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BETWEEN HOME AND THE WORLD: (BANAL) NATIONALISM AND REPRESENTATIONS OF A NATION IN SLOVENIAN FOLK-POP MUSIC

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of banal nationalism as often unconscious, routine processes that nations reproduce on a daily basis. Banal nationalism is recognisable in the use of national symbols but also in language and culture. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether Slovenian folk-pop music is one of these processes, and in which ways and strategies we can detect its reproductive role in banal nationalism that on a daily basis reminds its listeners of their national identities. Methodologically, the article is based on the content and a textual analysis of compositions by three of the most often listened to folk-pop ensembles, demonstrating that the national narrative can be identified in a smaller proportion of all analysed compositions in three sections: the idea of nation as an imaginary community or home(land), national (auto)stereotypes, and patriotic feelings.

KEY WORDS: *banal nationalism, Slovenian folk-pop music, nation, stereotypes, homeland*

Med domom in svetom: (vsakdanji) nacionalizem in reprezentacije naroda v slovenski narodnozabavni glasbi

IZVLEČEK

Članek izhaja iz koncepta vsakdanjega nacionalizma kot pogosto neopaženih, nezavednih in rutinskih procesov, ki obstoječim nacijam omogočajo njihovo vsakdanjo reprodukcijo in ki niso prepoznavni samo v uporabi nacionalnih

simbolov, ampak tudi v jeziku in kulturi. Namen prispevka je torej ugotoviti, ali je slovenska narodnozabavna glasba eden od teh procesov ter v katerih načinih in strategijah prepoznavamo njeno reprodukcijsko vlogo vsakdanjega nacionalizma, s katerimi svoje poslušalce, občinstva vsakodnevno spominja na njihovo nacionalno identiteto. Metodološko je članek utemeljen na analizi vsebine in tekstualni analizi besedil treh najbolj poslušanih slovenskih narodnozabavnih ansamblov, ki pokazuje, da je nacionalni narativ mogoče prepoznati v manjšem deležu vseh analiziranih pesmi v treh tematskih sklopih: ideji naroda kot zamišljene skupnosti, doma, domovine; nacionalnih (avto)stereotipih in nacionalnih oziroma patriotskih občutkih.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: vsakdanji nacionalizem, slovenska narodno-zabavna glasba, narod, stereotipi, domovina

1 Introduction¹

One of the main themes of Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995) is that signs of nationalism can be too familiar to be noticed. Whereas ordinary citizens may fail to observe national symbols in their daily routines, it is less forgivable that social theorists should routinely be so unobservant. Social scientists have disguised the nationalism of Western nations by labelling it positively as patriotism, which they contrast favourably, but unjustifiably, with the nationalism of others. Consequently, the accepted use of the word nationalism always seems to locate it on the periphery. From the perspective of Paris, London or Washington, places such as Moldova, Bosnia and Ukraine are peripheral, on the edge of Europe. From the perspective of Slovenia, places south of the Kolpa River, where the "Balkans" supposedly begin, are the periphery where nationalism is located. Therefore, nationalism is not perceived as merely an exotic force, but as a peripheral one. As Billig (1995: 5) claims, "those in established nations – at the centre of things – are led to see nationalism as the property of others, not of 'us'". And this is where the accepted view becomes misleading: it overlooks the nationalism of the West's (or more precisely, of "our") nation-state(s) or it prefers to name it differently, most often patriotism, liberal (Debeljak 2004a: 209–210) or aggressive nationalism (Rizman 2008: 103),² loyalty or social identification.

1. This research is part of the "Slovenian Folk Pop as Politics: Perceptions, Receptions, Identities" project, funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS), under project number J6-2582.

2. Both authors, Debeljak and Rizman, mention that illiberal nationalism also appears in Europe.

“In a world of nation-states, nationalism cannot be confined to the peripheries” (Billig 1995: 5). Nor does nationalism occur only in times of crisis. Between such times, nation-states continue to exist. Daily, they are reproduced as nations and their citizens as nationals. For such daily reproduction to occur, a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world. However, according to Billig, there is no readily available term to describe the collection of ideological habits that reproduce established nations as nations. Gaps in political language are rarely innocent, and nationalism is no exception. Having no name, it cannot be identified as a problem. Therefore, Billig insists on stretching the term nationalism to cover the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced, often unnoticed, on a daily basis. However, to avoid confusion between extreme, violent and everyday, often inconspicuous, even routine forms of nationalism, Billig introduced the term “banal nationalism” to cover the ideological habits that enable the established nations (of the West) to be reproduced in everyday life, not as an intermittent mood but as the endemic condition. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that banal nationalism is benign because it seems to possess a reassuring normality or because it appears to lack the violent passions of the extreme right. “In the case of Western nation-states, banal nationalism can hardly be innocent: it is reproducing institutions which possess vast armaments to mobilise national populations to support the use of those armaments” (Billig 1995: 7). And because nationalism is also simple, intellectually undemanding and emotional at its core, it can be easily propagated, which is also the reason for its success (Debeljak 2004b).

Robert Coles is another author who recognises aspects of nationalism in everyday routines. In his book, *The Political Life of Children* (1986), he studies the ceremony of saluting the national flag in schools in the US, where, since the 1880s, school pupils stand at attention each morning before the national flag, often with hand on heart, and pledge allegiance to the flag of the US. The significance of the ceremony is not diminished by being treated as routine rather than an intense experience, but the sacral has become part of everyday life. Therefore, nationalism is not a passing emotion or a surplus phenomenon; it works its way into just about every corner of the mind’s life. “Nationality is a constant in the lives of most of us and must surely be worked into our thinking in various ways, with increasing diversity and complexity of expression as our lives unfold” (Coles 1986: 59). The prevailing opinion, even among social scientists, is, of course, that such a ritual is an expression of patriotism and not nationalism, which opens up another debate about the relationship between the two, but we will not go into it at this point.

