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THE POST-COMMUNIST RENEGOTIATION OF SLOVENIAN NATIONAL SYMBOLS

ABSTRACT

This article explores how Slovenian collective memory and national identity have been renegotiated by post-communist political elites through the adoption of new state symbols in the light of changes connected to the collapse of communist ideology, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the establishment of an independent Slovenian state. Concentrating on the ways state imagery is legitimated as representing the nation, the analysis discusses the post-1991 reorganization of Slovenian national symbols. I argue that, by analysing the adoption of a new state flag, coat of arms, and national anthem, the official national identity re-conceptualization shows how Slovenian national memory became redefined as the new state memory, which resulted in nationalizing state practices and policies.

KEYWORDS: Collective memory, flag, national symbols, Slovenia, Yugoslavia

Postsocialistična redefinicija slovenskih nacionalnih simbolov

IZVLEČEK

Članek raziskuje, kako so slovenske postsocialistične elite s sprejetjem novih nacionalnih simbolov redefinirale slovenski kolektivni spomin in nacionalno identiteto v luči sprememb, povezanih z razpadom socialistične ideologije, Jugoslavije in z ustanovitvijo samostojne države Slovenije. Z osredotočanjem na legitimiziranje državnih simbolov kot reprezentacij nacije analiziram redefinicijo slovenskih nacionalnih simbolov po letu 1991. Predlogi za spremembo zastave, grba in državne himne kažejo, da je slovenski »nacionalni« spomin redefiniran kot dominantni »državni« spomin, kar ima za posledico nacionalizirajoče prakse in politike.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Jugoslavija, kolektivni spomin, nacionalni simboli, Slovenija, zastava

1 Introduction[1]

"The revolutions of 1989 have forced open the east European past" and all the different memories came out into the open (Judt 2002: 179). Influential political actors in post-communist countries have aimed to reconstruct collective memories as old public representations lost their legitimacy. The newly emergent "East Central European flags, coats of arms, currencies, and postal stamps in the early 1990s visually declared that times, ideas, and values had changed" (Zei 1997: 65–66). Because the past is "stored and interpreted by social institutions" (Halbwachs 1992: 24), once these institutions are discredited the past itself is questioned. History needs to be rewritten. State actors are the dominant force in supplying categories "to articulate and legitimise nationhood" and collective memory is shaped in "specific institutional contexts" and is "contingent on political developments" (Levy and Dierkes 2002: 244–245).

The communist authorities designed post-1945 federal Yugoslavia as a country of free and equal nations comprising six republics: Serbia (including the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina), Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia. In 1947 each republic adopted its own constitution, legalizing the particular features of all of the nations and national minorities. Yugoslav identity was primarily a supranational phenomenon, including layers of ethnic/national/religious, supranational/Yugoslav, class, and political identifications, interlaced in complex ways. The 1974 constitutional changes allowed the republics to exercise full independence in their legislation about education, culture, science, and the environment, and thus brought about a decade of decentralization. On June 25th, 1991, Slovenia (and Croatia) declared independence. With political sovereignty, Slovenia therefore had to be reimagined. Having become an independent state, Slovenia's political actors wasted no time attempting to differentiate the new state from Yugoslavia, its predecessor.[2]

With the construction of a new nation-state came the need to change public symbols and establish Slovenia as a sovereign state. The post-1991 authorities' rewriting of history textbooks, changing of state symbols, and renaming of streets illustrate the change in national memory. After Yugoslav state memory was dismantled with the collapse of Yugoslavia, Slovenian national memory faced reconstruction, whereas Slovenian national identity was redefined as the dominant state-promoted identity.[3] Although the post-1991 reorganization of Slovenian state symbols was far from smooth, as argued in this article, the firm embeddedness of Slovenian national identity prior to independence meant that

1. The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and guest editors for their valuable comments and suggestions for improving the quality of this article.
2. These processes took place even before independence because the dominant Yugoslav memory had been contested well before 1991.
3. Reflecting the most recent theoretical discussions within nationalism studies (e.g., Guibernau 1996; Smith 1991, 1999), national identity and cultural identity are not conceptually separated here, signifying the civic/political and ethnic/cultural interlacing in the process of national (self)categorization. Furthermore, whereas the term *state* signifies a territorially bounded political community, the term *nation* is predominantly used here in the sense of an ethno-cultural community (i.e., Smith's *ethnie*, or *Kulturnation*), although it also entails civic and political bonds (i.e., *Staatsnation*).

Slovenia did not require a drastic reinvention of national memory. Moreover, there was no need to invest in a separate language construction, as was the case with some of the other post-communist states (e.g., the former Serbo-Croatian has been redefined and re-codified as different languages in Yugoslavia's successor states; cf. Greenberg 2004).

