

ARTICLE

Slivovitz and Everyday Nationalism: The Analysis of Slovene Newspapers in Interwar Yugoslavia

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Abstract

By analyzing selected Slovene newspapers, the article discusses the role of *slivovitz* in the reproduction of everyday nationalism in interwar Yugoslavia. The article is based on an analysis of texts containing the word *slivovka* (the Slovene word for slivovitz or plum spirit) that appeared in three major Slovene newspapers and three minor Slovene pro-Yugoslav newspapers in the period 1919–1945. In the period in question, slivovitz did not (yet) have the role of a signifier of the Yugoslav state, the Yugoslav nation and other elements associated with Yugoslav identity, but it was becoming part of the “structure of national feeling” – the specific experience of life in a given time and place that was common to the Yugoslav nation. Slivovitz, frequently included in repetitive and everyday habits, practices and assumptions, began to define the Yugoslav nation through a specific culture of drinking and drinks and became a component of this everyday, largely unnoticed reproduction of the Yugoslav nation.

Keywords: Everyday nationalism; banal nationalism; material culture; interwar Yugoslavia; newspapers; slivovitz

Welcome Drink

What drink did boy scouts from Yugoslavia serve (to guests including Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden and numerous lords) during a Yugoslav evening at an international Scout camp in Darlington, England, in 1939? When the oceangoing sea captain came across the “Japanese wine” *sake* on his travels across the globe, what drink did it remind him of? And what did Mate Božić, a farmer from Srem in Serbia, present King Alexander with when he visited the royal court in 1922? What links all these questions? They are all questions with the same answer (see the quotations further on in the article), and possibly also questions with the same fate. Indeed, these questions will in fact never find a place in textbooks of history. However, drink, like countless other everyday items of every imaginable kind, also took part in the reproduction of the Yugoslav nation, and of course of other nations as well.

As I have already shown elsewhere (Mlekuč 2020), slivovitz unquestionably occupied a visible place in the process of formation of the Yugoslav nation during the socialist period – it was the most convenient “potatory,” “liquid” signifier (and indeed a very handy signifier in general) of the Yugoslav state, the Yugoslav nation, and other Yugoslav-related elements. This plum spirit, commercially and privately produced in Eastern and Central Europe (*šljivovica* or *šljiva* in Serbian and Croatian; *slivovka* in Slovene; *slivova* in Macedonian), had, in the words of Benedict Anderson (2006, 145), “an aura of fatality” about it, as far as the Yugoslav nation was concerned. In this article, I look at the role of slivovitz in an earlier period, at the time of the first, newly formed Yugoslavia,

when the new nation was facing the challenge of shaping or establishing the national imaginary. Was slivovitz already part of this imaginary? How did it enter it? From the top down – i.e., prompted above all by the nation’s institutions – or from the bottom up – i.e., passing from everyday life into the official, institutional sphere? How did it become, as it was frequently described in the socialist period, the “national drink” (Mlekuž 2020)?

Yugoslavia – officially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–1929) – and the later Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941),¹ as a new state created on December 1, 1918, and incorporating different nations or, as state discourse called them, “tribes” (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, etc.), represents an interesting experiment in the field of the emergence or shaping of a common national identity. A great deal of ink has already been spilt on the subject of the “political” idea of Yugoslavism (cf. Banac 1984; Rusinow 1992, 2003; Sekulic, Massey, and Hodson 1994; Wachtel 1998; Djokić 2003, 2007; Ramet 2006; Axboe Nielsen 2014; Markovina 2015). Much less is known, however, about how the feeling of belonging to a specific *political* community or state² was shaped in practice, or about how the idea of Yugoslavism was formed, lived, and materialized in everyday life. Therefore, a lack of research on the interwar Yugoslavia can be observed when considering particular objects and their meanings, connections, and associations with the Yugoslav state and nation. Eric Hobsbawm (1992, 10) considers nations to be dual phenomena “constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below,” which includes understanding the “assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people.” And it is precisely to this “drink-based nationalism from below” (focusing on the “assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people”) – to which, unlike Hobsbawm, we will ascribe not only an epistemological role but also a constitutive one.