It should be emphasised that not all of the aforementioned are clear examples of the “ideal types” of banal nationalism. On the contrary, researchers of this phenomenon should examine the complexities of actual cases as they unfold messily in real life. Nationalism requires “an imaginary” so “that each nation imagines itself to be unique. And in imagining itself to be unique, the particular nation is just like all other nations, imagining themselves to be unique” (Billig 2017: 10). While Billig examines his thesis of banal nationalism in the fields of politics, mass media and academic discourse, we did so in the case of Slovenian folk-pop music, which, according to the Slovenian Public Opinion 2021/1 survey (Hafner-Fink et al. 2021), is the third most popular music genre (after pop and rock) in Slovenia (47.6% of respondents chose this answer). Since research examining the connection between nationalism and (especially folk-pop) music, at least in the area of the former Yugoslavia, is relatively few in number or has only been growing in recent years, we assume that the present text will at least to the certain extent fill this void.

In the following, the aforementioned “uniqueness” of the Slovenian national imaginary will be detected in the texts of three Slovenian folk-pop ensembles, which were selected on the basis of the Slovenian Public Opinion 2021/1 survey (Hafner-Fink et al. 2021) as the most listened-to Slovenian folk-pop ensembles: the Modrijani ensemble³ as the most listened-to Slovenian folk-pop ensemble in the mentioned survey (57.7% of respondents), the Avsenik Brothers ensemble⁴ as the second most listened-to (52.5% of respondents), and the Lojze Slak ensemble⁵ as the third (39.5%). The methodological research is based on content and textual analysis of selected compositions. The selection of the compositions reviewed was based on their availability on a common website (Besedilo 2021). Methodologically, we followed Billig’s research on political speeches and mass media discourse (1995), where he studied the topics or strategies of banal nationalism in at least four thematic sections,⁶ of which we chose the following

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3. The Modrijani ensemble has been active since 2000. To date, they have released 14 albums (153 songs), most of which have received awards for high numbers sold (“Modrijani” n.d.).
 4. The Avsenik Brothers ensemble performed from 1953 to 1990. During that time, they released around 120 records and cassettes with a circulation of more than 30 million copies. In total, they released about 670 songs (“Avsenik” n.d.).
 5. The Lojze Slak ensemble performed from 1964 to 2010 and released 32 albums with 574 songs (“Lojze Slak” n.d.).
 6. The fourth section dealt with the issue of gender, specifically the representation of masculinity in the British national press as a specific sort of flag-wavings (Billig 1995: 119–125).

three: (1) nation as an “imagined community” of “our” people that is identified by key words such as home, homeland, domestic, tradition, countryside, mother etc.; (2) (auto)stereotypes of “our” nation and its character vs. other nations; (3) nationalist or patriotic sentiments that emphasize the importance of national belonging and praise the homeland in order to highlight its past and to evoke nostalgia. But before that, let’s see where banal nationalism and music, in our case folk-pop music, meet.

2 Where Banal Nationalism and Music Meet

We begin the paper by examining the intersection between banal nationalism and music, particularly folk-pop music. Put differently, since banal nationalism is recognisable not only in its use of national symbols (flags and their protocols, anthems, national days, currency, postage stamps, etc.), but also by implicitly operating in language (political speeches, everyday discourse, mass media) and in cultural products, and therefore also in music, we are interested in what the main topics, ways, approaches, strategies and patterns are with which folk-pop music reminds its listeners and audiences of their national place and identity in the world of nations. A partial answer is offered by Shepherd and Wicke, who argue that “a viable understanding of culture requires an understanding of its articulation through music just as much as a viable understanding of music requires an understanding of its place in culture. The challenge, in making this return, lay in how to show, symmetrically, how music articulates social life and social life articulates music” (1997: 34). Many authors confirm the thesis of the connection between music and society or culture, as well as, more specifically, music and identity—including national identity (Aubert 2001; Kramer 1990; Lomax 1968; Merriam 1964; Muršič 1993). According to Adorno (1986: 203), music began to be more closely associated with the ideology of nationalism from the mid-19th century onwards. The nationalisation of music was reflected in the dominance of certain musical traditions and genres over others (e.g. classical and folk music and opera) and by emphasising the national characteristics of a particular nation. The most illustrative example of the latter is, of course, national anthems, which “bring the state as an abstract concept into the everyday world” (Muršič 1993: 108). Although music in itself does not have a semantic (i.e., national) meaning, its meanings or connotations are conferred by the social and cultural system in which it is embedded. And when we are in the field of meanings, we are also in the field of ideology. Ideology of (banal) nationalism is therefore a kind of crossroads of national identity and music. Music is therefore not national(istic) in itself, but must be recognised as such, and this is influenced by many factors.