Symbols and rituals are decisive factors in the creation of national identity (Guibernau 1996). National in-group solidarity needs to be established, implying that similarity exists among the nation's actually heterogeneous members. At the same time, national homogeneity and unity – or rather the illusion of it – is achieved through the belief in the difference from outsiders. Symbols are crucial to the survival of national identity because they act as "border guards" (cf. Barth 1969). National identity is defined both from within (as in-group similarities) and from without (as out-group distance and differences), and it becomes meaningful only through contrast with others (Triandafyllidou 1998). Memories, myths, and symbols are the building blocks of every national identity, and the importance of historical memory in the formation of nations has been well documented (cf. Hutchinson 1987). Memory connects people with the past, and nations become defined through ideas of ancestral territory, specific ethno-history, and myths of origin (Smith 1999). Collective memory serves as a transmitter of collective identity because it explains the nation as a community with a specific territory perceived as a homeland; it constructs the notion of a shared past, and thus history "must be turned into ethnic myths and shared memories must become the basis of an ethno-heritage" (Smith 1999: 265). This is especially important for nations that lack a collective memory of a golden age (e.g., due to a lack of historic statehood) and hence often replace it with the elevation of a separate language and culture, as was the case with the Slovenians.[4] Lacking their own state, nobility, powerful military, and economic and political elites, it was the formation of a distinctive standard language that helped institutionalize Slovenian national identity.[5] The Slovenian nation and national identity existed before the sovereign nation-state was created in 1991, and they therefore predated the nationalist movement and political nationalism backing an independent state. Slovenian national identity hence relies on ethno-cultural characteristics such as presumed ties of descent and a shared distinct language, and in nationalist terms being a proper Slovenian means not only speaking Slovenian and living in Slovenia, but also being Slovenian "by birth" (Hafner-Fink 1997: 265).

This article explores how the post-communist political elites have renegotiated Slovenian national identity by adopting new symbols in the light of changes connected to the

4. This is not to suggest that the Slovenian case does not exhibit its own creations of a golden age in the ancient state of Carantania (Bajt 2011); however, such evocations have not been fully adopted as representing a glorious Slovenian past as can be observed, for example, in nationalisms with a historical legacy of empires (e.g., the United Kingdom, Spain, and Portugal).
5. Most recent historical research confirms that the idea of a Slovenian nation formed only at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and its formation was not due to the prior existence of a Slovenian ethnic or linguistic community, but was a result of the considerations of nationalist intellectuals, who applied the national concept from the European to the local context (Kosi and Stergar 2016). Moreover, because the Slovenian nation had developed in opposition to foreign rule, national distinctiveness was promulgated through emphasizing a separate Slovenian language.

collapse of communist ideology, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the establishment of an independent state. Post-1991 Slovenia is a "nationalizing" state (Brubaker 1996) – putting the nation above all other criteria – yet Slovenian nation-building and state-building processes, although inextricably related, should be analysed with their separate historical trajectories in mind.[6] Using the Slovenian case study, this article focuses on state-building by developing two themes: a) the ways the political elite rewrites the official version of national memory in changing socio-historical circumstances and the role the state plays in organizing collective memory and through this the idea of a shared national identity, and b) how certain symbols become recognized as national through a complex intertwining of semi-state-sponsored actions on the one hand and grass-roots-level activism of nationalist actors on the other. Put differently, the prevalent conflation of *nation* and *state* in English literature (i.e., the very term *nation-state*) is here critically re-evaluated by pointing out the nuances that define the difference between "state" (i.e., civic) and "national" (i.e., ethnic) symbols in the Slovenian case. This article hence discusses a) the change in *state* symbols, most notably the flag, coat of arms, and national anthem, but also b) the shifting symbolism associated with what defines "Slovenianness"; that is, adopting certain ancient signs as *national* (i.e., ethnic, cultural) symbols, especially as emphasized in recent years by right-wing racist groups.

To build an argument about the importance of the new Slovenian state memory for the redefinition of national identity, the article continues with a theoretical discussion of the concept of memory (Section 2). Section 3 explains the pre-1991 situation in Yugoslavia, and Section 4 provides a theoretical basis for the Slovenian case study. The existing literature usually analyses nationalism in official history teaching practice by examining school textbooks (e.g., Jelavich 1990), whereas "mapping the nation" (Azaryahu and Kook 2002) is often reflected in examining the process of new local and state authorities' renaming of streets, schools, parks, and other public places. Following this, in order to examine whether Slovenian collective memory changed and in what ways the new state imagery is legitimated by the political elite as representing the nation, the reorganization of Slovenian state symbols is addressed in Section 5. The change of state symbols, particularly the national flag, is analysed as an illustration of the official national identity re-conceptualization. Moreover, apart from the official changes in state symbols analysed in Section 5, nationalist re-appropriations of what constitutes "Slovenianness" that have occurred at the grass-roots level are also noted. Empirically, the article is based on participant observation, policy analysis, and analysis of relevant state laws.[7]

6. Rogers Brubaker highlights the neglected "nationalizing nationalism" of existing states. His conceptualization of a "nationalizing state" describes "the tendency to see the state as an 'unrealized' nation-state, as a state destined to be a nation-state, the state of and for a particular nation" (1996: 63).
7. By participant observation I refer to, among other things, my personal participation in public parliamentary discussions, specifically the one on October 28th, 2002 about changing the state symbols. I also conducted three interviews with public officials between February and May 2002.