This article investigates the everydayness of nationalism and nationhood or how the nation is produced and reproduced by quotidian practices, habits, and modalities – using slivovitz as the focus of analysis. In doing so, it relies on and considers the concept of everyday nationalism (for an overview, see Knott 2015), an approach that focuses on nationalism reproduced outside official, institutional, and instrumental frameworks at the level of largely unreflective *everyday* practices, decisions, and representations. The difficulty with studying the everyday is that it is too obvious, so its comprehension most often remains at the level of theory instead of an analysis of actual practices or processes. This article continues the debates on how unreflective national identity, based on the everyday, becomes at least partially the subject of reflection, and about how things and events that disturb the everyday routine provoke at least a partial awareness that certain things are important, that they are an omnipresent part of our everyday reality and, consequently, of our national identity (Edensor 2002; Skey 2011; Fox 2017; Fox and Ginderachter 2018; Ginderachter 2018; Skey 2018). One of the important aspects of everyday nationalism is the emphasis on human agency and reflexivity, or the idea that people are not only passive consumers of national meanings but are simultaneously their contingent producers. This article opens up the debate on human agency and reflexivity, and in particular addresses the point made by Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008), that reproduction of nationhood in everyday life is not only the result of discursive or linguistic practices but also of daily consumption and habits, choices, ritual performances, and other practices.

At the same time, however, the article is more than simply one more critique of the “big” theories of nations and nationalism, paying little attention, or very selective attention, to the question of everyday life and everyday culture. It introduces to the discussion of everyday nationalism and nationalism in general a discussion of material culture, the importance of objects in the construction and reproduction of nations, which is a topic that for the most part remains largely overlooked, at least among scholars of nations and nationalism.³ Placing the object at the heart of analysis also means that we try to understand the special place and role occupied by objects, or by material culture, in the construction and reproduction of nations and nationalisms. It is, of course, an extremely complex and broad question, which we will only consider here from the perspective of everyday nationalism and/or everyday objects, based largely on Daniel Miller’s (2010) theory of

humble objects. This article also captures a point at which objects and practices start to come together as everyday national practices. Most studies of everyday nationalism have been carried out in “formed” national settings, but this article examines the phenomenon of everyday nationalism – the construction of common Yugoslavian “we” – in the initial phase of nation-building. By exploring everyday nationalism, which has been criticized for its ahistorical approach, focusing on contemporary aspects of nationalism, and neglecting the “causal-historical methodology” of previous research into nationalism (Smith 2008, 567), this article also introduces something of a methodological experiment. Namely, research into the everyday nationalism of the past, which is conditioned by selective and specific historical sources (cf. Ginderachter and Beyen 2012; Ginderachter 2018), can also be tackled, as this article demonstrates, through the analysis of newspapers.

A Methodological Toast

The article is based on analysis of texts containing the word *slivovka* (slivovitz) in the three principal Slovene daily newspapers (the Catholic *Slovenec* and the liberal and moderately pro-Yugoslav *Slovenski narod* and *Jutro*) in the period 1918–1945⁴ (or until publication ceased) and three smaller strongly pro-Yugoslav newspapers *Jugoslavija* (1919–1922), *Jugoslovan* (1930–1931), and *Orjuna* (1923–1927). A search for the term *slivovka* in the Digital Library of Slovenia (DLIB) produced 394 hits in *Slovenec*, 492 in *Slovenski narod*, 358 in *Jutro*, 173 in *Jugoslavija*, 40 in *Jugoslovan*, and 10 in *Orjuna*. In other words, a total of 1,467 hits, from which probably more than half are advertisements and which also include some “empty” hits where a search of the relevant PDF document found no instances of the word *slivovka*. I eliminated most of the hints in the newspaper review itself, as they did not seem relevant to my research question (e.g., the appearance of slivovitz in many advertisements). The remaining hints were edited or tagged according to certain keywords or content that seemed relevant to my research (e.g., everyday life, traveling abroad) and helped me interpret the material. In writing the article, only a set of 20 articles (citations) was used to illustrate the arguments. To some extent, this set also represents the remaining, unused material. On the other hand, it does at least partly determine some of the relevant issues the article aims to address.

Why did I choose precisely these newspapers and not also at least some Serbian, Croatian, or Bosnian publications? The pragmatic reason is that Slovene newspapers are to a large extent digitalized and allow rapid searches for a specific word, in this case the word *slivovka*.⁵ Such a choice nevertheless requires an explanation. The choice of Slovene newspapers offers a *Slovene*, and therefore at least to some extent *particular* view of slivovitz and its place in the Yugoslav reality and imaginary (for more on Slovene interwar newspapers, see Mikuž 1965; Amon 1996; Nežmah 2013). Slovenia was, on the one hand, the periphery and, on the other, the “glue” of Yugoslavia. Because of its small size and threats to its nationhood, it saw Yugoslavia as the guarantor of its existence and, unlike Croatia, was much more favorably disposed toward Yugoslavia (Mikuž 1965; Perovšek 2005; 2009). So, in addition to the pragmatic reason, there is also a more convincing substantive argument for focusing on Slovenian newspapers, especially given the fact that Slovenian newspapers more often (compared to Serbian and Croatian newspapers) carried news from other parts of the country. The choice of the principal or largest Slovene newspapers published in the period in question rather than smaller or regional, specialist, thematic, or other more specialized publications is based on the fact that the chosen “broad spectrum” newspapers undoubtedly offered a broad overview of different contents and fields (politics, economy, everyday life, sport, etc.) and included more news from other parts of the country. Of the 20 newspaper citations selected, 17 are from 2 liberal newspapers and only 3 from one catholic newspaper. Although this was a time of strong ideological divisions (largely concerned with the question of the relationship between the Slovenian and Yugoslav identity), which were also reflected in the newspapers, it should be stressed that political divisions were not the focus of this research and are also largely absent from the writing on slivovitz. This imbalance is therefore rather a result of the hue and in part probably also of the slightly different focus of the newspapers.