It is also not possible to determine the intensity of the influence of each of these factors separately, as it is practically impossible to isolate them from the wider contexts of occurrence and from the diversity of audiences whose identities are not fixed in terms of their content and situation. Consequently, the national component cannot be tied only to a certain musical genre, although in our study, we will start from the assumption that at least Slovenian folk-pop music is the one that is most associated with national elements (Gabrovec 2016: 44). The connection between music and ideology is never simply definable but usually covertly permeating. Ideological content is added to music, as it is semantically open, in the process of creation, performance and reception. Music, which in itself is not primarily semantic or at least not semantically unambiguous, is therefore even threefold ideological, but this ideology is often difficult to recognise or rationally explain. Thus, it is often even more effective. Of course, all musical styles, music of different cultures, historical periods and sociological and functional contexts are subject to ideological connotations (Pompe 2012: 77–79). According to Hesmondhalgh (in Gabrovec 2016: 24), music is effective in terms of mobilisation because of its pleasurable aspect, because it affects emotions and emphasises common values and because it works on an unconscious level. Most important, however, is the social power of music, by which music unites people, and this occurs precisely on an unconscious, subliminal level (Muršič 1993: 147).

According to Stefanija (2010: 125), its communicative value lies in the fact that music is able to spread certain personal, social, political, ideological and other messages very penetratingly. The interaction between music and national identity is especially intense in those musical expressions that the national community or its actors recognise as traditional or referring to tradition, on which nationalism and national identity are distinctly based. Folk or ethnomusic is certainly the first of these, followed by folk-pop music.

So, the question we should be asking is not what (popular) music reveals about “the people” but how it constructs them. Therefore, music provides a resource through which agency and identity are produced (DeNora 2000: 4–5). The relationship is, therefore, reciprocal. Music serves as a kind of template against which feeling, perception, representation and social situation are created and sustained. Music is a referent (with varying degrees of conventional connotations, varying strengths of pre-established relations with nonmusical matters) for clarifying the otherwise potentially polysemic character of nonmusical phenomena (social circumstances, identities, moods and energy levels, for example) (DeNora 2000: 44). The point is that it is music’s *recipients* who make these connections between social life, their identity and the music manifest or, in other words, musical

materials are active ingredients in identity work, as recipients “find themselves” in musical structures. Using music in this way, as a mirror for self-perception, is a common practice of identity work in daily life (DeNora 2000: 68–70). However, listeners need to find resemblance between a song’s meaning and their own lived experience in order to make their own meaning from music and to connect with it deeply, as Hield and Price (2018: 4) note in their article on generating meaning from new folk songs among folk music listeners. It follows that the meaning listeners derive from songs is not equivalent to the meaning intended by the author and that connections cannot be assumed between either performers and listeners or for listeners as a homogenous body. Moreover, the process of meaning-making depends not only on the personal context but is also always culturally specific and liable to change over time. All of this suggests that “song meanings are more complex than an essential, reductionist interpretation of a song’s lyrical content” and that “there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for meaning-making” (Hield and Price 2018: 16, 18–19). Of particular interest, however, is their finding of the influence of music on listeners’ behaviour. Focus group participants otherwise embraced the idea that music narratives might prepare us for life in general, yet they did not feel that this had impacted their own future behaviours. Instead, they felt that songs were powerful when they retrospectively struck a chord with their experiences.

There is limited research on music as an active (co)shaper of national identity, at least in the former Yugoslav region. In his study, *Music, Politics, and War in Croatia in the 1990s: An Introduction* (1998), Pettan discusses Croatian music production during the Yugoslav War, which is actually the period of the formation of a new (Croatian) nation-state, that is, a period of aggressive (not banal) nationalism. Patriotic (nationalist) songs proved to be a tool for arousing patriotic (nationalist) feelings (even among emigrants) with mostly recurring motifs such as God, mother, home, homeland, important historical figures, natural and geographical characteristics and beauties of the nation and the state, its national flag, etc. At the same time, music was used as a way to humiliate and torture prisoners of war.⁷ This has, of course, been the case in the past, as states at war generally forbid the music of the enemy. Even during the war of independence in Slovenia in 1991, Slovenian national radio did not broadcast songs in Croatian and Serbian for some time, although it was not publicly banned (Muršič in Lukšič 1999: 186). Since there was no long-lasting war in Slovenia, there was no need for war songs in the 1990s. In his article on the relationship between

7. In the Omarska camp in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Bosnian Serbs captured Bosniaks and Croats, prisoners had to sing Chetnik songs (Pettan 1998: 18).

rock and nationalism in Slovenia in the 1990s, Stanković (2002) states that part of Slovenian popular music after independence, that is, at the time of the greatest rise of Slovenian nationalism, looked nostalgically to the past, to the former common state, by the rejection of which the prevailing Slovenian (non-Balkan) national discourse was just being established (Stanković 2002: 233).

Čvoro, in his thorough investigation of the significance of turbo-folk in former Yugoslavia beyond the music (2014), positions this music genre quite close to DeNora's view of music as a political and cultural mediator of national identity. Like some other genres of popular music, turbo-folk as a political mediator does not just formally reflect or symbolise politics in the region but rather becomes entangled in it (e.g., turbo-folk as the antithesis to progressive modern state or/and to the cold and rational European Union/neoliberal global world, that is, as the domain of the uncultured, uneducated, rural, traditional and generally backward, nationalist people). On the other hand, music as a cultural mediator of national identity is understood in terms of cultural attitudes that were attached to a particular genre (i.e., cultural responses to turbo-folk through art, public sculpture, architecture, and film) (Čvoro 2014: 10, 21). While we are more interested in the political aspect of music as a mediator of national identity, the important distinction between turbo-folk in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on the one hand and in Slovenia (as well as Croatia) on the other should be pointed out. According to Čvoro (2014: 24–25), stylistic or lyrical differences between the mentioned nation-states are virtually nonexistent,⁸ however, there is an ironic distance towards symbols associated with national identity in Slovenia and Croatia, which does not exist in turbo-folk performers from Serbia. Although it is not entirely clear where the author recognizes this irony in Slovenian turbo-folk, there is undoubtedly a large degree of influence of Serbian performers on their Slovenian counterparts. But despite this influence, Čvoro believes (2014: 89) that the origins of turbo-folk in Slovenia can also be traced to folk-pop performers such as the Avsenik Brothers ensemble, who mixed Slovenian polka with elements of pop in the 1980s to achieve great commercial success. Stanković (2021: 24) defines Slovenian turbo-folk as "the first major stylistic transformation of Slovenian folk-pop music" in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, which, under the obvious influence of Serbian turbo-folk, revitalizes Slovenian folk-pop genre and popularizes it also among the urban population. However,