2 The territorialization of national memory

Territorialization of memory is a term adopted from Anthony D. Smith. He used it in connection to "ethnoscapes" as those culturally, historically, and nationally charged territories that are felt "to influence events and contribute to the experiences and memories" that mould a community and its shared myths (1999: 150). Because Slovenian national identity is strongly attached to landscape, "ethnoscapes" are understood here not only as territorial borderlines, but as indispensable for the symbolic "feeling" of a national community. The narratives of memory can help one understand the relationship between memory and history, and in this way influence national identity. The past, or rather one's sense of the past, is reproduced in public representations on the one hand, and in private memory on the other, hence the study of collective memory is inevitably concerned with both. Ideas of history are formed in the course of everyday life as well as through public rituals and ceremonies. Everyone participates in this "social production of memory", although the participation is unequal (Popular Memory Group 1998). The social production of memory is a set of different ways in which "a sense of the past is constructed" (Popular Memory Group 1998: 76). Only some historical representations gain access to the public field and can, consequently, become dominant. Nonetheless, public memory, even in authoritarian regimes, is always open to contestation from other, differently constructed, visions of the past because people hold on to their private memories and they remember a non-official version of the past.

National memory is inextricably connected to national identity because national elites create an idea of the nation as a real entity by emphasizing its unity and shared history. With the nationalists' propagation of national memory and symbolic markers of nationhood, the nation is imagined as having a specific place not only in the present, but also in the past and future. This continuity is often achieved by nationalist elites through selection; that is, the idea of homogeneity pushes non-conformities to the margins because private memories might often clash with public, "official" versions of history. Dominant memories therefore attempt to shape private memories; to remember "otherwise" can be perceived as dissidence, and only those private memories that are important for national identity are emphasized. Individual memories remain private and secluded from the public domain, especially in totalitarian regimes. The purpose of state-organized memories is to create homogeneity, remove difference, and build a national/state identity shared by all. National identity, in effect, is created through the appropriation of national symbols by national elites and consolidated through national memory. "Wherever 'national identity' seems to be in question, memory comes to be a key to national recovery through reconfiguring the past" (Müller 2002: 18). However, state historical memory is also subject to change, either naturally or because of deliberate manipulation by state actors.

As two separate processes that are important for each other, the connection between national identity and memory has been recognized in explorations of nationalism, especially within the ethno-symbolic approach. Here (e.g., Hutchinson 1994; Smith 1999), the aim is to uncover how modern nations and nationalisms reinterpret "the symbols, myths, memories, values and traditions of their ethno-histories" and how myths, memories, and

symbols generate national attachments (Smith 1998: 224). Memories, together with myths and symbols, unite a nation and demarcate it from the outsiders, who do not share the same kind of alleged collective repositories. The idea of the nation is influenced by the way collective memories are shaped through selective remembering and forgetting.

3 Yugoslavia and Slovenian national identity

Concentrating on the post-1991 renegotiation of Slovenian national memory and state symbols, on the re-definition of Slovenian national identity that occurred as Slovenia established itself a state *of* and *for* the Slovenian nation (cf. Brubaker 1996), one can observe how Slovenian "national" memory became "state" memory. Prior to independence, Slovenian national memory existed alongside Yugoslav state memory. Although the underlying communist ideology was the same, here I distinguish between the *state* memory promoted by the federal Yugoslav government and the League of Communists of Yugoslavia on the one hand, and Slovenian *national* memory as a part of the institutionalized transmission of common Slovenian symbols, values, and general ideas about the past within the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (1945–1991). Conceptually, even Slovenian national memory prior to 1991 was a "state" memory because it was public, it was the dominant memory within the republic, and it promoted only officially accepted representations of the past.

Yugoslav state memory was organized by the federal authorities in order to create a unifying Yugoslav identity. Simultaneously, the Slovenian cultural elites (e.g., intellectuals, artists, and poets) and political elites (i.e., the republic-level communist authorities) forged national identity through national symbols, consolidating it through Slovenian national memory. In Slovenia, people's already-existing attachment to their specific "ethnoscape" was hence used, incorporating the particular Slovenian cultural identity into its relatively autonomous socioeconomic reality. Despite the competing existence of two simultaneous homelands (i.e., the republic of Slovenia and the federation of Yugoslavia), Slovenia was the homeland that Slovenians primarily identified with (Hodson et al. 1994). A wider Yugoslav identity was connected to being one of the South Slavic nations and could thus coexist with the Slovenian identity. However, once the Yugoslav framework began to threaten Slovenian identity, this coexistence started to break.[8]

Had there not been a separate Slovenian national memory, the state memory of Yugoslavia would probably have succeeded in superseding the distinctiveness of Slovenian national identity. However, Yugoslavia promoted the cultural (national) distinctiveness of its constituent nations (Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian, and Slovenian), and so a complex set of collective memories as well as state and sub-state national symbols coexisted. Even though the overarching state ideology was communism and all the republics

8. In the mid-1980s, political polarization within Yugoslavia was growing. A prominent example was a proposed educational reform that envisaged the unification of the entire Yugoslav schooling system. The Slovenians as a cultural and linguistic minority perceived this centralizing measure as "Yugoslavization", and the cultural and political elites were opposed to changing their independent jurisdiction in education.