History that is uncovered *only* through newspaper sources is, of course, incomplete history. Newspapers only write about some phenomena and events, while ignoring others. And even when writing on selected phenomena and events, they write in one particular way. As has been demonstrated, for example, by some scholars of nationalisms in Austria Hungary, the image of nationalism we gain by browsing newspapers is usually overinflated and distorted (Judson 2006, 2016; Zahra 2010). A newspaper must thus also – or above all – be understood as a specific medium and as a specific representation of reality, with a more or less blatant ambition to shape reality. Newspapers have undoubtedly played a part in shaping and reproducing nationalisms and nations. We should not forget that in the period in question newspapers were the most influential apparatus of information and ideology that, on a daily basis, served the reading public with information and ideological material, and in this way reproduced the existence of the nation or the conception of it every single day (cf. Briggs and Burke 2009; Anderson 2006). As Eric Hobsbawm (2007, 16) puts it, “Deliberate propaganda was certainly almost less significant than the ability of the mass media to make what were in effect national symbols part of the life of every individual, and thus to break down the divisions between the private and local sphere in which most normal citizens lived, and the public and national one.”

Its Everydayness

In the set of 1,467 articles and other texts that mention slivovitz in one way or another, we cannot find any text in which slivovitz has a clear role as signifier of the Yugoslav nation, state, or other things connected with Yugoslavism. In other words, we can only speculate about an explicit connection between slivovitz and Yugoslavism. In the period of the first Yugoslavia, then, slivovitz did not (yet) act, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm (1983, 282), as a “symbolic representative of the country’s greatness and glory.” One of the very few articles to indicate a possible role for slivovitz as a signifier of Yugoslav identity is a humorous sketch by the well-known Slovene writer and dramatist Fran Milčinski (who signs the piece pseudonymously as “Fr. Ž.”), which appeared in a feuilleton of *Slovenski narod* in 1923 under the title “Concerning the new street names”:

I found out where the chairman of the new street names committee lives – envy and selfishness are strangers to my heart – and went to see him to offer my advice and suggestions. He received me in a friendly manner and allowed me to say my piece. Then he took my pulse and advised me to drink a glass of warm water with two tablespoons of Karlovac salt. I answered politely that I was moved, that I had not expected such hospitality, that one could tell at once that the house was imbued with Yugoslav spirit, and that, if he didn’t mind, I would rather take, instead of Karlovac salt, a little glass of slivovitz. (*Slovenski narod* 1923)

Yet rather than search for a supposed “Yugoslav spirit,” let us look instead at the various contexts we find this alcoholic beverage that was so desired by the protagonist of the above sketch. It was a frequent and visible part of urban and rural *everyday life*, as for example we read in a report from the Srem district, where, despite crushing debts, “the frank and open local folk do not despair” but instead “drink their slivovitz and hope for better days” (*Jutro* 1929a). Slivovitz likewise occupied a special place at festivities and celebrations. At a “big wedding in a Slavonian village,” which lasted for five days, the 500 guests consumed “6 pigs, 2 cows, 90 chickens, 63 large loaves of bread and an enormous quantity of other victuals” and drank “1,400 litres of wine, 500 litres of homemade slivovitz and 75 litres of black coffee” (*Jutro* 1940). The ubiquitous reports on everyday life around the country often bring up mentions of slivovitz in one way or another.