8. The performers follow the same basic formula of fusing elements of folk sound – usually through an instrument that functions as a signifier of folklore and national identity – with a base of electronic dance pop.

in both the classical (Avsenik and Slak) and contemporary⁹ (Modrijani) forms of Slovenian folk-pop music, the key structural contradiction of Slovenian identity remains recognisable, namely the dichotomy between the Germanic and South (Yugo)Slavic cultural spaces and identities. "On the one hand, Slovenia was always perceived as a culturally advanced and distinctive space in Yugoslavia. It was the most economically developed and liberal republic. Yet, on the other hand, despite being perceived as 'the Europe of the Balkans', Slovenia retains its view of Europe – Germanic Europe in particular – as being cold, boring and soulless" (Čvoro 2014: 89). Among the more recent research is the article *What is the Affect of a Merry Genre? The Sonic Organization of Slovenian Folk Pop as a (Non)Balkan Sound* (Bobnič, Majsova, Šepetavc 2022), in which the authors reflect the Slovenian folk-pop – the opposite of Čvoro – as a "merry" music genre. This dichotomy, the symbolic division of Slovenia and at least part of popular music – especially folk music – between Europe and the Balkans will be discussed in more detail when discussing the third topic or strategy of everyday nationalism in music, that is, nationalist (patriotic) sentiments.

3 Strategies of Banal Nationalism in Slovenian Folk-Pop Music

As previously mentioned, reminding people daily of their national identity is so familiar, so continual, so routine that it does not register consciously as a reminder. National identity embraces all forgotten reminders and consequently, it can be found in the embodied habits of social life. "Having a national identity also involves being situated physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally" (Billig 1995: 8). All these aspects of national identity, however, are historically constructed in accordance with the assertion that the existence of nations "is not a truth that human beings have discovered but a conceptualisation of the world that we have created" (Jackson in Praprotnik 1999: 153). In the heyday of nation-making in the 18th and 19th centuries, many seemingly ancient traditions, artifacts and poems were invented or created out of some older loyalties and artifacts but presented as age-old traditions and through the invention of traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1993). National identities were being created as if they were "natural", even eternal features of human existence (Gellner 1983). Since

9. In the text, we follow the division introduced by Stanković (2021: 28–29) into classical and contemporary Slovenian folk-pop music. The first was directly related to the stylistic innovations of the Avsenik brothers and prevailed until the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, when Slovenian turbo-folk appeared for a short time and revitalised and popularised later contemporary folk-pop music in Slovenia.

nationalism is the ideology by which the world of nations has come to seem the natural world, national identity is not only something thought to be natural to possess, but also something natural to remember because it is embedded in the routines of life, which constantly reminds – Billig (1995: 38) would say “flags” – nationhood. This remembering, nevertheless, involves a forgetting (Hall 1997), and the dialectic of remembering and forgetting (the violence, for example) is important in the banal reproduction of nationalism. But if banal nationalism should not be confined to particular social movements but rather to nation-states, who, in the name of the latter (besides the obvious state institutions and symbols), is its bearer or messenger, and what are its main topics?

Billig examines his thesis of banal nationalism, which suggests that nationhood is “near the surface of contemporary life” and not confined to “the florid language of blood-myths” (Billig 1995: 93), but operates with prosaic, routine words, which take nations for granted and, in doing so, inhabits them, in the field of politics, mass media (e.g. political speeches in which politicians, regardless of political orientation, represent, stand for and speak for – but also to – the nation; election campaigns and the tabloid press) as well as in academic discourse.¹⁰ According to the author, in classical rhetorical theory, the *topos*, or rhetorical place, referred to the topic of argument. However, in the rhetoric of established nationalism, there is a *topos* beyond argument. “The argument is generally placed within a place – a homeland – and the process of argumentation itself rhetorically reaffirms this national *topos*. [...] [T]his rhetorical reaffirmation of the national topography is routinely achieved through little, banal words, flagging the *topos* as the homeland” (Billig 1995: 96). Put simply, the *topos* is the argument itself. The following is a textual analysis of selected compositions of the three most listened-to (according to the Slovenian Public Opinion 2021/1 survey (Hafner-Fink et al. 2021)) Slovenian folk-pop ensembles – the Modrijani ensemble, the Avsenik Brothers ensemble and the Lojze Slak ensemble. The content analysis showed that among the 153 reviewed compositions of the Modrijani ensemble, 15 (9.8%) were suitable for analysis because they relate to topics or strategies of banal nationalism in music. Among the 228 reviewed compositions of the Avsenik Brothers ensemble, 55 (24.0%) were suitable for analysis and of the 339 reviewed compositions of the Lojze Slak ensemble, 78 (23.0%).¹¹ However, the content analysis, with which we previously examined all the accessible texts of

10. Billig illustrates this “philosophical nationalism” with the example of selected publicistic and academic texts by Richard Rorty (Billig 1995: 157–173).