adhered to that model, separate national (i.e., ethnic) identities existed alongside the official state-promoted "brotherhood and unity" mantra.[9] Communist ideology, the "invented tradition" of Slavic unity, the mythology of the anti-fascist "national liberation struggle", and the construction of the enemy were all incorporated in Yugoslav state memory, but were also present in Slovenian national memory.[10] Yugoslavia as a state did not claim to represent one nation and several national identities simultaneously existed, whereas the task of the Yugoslav authorities was to promote a unifying all-inclusive Yugoslav identity. Despite the fact that the spirit of the South Slavic union had a historical base and was not a total invention (cf. Hodson et al. 1994), and although many people were in favour of such a supranational identity, the idea of Yugoslav cohesion had to be actively promoted through state symbols and public rituals.[11]

However, even though state propaganda, public affirmations, monuments, and schoolbooks can be very compelling, people can and do resist the official version of history. Although pre-1991 Slovenian national memory may have followed the official Yugoslav version of history, the private memories of some individuals (e.g., older generations that remembered the Second World War) continuously resisted Yugoslav propaganda. Once Yugoslav state memory was dismantled with the collapse of Yugoslavia, Slovenian national memory faced reconstruction, whereas the new political elites redefined Slovenian national identity as the dominant state-promoted identity. This was also an opportunity to re-evaluate the idea of what constitutes Slovenianness, which resulted in substantial intra-national tensions that continue to affect the contemporary political and ideological divide in Slovenia.[12]

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9. Resistance to top-down implementation of Yugoslavism already started in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians. Tito and the Communist Party thus awarded relative political and cultural autonomy to the constituent republics of post-1945 Yugoslavia. There were several attempts of to revive Yugoslavism in federal Yugoslavia, but they were met with resistance. It is not possible here to discuss the complexity of national relations and critical evaluation of Yugoslavism in greater detail.
10. The enemy was an especially ubiquitous concept; present always and everywhere. The external enemy was tied to the so-called threat from the East (Sekulic 1997) stemming from the Eastern bloc, but also connected to the "capitalist" and "imperial" West, as well as the wartime adversaries (fascists and Nazis). Even more ominous was the "internal enemy", an idea that served the communist elites in their attempts to channel the emotions of the masses against various scapegoats.
11. Analysis of pre-1914 textbooks used by the South Slavs in their various educational systems revealed that each nation strove for its own interests; the main Slovenian goal was to unite the nation scattered across the Austrian provinces. "Yugoslavism appealed to idealists, but not to those who had to deal with the realities of the South Slav world" (Jelavich 1990: 272). Only a small segment of the people that were to become "Yugoslavs" after 1918 were actually enthusiastic about Yugoslavism and the idea of the South Slav unity (e.g., intellectuals, university students, and a few politicians; Jelavich 1990: 272). Tito's post-1945 Yugoslavia thus faced the difficult task of uniting nations that had not been "melted together" in its royal predecessor.
12. Here I refer to the ideological chasm between the so-called left and right, which clash beyond political partisanship. The political parties and elites on the right have been constructing revisionist views of history, especially the Second World War, attempting to exonerate wartime Slovenian collaboration with the Nazis, where avid anti-communism is problematically portrayed in terms of being the only stance safeguarding Slovenian national interests.

4 Constructing symbolic historic continuity

Symbols assist in "creating, coding, and decoding" systems of meaning because individuals "perceive and understand" their environment through symbols that attach meaning to their experiences (Schirch 2005: 81). Symbols only have value for those that recognize them and understand their meaning; they enable the national community to differentiate between "us" and "them". National symbols hence "heighten people's awareness of, and sensitivity to, their community" (Guibernau 1996: 81).

State ceremonies and national symbols are so much part of the world that people frequently take them for granted (Smith 1991). They all share an emotional component and have a Durkheimian collective quality, which makes them "the most potent and durable aspects of nationalism" (Smith 1991: 77). Some kind of special and symbolic meaning is always also present in rituals; as Kertzer argues: "symbols provide the content of ritual" (1988: 11). Due to their ability to be understood in different ways by different people, symbols are the ultimate basis for uniting people even in situations of absence of consensus. National rituals therefore make the official symbolic meaning explicit by referring to national symbols. National flags, emblems, heroes, recollections of national glory, and historical common suffering are just some of the elements that states never forget to include in their ceremonies. Thus symbolic forms act in three ways: 1) symbols condense information about the world into one single unified form; 2) they are multi-vocal; that is, they have the ability to communicate different meanings to different people; and 3) they are ambiguous "precisely because they allow for multiple interpretations" (Schirch 2005: 81). This is important because it allows for one symbol to resonate with a myriad of people whose differing positions are brought together in the idea of being members of one nation.