11. Note: Folk songs set and performed by individual ensembles are not included in the analysis.

the three ensembles selected, showed that the most compositions with a national topic were detected in the Avsenik Brothers ensemble (24% of all analysed, i.e. 55 of 228), then in the Lojze Slak ensemble (23% of all analysed, i.e. 78 of 339) and the fewest in the texts of the Modrijani ensemble (9.8%, 15 of 153). The aforementioned national topic is divided into three previously mentioned thematic sections.

3.1 Slovenian Mountains, Places, Home and Mothe as Personifications of the Homeland

The first thematic section derives from Benedict Anderson's idea of nation as an "imagined community" (1983) stretching through time and across space embracing the inhabitants of a particular territory, which, through the creation of national histories, has become synonymous with the homeland. This, however, became a narrative of "our people" with "our" ways of life in "our" territory with "our" culture and "our" identity and about "our" uniqueness (demonstrated in "our" traditions and heritage). In such narratives, a mystical link between the people/nation and its (home)land is detectable. The home is understood as a point of reference from which individuals define their view of the world, where they feel their centre of existence and are offered stability. Because individuals define their home to the same extent that the home defines the individual, there is a constant reciprocal process between them, with which individuals construct their life stories (Fox 2016: 218). In the symbolic imaginary of Slovenian folk-pop music – at least the classical – the most important signifier is certainly connected with everything domestic (homeland, home landscape, homestead, family – primarily mother, etc.), nature (meadows, mountains, flowers, etc.), the countryside (village environment or small towns in contemporary folk-pop music) and tradition (folk costumes, folk customs – drinking customs, for example – old architecture, typical food, etc.) (Stanković 2021: 29).

In our textual analysis of the three ensembles selected, we identified the theme of homeland in the following four sets: home, Slovenian mountains, Slovenian places, and the image of the mother (and the family as the personification of the homeland). The first therefore relates to the concept of home, which prevails particularly in the two classical ensembles – the Avsenik Brothers ensemble (in songs such as *We are at home below Triglav*; *At our home*; *In the home circle of swallows*; *I dream of my homeland*; *Abandoned homestead*) and the Lojze Slak ensemble (in songs such as *Native house*; *To my home village*; *Good bye, America*; *My home*; *My home is closed*; *There is my home*; *I'm coming home*; *I am returning to the country again*). Avsenik's composition *I dream of the homeland* includes the lines: *I have been homesick for a long time my thoughts do not*

know where. *I want a home full of flowers. It's bad if you're alone abroad.* The concept of home can also be found in some songs of the contemporary Slovenian folk-pop ensemble Modrijani (*Home is far away (and homeland is far away); Dear compatriots*).

The rhetoric of chanting the natural and geographical characteristics and beauties of Slovenia is most recognisable in the second set on Slovenian mountains, which is trully comprehensive. If we list only some of the Avsenik Brothers ensemble compositions, which highlight the beauty of the Slovenian mountains already in the title: *Aljaž tower; Wonderful mountain world; Call from the mountains; You are beautiful, the Karawanks; Echo from Triglav; Mountain joy; Regiment on Mount Vogel; Happy in the mountains; Everyone back to the mountain paradise; From the mountains through the lakes to the sea; come with me to the mountain etc.* Among the compositions of the Lojze Slak ensemble, which describe the beauty of the Slovenian mountains, we can expose the following: *Mountain song; Along mountain trails; Happiness in the mountains; Triglav; Triglav waltz; On top of the mountains etc.*, and *Mountain love* by the Modrijani ensemble.

The third set of compositions, in which we identified the topic of the homeland, referes to Slovenian places (towns, villages, rivers, regions). Such compositions are, for example: *An island in the middle of the lake; Planica Planica; Greetings from Pohorje; Beautiful Upper Carniola*¹²; *The beautiful Upper Carniolan world* etc. by the Avsenik Brothers ensemble and *Morning on the Mura River; It is nice to live in Dolenjska; Postojna cave; Greetings from Dolenjska; Beloved Dolenjska; I am going to Dolenjska again; Memories of old Ljubljana* etc. by the Lojze Slak ensemble. This is what Slak's song *Along mountain trails* says: *Follow me along the mountain trails stretched from the lowlands, through the mountains to the sea, the real beauty is in the mountains, this is Slovenia.*

The fourth set of patriotic compositions is related to the figure of the mother (and her relationship with her son) who embodies the meaning of family and homeland. The Lojze Slak ensemble sings about the mother in many songs: *Mom; Mom, I'm coming home; For mom; To mommy* etc., the Avsenik Brothers ensemble in the song *Today mom is celebrating* and the Modrijani ensemble in songs such as *Mother's tears; Where did the time go, The call of the heart* etc. In the first mentioned song, *Mother's tears*, the Modrijani ensemble sings: *Mommy, today I would like to say thank you for the hours of care and concern, for those moments when you gave me life, your hand was found by my eyes.*

12. Upper Carniola as a translation of the Slovenian word Gorenjska.

3.2 Diligence, Drinking and Absence of the Other as a Slovenian Autostereotype

The second thematic section includes stereotypes as shared, cultural descriptions of social – in our case national – groups. Because nationalism is an ideology of the first-person plural, which tells “us” who “we” are, then it is also an ideology of the third person. Or, to use a familiar catchphrase, there can be no “us” without “them”. The national community/nation can only be imagined by also imagining communities of foreigners, and this imagining cannot take place without the act of stereotyping “them”. In doing so, it is important to acknowledge that some “others” are stereotyped as more admirable and more like “us” than others. At this point, it is worth noting another not insignificant aspect, namely, that nations and national identities are not described precisely or in great detail in national mythologies, but rather very broadly and openly, for example, with phrases such as “English culture, Slovenian language, Croatian landscape” and with stereotypical characteristics (Praprotnik 1999: 160). Moreover, “Slovenian” and “Slovenianness” do not mean anything in and of themselves; they are empty signifiers, voids that present themselves as being filled with content, but in fact signify nothing. The term can belong to anyone or to no one, for the “Nation” is merely an ideological subject. The positive characteristics (e.g., diligence, industriousness, honesty) have a specific meaning, while “Slovenianness” and “Slovenian” are self-referential descriptions that mean nothing or are only meaningful to those who recognise them. To paraphrase Žižek, if a Frenchman is diligent, he is simply diligent; if a Slovenian is diligent, this quality becomes proof of his Slovenianness; he is not Slovenian in the true sense because he possesses these qualities—he possesses these qualities, which are attributed to Slovenians, because he is Slovenian (Žižek in Praprotnik 1999: 161). The song *Beekeeper* (1995) by the Lojze Slak ensemble is an example of an outline of the Slovenian national character through the autostereotypical image of a modest, hard-working man who befriends hard-working bees. Among contemporary Slovenian folk-pop music, of course, we cannot miss the Modrijani ensemble and their songs: *Miller*; *Singer’s memory is still alive*; *Slovenian, Slovenian* and *The new year will come*. The refrain of their latest song *There is no Slovenian who does not scream* highlights three stereotypical national characteristics of a Slovenian: screaming (at parties/out of joy and similar to yodelling), loving and drinking (wine).

Let us stop for a moment at the last-mentioned stereotypical characteristic of Slovenians, that is, the drinking of (particularly) wine and everything related to it. In particular, both classical folk-pop ensembles selected offer plenty of interesting

songs on this subject: *We drink it again; If the wine speak; Never home; I like to drink and eat well; Feast of prosciutto and terran; Night owls; Only the bike is practical; Curious astronaut Franc* etc. by the Avsenik Brothers ensemble, and *St. Martin's day; At the wine fair; Ribolla is not an onion; I built a wine temple; Harvest; Song for the vine; In the village pub; In the wine cellar; Vine; Happy company; Happy cellar, Vipava Valley* etc. by the Lojze Slak ensemble. The following is written in Avsenik's song *Nighttravelers: Hello, innkeeper, open it, if not, we go crazy. Thirst for death, life on the line, save us from the end tonight, this fight is too much.* Lojze Slak's composition *Ribolla is not an onion* goes like this: *Rebula is not an onion, and merlot is a crook, before the hour passes, they turn you behind the fence.*

In his last book about the symbolic imaginary of contemporary Slovenian folk-pop music, where, in relation to both the content of the compositions' texts and the visual image of the ensembles, Stanković (2021: 126–128, 132–133) points out two relevant motives that are important here and that can certainly be recognised in the classical as well as the contemporary version of this genre. The first is general order (the order of the *mise-en-scène*, costumes, venues, performers, etc.) where everything is in place, clean and transparent, which expresses the established Slovenian value of "nobility". In short, no dirt, messy hairstyles, clutter, worn-out clothes, etc., which would disturb the established physical and symbolic order and express uneasiness about anything different, disordered, deviant. Another predominant and recurring motif, however, is uniformity, which first appears as uniformity of appearance (clothing (formal, semi-formal or casual), hairstyles, etc.) and then as the absence of anything that this uniformity would indicate. According to Stanković (2021: 134–135), all cultural differences (including the cultures of nations other than the former Yugoslavia and even tourists) and other races (except white) are absent. "All narrative elements are in one way or another connected with established markers of Sloveneness or domesticity; foreigners, cultural symbols of other cultures, etc. however, they are not present". In the considered sample of contemporary Slovenian folk-pop songs, the author also notes the absence of any other non-dominant sexual identity except the (young!) heteronormative, any subcultures or unconventional lifestyles, major cities, drugs (except alcohol), or structural antagonisms (i.e. differences between rich and poor or poverty in general, precarious class, intolerance of dissenters, xenophobia, homophobia, cultural struggle, political tensions, etc.). Or, as Stanković (2021: 136) notes:

When listening to contemporary Slovenian folk-pop music (and watching videos), it seems that all people live in the same way, share the same values and habits, dress more or less identically etc. [...] Consequently, no

(economic or cultural) marginals, dissent and the like are seen or heard in the songs, on the basis of which we conclude that one of the central characteristics of contemporary Slovenian folk-pop music, in addition to the above-mentioned absence of any otherness, is the orientation towards painting Slovenian everyday life as distinctly harmonious.

The substantive absence of any cultural, ethnic, racial, worldview, lifestyle, sexual and other differences (i.e. emphasising normativity, monoculturalism, standardisation, uniformity, orderliness) and the emphasis on orderliness together with the principled combination of modern surface (technologies, images, locations) with traditional values are those elements that bring contemporary Slovenian folk-pop music closer to nationalist or even fascist political articulations in terms of content and structure (Stanković 2021: 148). Due to the absence of “everything different” in Slovenian folk-pop music, the absence of stereotypes about the “others” is therefore not unusual. Instead, autostereotypes prevail, that is, introspective stereotypical representations of the nation itself, which maintain a positive self-image of Sloveneness and its national qualities.