Hobsbawm understands nations precisely through special "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition" (1993: 2). Thus, it was not only the entire new set of symbols that emerged with the rise of the nation-state; the most important thing was that the state's historic continuity also needed to be invented. For Hobsbawm, the invention of signs, which bear symbolic and emotional value, is of crucial importance for group membership. National anthems, flags, emblems, symbols, and images became a necessary part of every national movement and state. Primary education, public ceremonies, and monuments play a pivotal role with regard to the invention of tradition. References to the past are established and strengthened especially through processes of formalization, repetition, and ritualization: "Existing customary traditional practices . . . were modified, ritualized and institutionalized for the new national purposes" (Hobsbawm 1993: 6). It is the "undefined universality" of ritualization that matters the most; the obligation to follow a specific symbolic practice, rather than particular content, is crucial for emotionally charged signs, symbols, and ceremonies to work (Hobsbawm 1993: 11). It is also necessary that some sort of genuine "popular resonance" be present in order to mobilize public support. Whereas the modern conceptualization of the nation treats it as founded in the cultural unity and social solidarity of its citizens, national attachment and identification with particular historical events, heroes, symbols, and even flags is often much older (Elgenius 2011).

At the same time, it is always possible to acquire a glorious history through retrospective nationalism.

The establishment of the independent state of Slovenia reiterated the necessity to accentuate the use of an older, even ancient symbolic dimension of national identity for popular mobilization. The theory of nationalism has argued at great length about the importance of historical continuity for the idea of the nation. Although historians have called on the need to surpass myths in Slovenian historiography (Pleterski 1997; Štih 1997, 2006), conceptions of Slovenian history as commencing in the Early Middle Ages with the state of Carantania remain the hallmark of amateur "historians" with a nationalist agenda and they resonate in popular ideas of the "Slovenian" past. The revival of Slovenian public interest in the ancient political entity called Carantania, which started in the 1980s, has been analysed in a handful of studies (e.g., Štih 1997; Skrbiš 2002; Bajt 2015).[13] Claiming that Carantania was the first Slovenian state is a way of building an entire new set of national myths and symbols. It is a territorial myth of an ancient homeland, a myth of ethnogenesis and antiquity that separates the Slovenians from the other Slavs by claiming they are direct ancestors of an ancient indigenous population that survived all subsequent population mixing. This also makes Carantania a myth of kinship and shared descent. Finally, it is the supposed democratic nature of Carantania's politics that is perceived by certain Slovenians as evidence of the historic chosen nature of the Slovenian people (Schöpflin 1997).[14]

Recent changes in Slovenian national memory have provided new impetus for claiming a historical bond with this ancient state. The importance of historical continuity for the idea of a nation is invaluable, and recent attempts to adopt Carantania and its symbols

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13. Such "autochthonous" theories (i.e., hypotheses placing the beginnings of the Slovenian nation far back in the prehistoric period) have older historic roots. In these primordial accounts, Slovenians are seen as already inhabiting their present-day homeland in prehistoric times and the Slovenian language as having formed a long time ago, remaining almost unchanged until the present. Specific historical socio-political circumstances should be taken into consideration when trying to understand why such beliefs emerge and when they become particularly powerful. In accordance with the general historical "roots-searching" of the nineteenth century Europe, so too did Slovenians attempt to re-invent their ancestry and made it appear to be perennial and "forever there". Theories propagating "Slovenian European indigeneity" (Skrbiš 2008: 142) included ideas of Scandinavian and Etruscan origins of Slovenians, and were particularly useful as a tool of national emancipation for the nineteenth-century Romantic nationalists (Štih 1997). The "forever there" part was particularly important due to its connection of the people with the land, their homeland. Mapping Slovenians as the people that have been occupying the same historical place through time helped them believe that they possessed a historical right to it. The twentieth century witnessed the continuation of these endeavours, culminating in the 1970s and 1980s, when broader economic and political circumstances provided the framework for a new theory of an indigenous Slovenian presence (i.e., the Venetic theory with its strong emphasis on Carantania). This striving for continuity reflects one of the most important elements of every successful nationalism: its primary belief in the distinctiveness of "its" nation.
14. Some (e.g., Felicijan 1976; Požun 2000) even believe that Thomas Jefferson used the ancient custom of Carantania's ritualized investiture ceremony of enthroning the duke, which was rich in the symbolism of social contract, as his inspiration for the American Declaration of Independence.

as "Slovenian" reflect the nationalist need for historical permanence. As a nation that did not form an independent state until the late twentieth century, allegedly having its own customs and institutions embedded deep in history strengthens the idea of its uniqueness, its territorial claims, and its inner solidarity. Carantania is a powerful and effective symbol that provides a source of Slovenian cultural closeness to assumed ancestors and aids revisionists' desire to supersede the historical association of Slovenians with passivity and serfdom. Most significantly, it implies a sharp break with the Yugoslav past.