Our analysis of the three folk-pop ensembles recognised the presence of a difference in only one composition of all analysed. It is a composition by the Avsenik Brothers ensemble with the title *Čevapčiči and skewers and a good drop of wine*, in which there is a difference between “our dishes”, that is, typical Upper Carniolan food (potatoes, porridge, “žganci”, “močnik”, Kranjska sausage), and the food and drink from the southern (“Balkan”) lands of the former common state (grilled food, plum brandy). The song laments the disappearance of the former due to the growing popularity of the latter. However, another song is worth mentioning that highlights the similarity more than the difference, namely the similarity between Slovenia and Europe. It is a song by the Lojze Slak ensemble titled *We are going to Europe now*, which – in contrast to the first mentioned song – emphasises the common European home, including Slovenia:

I will scream out loud, our young Slovenia has entered the European common home. We are now going to Europe with a Slovenian song, as the sea roars, as the wind roars. We are now going to Europe with a Slovenian song, as a bird chirps, as a flower breathes, let the Slovenian song live!

3.3 Praising the nation through patriotic sentiments, nostalgic clichés and (invented) traditions

The third and the last thematic section includes strategies with their own recognisable rhetoric that are conventionally identified as playing upon nationalist or patriotic sentiments. These strategies and rhetorics – Billig (1995: 103) calls

them “nationalist clichés” – highlight, for example, praising the nation and its spirit and urging patriotism for the father-/homeland/home to evoke the past and anger against those who would cause “us” to abandon “our” heritage, country, etc. Heritage, tradition and associated nostalgia are noteworthy examples of celebratory flagging, both of which successfully market the national past within a heritage industry. As Roland Robertson (1992) claims, “wilful nostalgia”, especially with a national dimension, is a distinguishing feature of contemporary Western culture. In the case of Slovenian folk-pop music, the accordion is certainly an important artifact of Slovenian tradition that evokes the past and nostalgia for it. There is probably no more illustrative example in Slovenian folk-pop music than the instrumental folk entertainment regiment *Na Golici* (1954, German *Trompeten-Echo*) by Slavko Avsenik and performed by the Upper Carniolan Quintet. The composition, which has as many as 600 arrangements, is considered one of the most recognisable regiments and one of the most played instrumental compositions in the world. There are probably several reasons why *Na Golici* has become the most recognisable and relevant composition in connection with the concept of “Sloveneness”, even though it has no lyrics. One reason is its transnational popularity, and another is certainly the accordion, which plays a central role in the composition (next to the trumpet) and is perceived in Slovenia as a representative musical symbol and a “typical” national instrument.¹³ The latter is, of course, an “invented” tradition, as the accordion did not become established in the Slovenian region until the end of the 19th century¹⁴ (Stanković 2021: 13). The Avsenik Brothers ensemble also sings about the accordion in their song *Accordion and harmonica*, and about their attachment to Slovenia and Slovenian people in many other songs: *National costume; There are no such people anywhere* and of course in the almost nationalised song *Slovenia, where does your beauty come from: We greet you from the bottom of our hearts and we are happy here at home. Slovenia, let the song sing to you, do not seek happiness elsewhere than at home*. The accordion is also mentioned in quite a few songs of the ensemble Modrijani: *There is no Slovenian who does not scream; We all have something in common; Where there is music, there we are*, in which they sing:

When the accordion plays aloud in the village [...] Our Slovenia, wish fulfilled, let it live and rejoice. Our Slovenia is all beautified, together it

13. It should be noted that in the Slovenian national narrative, the diatonic accordion, the so-called “frajtonarca”, occupies the most prominent place, while in the aforementioned composition *Na Golici*, the piano accordion is specifically used.

14. Interestingly, at the end of the 19th century this instrument replaced the violin, which had been prevalent in Slovenian folk music until then in the then Slovenian territory, with the exception of Pomurje.

celebrates the holiday of its people. Or in the song An eternal traveller with an accordion: I have a lot of beautiful vibes in the accordion. [...] Our Slovenia is beautiful, all sown with the flower of girls.

And last but not least, the Lojze Slak ensemble, where we find a rich collection of songs about the accordion: *Accordion voice; My musician; I'll take the accordion again; Sing to me, accordion; Regiment of memories* etc., and affection for Slovenia: *Paradise under Triglav; Let Slovenia be more beautiful tomorrow; Good luck, young Slovenia; In this land of dreams; Our homeland*, in which we also find the following verses:

Here will be our homeland, here will be our home forever, here will take root our proud genus; or Slovenia, which states: Slovenia is in my heart, it will be written in it forever, if necessary, I will give everything, except Slovenia.

Like the accordion, this type of music, which has remained one of the most recognisable features of the Slovenian musical landscape since the 1950s, is characterised by a distinct rustic aesthetic, which was maintained by most Slovenian folk-pop ensembles. As a result, this genre of music has gradually become synonymous with introverted traditionalism and cultural backwardness. In this connection, the derogatory term “beef music” (music for Sunday lunch hour, which traditionally began with beef soup) also began to be used (Stanković 2021: 16). This is somewhat paradoxical, given that, as previously indicated, the orientation of Slovenia and part of Slovenian popular music was toward “Europe” – the Alpine states in the north and west of Slovenia being the most convincing incarnation – as an important strategy for distancing the independent Slovenian state from the former Yugoslav space. Since its origins in the 1950s, Slovenian folk-pop music, with its predominant Upper Carniolan iconography and symbolism, has been directed toward this alpine, predominantly Germanic area, and standardisation of Upper Carniolan iconography in Slovenian folk-pop music is undoubtedly connected with the processes of symbolic distancing of Slovenia from other parts of the former common state (Stanković 2004). Upper Carniola, with its recognisable natural and cultural landscape, was the most distant of all Slovenian regions from other parts of the former Yugoslavia and the most closely related to the northern and western Alpine regions (Austria, Switzerland, northern Italy and the Alpine part of France), which in the time of socialism also represented the democratic capitalist West. The next important identification point of Upper Carniola is that it is the most recognisable ski region in Slovenia, where many successful Slovenian alpine skiers came from, with whom the Slovenian national identity in the former common state was most