Radical right groups in Slovenia have appropriated Carantania's symbols in order to mask their racist exclusion with supposedly benign patriotism. Since independence, but especially again since the recent "refugee crisis", Slovenia has seen a notable rise in self-proclaimed "patriotic" organizations and movements that promote exclusionary and discriminatory rhetoric (Bajt 2015). They have all appropriated Carantania's symbols as expressions of *Slovenianness* in its purest form. Although they resonate with the radical right and nationalist youth, this would have remained an obscure trend were it not for its adoption by some political figures as well. Especially politicians from the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), but also the Slovenian People's Party (SLS), who – together with New Slovenia (NSi) – are members of European People's Party (EPP), Christian Democratic, and centre-right, began to use the black Carantanian panther as a way to contradict the official state symbols and to accentuate their standing for "true patriotic" values.[15] Historians have pointed out the historical incorrectness of appropriating the Carantanian panther as a "Slovenian" symbol (e.g., Štih 1997; Pleterski 1997). However, the inclusion of Carantania among the state symbols has not only been the prerogative of populist politicians and nationalists that claim to stand for patriotic national interests while promulgating racist exclusionary views and policies. There are also visible institutional claims to Carantania, a prominent example being a statement on the governmental official website that Carantania was "the first Slovenian state" (Vlada RS 2017).

5 Reorganization of Slovenian state symbols

National days and flags are physical manifestations that aide citizens in imagining their community more powerfully. Flags and anthems were deliberately created in the nineteenth century as symbols designed to promote national identity, which was especially important given the fact that most modern states are multi-ethnic and culturally pluralistic in their composition (Bechhofer and McCrone 2012). Other national symbols, such as music and art, sports (in terms of peacetime competition between nations), landscape, language, and of course the special place dedicated to "national values", are also important. Although the flag and other state symbols are the means by which a nation can be imagined, it does not necessarily mean that such impulses will always be evoked, much

15. The Carantanian black panther has become popular as a pin worn on clothing by right-wing nationalist politicians. It is also a regular feature of alternative flags used by racist groups. For more on the normalization of racism in the case of a prominent political party, see Frank and Šori (2015).

less that they will always follow the same logic. Empirical data on this subject are clearly deficient and flags especially have been poorly theorized (Eriksen 2007). Symbols, often treated somewhat self-evidently, help personalize the nation because they allow a link be made between institutional aspects and everyday life. Flags are not only symbols of belonging to a nation, but help centre the national identity of the people (Elgenius 2011; Eriksen 2007). "The flag, for all its rich symbolic and political connotations, its long history harking back to medieval heraldry, its ubiquity and emotional power, has been relatively neglected in research on nationalism" (Eriksen 2007: 1–2). Most theorists of nationalism make only a passing reference to flags as symbols of the nation, but rarely treat the flag systematically. As Michael Billig (1995), one notable exception in this regard, pointed out when describing "banal nationalism" in the West, states use their national imagery in everyday life in order to reproduce themselves. Flags become a part of people's daily routines when their use is popularized. In particular, popular sporting events such as the Olympics or World Cup make national symbols highly visible.International sports are the paradigmatic example of highly visible public display of national flags. Although these are examples of what Billig calls "waved" flags, "unwaved" flags (e.g., on state buildings, or depicted on stamps) are just as important (Zei 1997). Through the everyday presence of state symbols, nations are reproduced.

The three main Slovenian state symbols – the coat of arms, flag, and national anthem – have existed since 1991.[16] Slovenia's authorities seem to have entirely changed the state's public symbols in order to differentiate it from Yugoslavia. A closer look, however, reveals that the new state symbols drew on the previously existing ones. White, blue, and red have been national colours for a much longer time; that is, the Slovenian national flag was brought forward in 1848, the year of the "Spring of Nations" revolutions in Europe (see Figure 1).[17]

Figure 1: The Slovenian national flag since 1848
Source: Wikipedia 2017a

16. The flag, coat of arms, and national anthem were defined in the Slovenian constitution adopted in December 1991. Their use is further stipulated in a law of November 1994.
17. In 1848 feudalism was abolished in the Habsburg Empire and the proclamation of the Slovenian national programme took place. For the first time in history, a clear demand was expressed for the unification of all Slovenians into one administrative unit with its own parliament and Slovenian as its official language.

In 1941 the Partisans added the antifascist five-pointed red star to the Slovenian tricolour. It was preserved in this form as Slovenia's official flag for five decades within the Yugoslav context (see Figure 2). The post-1945 Slovenian communist coat of arms was developed from the Liberation Front's symbol: the three main elements were the Adriatic Sea, Slovenia's highest mountain, Triglav, and linden leaves, and the anti-fascist five-pointed star was a ubiquitously prominent symbol (see Figure 3).[18] The symbolic value of a holy mountain is a common nationalist ethnoscape, and Mount Triglav has long held this role for Slovenians.

Figure 2: The flag of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (1945–1991)
Source: Wikipedia 2017b

Figure 3: The emblem of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (1945–1991)
Source: Wikipedia 2017c

Yugoslavia's state symbolism was intertwined with communist ideology. Various national symbols were used at the level of the republics, and the supra-national Yugoslav symbolism combined all the parts. The Yugoslav flag, for instance, was a blue-white-red tricolour with a red star in the middle. The differences between the republics were expressed only through different ordering of the colours in the flag.[19] The state emblem depicted Yugoslavia's multi-nationality by showing six torches burning into one (i.e., Yugoslav) flame of brotherhood and unity.

The original Slovenian national tricolour "as the only common historical symbol of all the Slovenians" was adopted as the state flag in 1990 (Vidic 1999: 46). The new state

18. An important Slovenian national symbol is also the linden leaf. For more, see Bajt (2014: 1355).
19. Except for Macedonia, whose flag was red with a star in its upper left corner.

emblem was later added in the upper left corner, marking the official Slovenian flag as it is described in the 1991 constitution (see Figure 4). The emblem has a shape of a shield, in the middle of which is a representation of Mount Triglav, three golden stars of Celje, and two undulating blue lines symbolizing the Adriatic Sea and Slovenia's rivers. The golden stars of Celje are drawn from the allegedly Slovenian medieval Counts of Celje. These counts are not only disputable on the grounds of their supposed "Slovenian ethnicity", but they also do not represent a wider all-embracing Slovenian identification due to their localized resonance. Nevertheless, the three stars were obviously selected because the new state felt the need to anchor its identity in a way that enables a relation to an allegedly "Slovenian" medieval nobility. When compared to the communist republic emblem (cf. Figure 3), the continuation of the symbolic value of Triglav, the Adriatic, and rivers, however, points to the durability of the Slovenian ethnoscape.

Figure 4: The flag of the Republic of Slovenia since 1991
Source: Wikipedia 2017d

The change in the state anthem was clearly evident; Yugoslavia's hymn to the Slavs was replaced by a nineteenth-century poem written by the Slovenian "national poet" France Prešeren. Prešeren's *Zdravljica* (A Toast) as a symbol of Slovenian national identity replaced the old state hymn *Hej Slovani* (Hey Slavs), which praised the Slavic spirit of brotherhood and unity. Prešeren wrote his poem in the nineteenth century, when what is now Slovenia was part of the Austrian empire. In 1844 the Austrian authorities banned it due to its call for the unification of the Slovenians, which contradicted the principles of the monarchy. Prešeren can be seen as a "myth-making" intellectual, who combined a "romantic search for meaning" with promotion of the national idea (Hutchinson 1994: 44–45). He is seen as the "father" of the nation because he chose to write in Slovenian rather than German and because he put the Slovenian language and culture on a pedestal, thus making his literary opus a notable part of Slovenian national identity.

My analysis of numerous newspaper articles and letters to the editor that have appeared since Slovenia's independence shows that articles discussing Slovenian symbols became more prominent especially after the 2001 parliamentary proposal to change the state symbols. Nonetheless, the discussion has been present since the early 1990s, and the topic of Slovenian symbols has also been discussed sporadically on television and radio. On the one hand, several experts claim that certain irregularities exist in the coat of arms.[20]

20. In 2009, another public competition was held by the Slovenian heraldry web portal and a local TV station. The selected emblem depicted the Carantanian panther (see Slovenska heraldika 2009).

On the other hand, a portion of citizens are not happy with the "Slavic" selection of the flag's colours. Some proponents of change would prefer it if the flag were to draw from a more "ancient" Slovenian history; for example, from the times of the Habsburg lands or even from ancient Carantania (see Figure 5). Phrases such as "the facts that scream to the sky about Slovenian statehood and are written in stone" directly link Slovenia to Carantania through "ancient national symbols" (Lenarčič 2001).

Figure 5: One of many suggestions for a new flag, depicting the black panther of Carantania
Source: author's personal archive

The greatest bone of public contention seems to have been the issue of Slovenia having too low a profile as a distinct state. There have been problems with its name, which many find difficult to differentiate from Slovakia or Slavonia. Further, the flag appears to be very similar to several other Slavic countries' flags; for example, Slovakia or Russia. A prominent Slovenian ethnologist and art historian, however, asserts that the white-blue--red tricolour (without the coat of arms; see Figure 1) is a real and authentic Slovenian symbol and supports his argument with explanations of different origins for the similar Russian, Slovak, Croatian, and Serbian flags (Ovsec 1993). He does not support claims for the "historical" symbols (see Figure 5) to replace the current flag. His most important argument is that the Slovenian tricolour is actually older, and thus has a more valid claim for originality, than the Russian or Slovak flags.

Figure 6: Officially awarded selection for a new state flag, 2003
Source: Mladina 2003

Nevertheless, an initiative to change the state symbols was put forward in the Slovenian parliament in the spring of 2001, and there was a public announcement welcoming suggestions for a new flag in June 2003. The supporters of the change believed that the politicians were in too much of a hurry after independence and hastily accepted "politically constructed" state symbols (Bavčer 2001). In 2003 the evaluation committee published the results of a public anonymous competition for the design of possible elements for the

new state symbols. The National Assembly commissioned the call, and the selection was based on the decision of the Constitutional Commission, which sought the best mutually compatible design elements for state identity (Kajzer 2013). The winner was announced and given a substantial financial award, but the new flag was never adopted (see Figure 6). Two years earlier, a similar campaign was launched by the magazine *Mladina*, which announced a similar selection for a new flag in 2002 (see Figure 7). In the last decade, however, there has been no more serious discussion about changing the state symbols.[21] This follows from opposition to change, partly due to the high costs of the 2003 public competition. However, the opposition was predominantly because of a significant lack of agreement among political representatives and especially because the experts could not agree whether the flag should have a "designer" basis (e.g., like Canada and South Africa) or a "historical" basis (Kajzer 2013).