profiled as a skiing nation (Stanković 2021: 16). Last but not least, mountains play an important role in the Slovenian national imaginary – Triglav is the first of them (Šaver 2005) – and Upper Carniola, as the most mountainous alpine region in Slovenia, represents Slovenia, Sloveneness and Slovenian tradition as a whole. According to Stanković, Slovenian folk-pop music does not represent the Slovenian tradition in general, but focuses on the tradition of only one region, (Upper Carniola), from the standpoint of the music convention used,¹⁵ Upper Carniolan folk costume, idyllic images of Slovenian (that is, Upper Carniolan) landscapes and Upper Carniolan traditions. However, although Slovenian folk-pop music refers to and draws on Slovenian tradition, it is not Slovenian traditional or folk music. It is a modern genre that merely enacts tradition in an idealised and nostalgic way – nostalgia for nature, life in the countryside in the times before modernisation and romantic love. Interestingly, love songs can be associated with national identification. Such music do not contain explicit national connotations, as it contains universalistic values and identifications that evade or transcend narrow national discourses (Stanković 2002: 225). The reason is in the emotionality of the music, to which personal emotional experiences and nostalgic memories are related, which can also be a collective (national) experience. Such an example could be the Slovenian folk song *In the silent valley* in its most famous adaptation by the Lojze Slak ensemble and Fantje s Praprotna (1966). In a qualitative survey with an otherwise unrepresentative sample (Gabrovec 2016), this composition was recognized as one of the eleven songs that illustrate Slovenian national identity to the respondents, even though it does not contain any explicit national connotations. It could be argued that it is a similar (emotional) pattern of reasons for this as in the previously discussed instrumental composition *Na Golici* by the Avsenik Brothers ensemble.

However, regardless of the traditionalism and the alleged cultural backwardness of Slovenian folk-pop music (Stanković 2021: 16), it is not just a matter of symbolic and national positioning of Slovenia in the European space. According to the Slovenian Public Opinion 2021/1 survey (Hafner-Fink et al. 2021), there is a general and extremely high (93% or more in almost all categories except one)¹⁶ consensus among respondents – regardless of nationality, class, place, education, age and gender – that Slovenian folk-pop music is unique and should be included in tourism promotions of the Slovenian nation state.

15. Slavko and Vilko Avsenik, as the founders of folk music, who come from the Upper Carniolan region, relied on the Upper Carniolan musical and wider cultural context in their musical creation.

16. In the age group under 30 years, this share is “only” 87%.

4 Conclusion

Can it therefore be argued that the significance of music – folk-pop in particular – is equal to that of politics, media and sport in the reproduction of national identity? If we accept Billig's thesis that these principal indicators are not the sole transmitters of "home-centrism", then we must understand the banality of nationalism as a form of life, in which "we" are constantly invited to relax, at home within the homeland's borders. "This form of life is the national identity, which is being renewed continually, with its dangerous potentials appearing so harmlessly homely" (Billig 1995: 127).

But why even bother to notice such unnoticed signs of nationalism? First, by noticing the flagging of nationhood, we notice something about ourselves and our identity and about the identity of "others" at the same time. Second, identities are forms of social life. They do not float in some sort of free psychological space but are rooted within a powerful social structure that reproduces hegemonic relations of inequity. This power is symbolic, structurally as well as physically. "This needs to be borne in mind when observing the banal symbols of nationhood" (Billig 1995: 176).

At least in the case of Slovenian folk-pop music, we can conclude, based on existing research of analysed music content, that it does not offer different, changed national identifications or new views on "Sloveneness", but it deepens and consolidates existing, conventional, often autostereotypical representations of nation, national values, traditions or national specificities (Gabrovec 2016: 47). These national specificities can be summarized in the following findings, based on the textual analysis of the compositions of the three most listened-to ensembles of Slovenian folk-pop music. The first and most common thematic section refers to Anderson's idea of the nation as an imagined community or homeland, which is most often represented in the images of the home, Slovenian mountains, Slovenian places (towns, villages, rivers, regions) and in the figure of a loving mother. The second thematic section is related to the stereotypes that an individual nation establishes in the process of building its own national identity. Analyzed compositions more than stereotypes about other nations contain autostereotypes, that is, the representation of the Slovenian nation about itself. They portray Slovenians as working, diligent people, who also know how to rejoice, love and drink (wine in particular). And finally, the last, third thematic section, which we have linked to patriotic sentiments. In the compositions examined, they were perceived primarily in the directly expressed affection and loyalty to Slovenia and indirectly through the invented traditional Slovenian artifacts, such as accordion. However, it should be noted that the content analysis has shown that

the proportion of all compositions included in one of the three thematic sections remains relatively low in all the ensembles considered. It is the highest in both classical folk-pop ensembles, namely the Avsenik Brothers ensemble (24%) and the Lojze Slak ensemble (23%), while the lowest is in the contemporary Slovenian folk-pop ensemble Modrijani (9.8%).

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