Figure 7: Selected suggestion for a new state flag by the magazine Mladina, 2002
Source: Mladina 2002

National symbols need to be carefully selected in order to be as all-embracing and homogenizing as possible if they are to bring together a collectivity as diverse as a nation. The new Slovenian authorities were in a rush when the independent state required the swift adoption of new public symbols in 1991. In subsequent years, state officials therefore continued to change some of the state's most prominent public representations. In fact, the process – although much more consolidated after twenty-six years of statehood – is not complete. Moreover, even though the public has gradually internalized and accepted the existing state symbols after twenty-six years, most prominently in the form of Billig's waved flags at various sporting events, state-building processes can never be seen as fully complete. Ongoing discussions surrounding the proposals for changing the state flag of Australia or a recent referendum on a new flag in New Zealand testify to this.

6 Conclusion: Ongoing renegotiation of national symbols

This article explored how Slovenian collective memory and national identity have been renegotiated by the post-communist political elites through the adoption of new state symbols in the light of changes connected to the collapse of communist ideology,

21. Nonetheless, digital platforms allow for continuation of the discussion, and a special Facebook public group devoted to the issue of a new Slovenian flag has over 10,000 likes and followers. See https://www.facebook.com/Nova-slovenska-zastava-276989185784543/.

the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the establishment of an independent Slovenian state. It discussed the post-1991 reorganization of Slovenian national symbols, arguing that, by analysing suggestions to adopt a new state flag and national anthem, the official national identity re-conceptualization shows how Slovenian national memory became the dominant "state" memory. Although the process of the post-1991 reorganization of Slovenian state symbols was far from smooth, the firm embeddedness of Slovenian national identity prior to independence meant that the Slovenian authorities did not need to resort to a drastic reinvention of national memory.

The role of invention and construction in every nation is both clearly evident and, indeed, necessary. Nevertheless, states would face a much harder task in inculcating national identities were they not to draw on some sort of pre-existing regional, cultural, religious, or other affiliations. Moreover, traditions are not "simply inherited, they have to be reproduced" (Calhoun 1997: 50). This is why state authorities invest in educational systems, public symbols, and the organized perpetuation of nationhood, and this is why nationalism is something more than just a political principle that supposedly ceases to exist once nation-states are created. With changes in history textbooks, renaming of public spaces, new stamps, and a shift in political rituals, the new Slovenian political elites also invested in altering the state symbols. This process cannot be understood as finished; in fact, a certain level of public dissatisfaction is still present, and so further investigations of this topic would be welcome. Studies of the flag in analyses of nationalism, especially comparative studies, have also been rare, and this gap should be filled.

This article argued that national memory as a form of collective memory is an essential element of every national identity. In post-1991 Slovenia, national memory is reproduced through the state's public symbols and spaces; it permeates its official teaching of history and consequently demarcates a distinct Slovenian national identity. I argued that memory is continuously reshaped because ultimately no single truth exists and multiple historical representations are simultaneously present at different levels of public visibility. The dominant memory is shaped by a few that hold political power and is then reproduced by social actors through national symbols devised to signal national unity and cohesion. Whereas in Yugoslavia Slovenian national memory was not a state memory, with independence it became the dominant state memory. In 1991, Slovenian national identity was redefined and a new political value system was established. Once Slovenian national memory was redefined as the new state's dominant memory, the danger of conflating the nation and the state occurred. The state thus tends to "forget" that not all of its citizens share Slovenian ethno-national affiliation, and so its state-building practices are often nationalizing; that is, since 1991 Slovenia has promoted the centrality of the Slovenian nation in ethno-cultural terms.

Flags are evidently multi-vocal and have excluding and boundary-marking qualities, which allows them to encompass various cultural meanings (Eriksen 2007). At the same time, different flags may and do coexist. The example of contemporary Slovenia shows how the idea of Carantania as the ancient homeland has been transformed to an almost alternative national Slovenian symbol for certain political actors and social groups (i.e., the Carantanian black panther). Shifting symbolism associated with what defines "Slo-

venianness" was highlighted; that is, the recent appropriations of certain ancient signs as *national* symbols, especially by nationalist right-wing politicians and racist groups. Once radical right groups as well as certain political actors have seized certain ancient symbols as "Slovenian", proclaiming their endeavours as patriotic in order to mask their racism, it becomes a task of every student of nationalism to be alert to the construction of difference and consequent inequality. The wider European context shows that it is not only obscure nationalist groups but also prominent politicians that adopt the apparently patriotic calls for purity of the nation in order to oppose migrant integration. Situated within the current global context of the "refugee crisis" that has reopened discussions about European identity, migrant integration, and questions of belonging, it is thus imperative to analyse and recognize nationalizing states beyond post-communist central and eastern Europe alone. Exclusionary and nationalist state practices and policies are quite universal.

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