Slivovitz also played an important role in the *economic life* of the country. As we read in all manner of reports on export or import quotas, customs, “trade conventions,” and so on, it helped boost the national economy: “When compiling the new Excise Duty Act, the intention was to facilitate the export of our brandy and slivovitz to other countries. To this end a special export

premium of 4 dinars per hl/degree had been introduced. This will revive our exports of slivovitz to Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, to which territories our exports were once plentiful” (*Jutro* 1929b). And as “Stories of small-scale smuggling” tell us, it was also part of the economy at “lower” levels:

In recent times the female egg sellers of the Dolenjska countryside have taken to smuggling spirits into the town. They place one or two bottles of spirits at the bottom of their big baskets and cover them with around 500 eggs. They then sell the liquor to private customers. It is extremely hard to carry out checks in order to thwart this practice, since the authorities cannot poke around in the baskets with needles without damaging the eggs. And so the egg sellers nonchalantly smuggle in *brinjovec* [strong alcoholic drink, produced in some regions in Slovenia; re-distilled from ground and fermented juniper berries only] and slivovitz and later offer them discreetly for sale to housewives at the food market. (*Jutro* 1929c)

Among the genres particularly fond of slivovitz are crime news and travelogue. Slivovitz was often the object of theft, and its (excessive) consumption was likewise responsible for thefts, murders, and other acts found in crime news. In the travelogue, slivovitz again finds itself in very different roles. Slivovitz is often featured in travelogues abroad; either when authors discover that slivovitz is also available in other countries, or when they consume a drink that reminds them of slivovitz. In travelogues in different parts of the country, it is often served as a welcome drink, a refreshment, or even as medicine. To take from an account of a journey “On the Adriatic”: “A book flew off the shelf and onto my chest and I realized that the ship was rolling heavily. I staggered to my feet with the intention of taking my medicine – a bottle of good slivovitz which my considerate wife had prepared for me as a remedy for seasickness” (*Jutro* 1923). And if we are to believe the “Slavonian Methuselah” – a 105-year-old from that region – slivovitz is a medicine that truly works: “In the village of Vlatkovac, not far from Našice, a farmer by the name of Stjepan Bertalan died at the age of 105. He was a great joker and the young folk always enjoyed his company. He was extremely fond of slivovitz, which he would say was true medicine” (*Slovenski narod* 1939). We could say that people, like the newspapers, used slivovitz for all manner of needs.

Of course, people do not only drink slivovitz “out of necessity.” They also drink it “out of non-necessity,” as we read in the “News from the Konjice Valley” section: “Before long this year’s wine starts to take effect and the sound of merry singing echoes from the cellar. The still is already bubbling away. If only people would behave sensibly when it comes to slivovitz and drink just a little of it and save it for the times when there are no plums, using it more out of necessity than out of non-necessity” (*Jutro* 1929c).

And since we are talking about things that are necessary and unnecessary, slivovitz also appears in newspapers in every context imaginable – quite often in the “humour section”:

Consolation. A farmer has just buried his wife. He sits in his house drowning his sorrows with good slivovitz. The local parish priest walks in: he has come to console the grieving widower. “Is this your only consolation, Franc?” asks the reverend gentleman reproachfully. “Why no, Father,” answers the widower. “I’ve a couple more bottles in the cellar.” (*Slovenski narod* 1927)

This omnipresence and/or quotidian nature of slivovitz (with which we could easily continue until we run out of space) is addressed directly by some articles:

With regard to the claim that “in order to earn a little money,” the country folk “sell spirits in the town, so that they might help the town dweller too,” in truth it is only slivovitz that they sell. You probably know what slivovitz means to our gentle nation. Slivovitz is, as it were, the backbone of our spirit and our strength. Without this elixir, a man cannot even sneeze properly, and all great actions and apparently even the glorious past of our “heroes” are, as it

were, swimming in slivovitz. This has to be said, because we don't talk much about slivovitz, much preferring to drink it instead. Since someone has announced the great discovery that drinking spirits is vulgar and even harmful, the gentle folk now drink it even more, because they drink it in secret. (*Slovenski narod* 1932)

A review of the wide variety of newspaper articles (reports, travelogues, commentaries, jokes, etc.), which touch on a wide variety of topics and issues (everyday life, economy, leisure, etc.) and which are difficult to organize in a meaningful way, attests to the frequent presence, visibility, popularity (and contempt among alcohol haters) of slivovitz. Of course, such a claim is relative; we have no studies, let alone comparisons with other objects. Yet, as many newspaper articles tell us, slivovitz was the most prominent, popular, and widespread spirit. Slivovitz is often found first among the spirits on price lists of spirit producers. Slivovitz also occasionally takes on the role of a kind of proxy for alcohol or spirits in general. In an article on "alcoholic doom," slivovitz thus appears in the heading of a section, "which draws attention to all the misery caused by the drinking of spirits": "The country is swimming in slivovitz" (*Slovenski narod* 1940a). Slivovitz was not, then, some sort of mirage existing only in newspapers, something that the writers of all kinds of articles frequently liked to use in order to attract the attention of the readers (although it also served this purpose). Rather, as a drink that went beyond the division of rural and urban and class divisions (though admittedly much more at home in the male sphere), it had a "prominent" place in the everyday, economic, and other life of a country that was "swimming in slivovitz" (*Slovenski narod* 1940a).

But how does this everyday aspect of slivovitz, its common use for one purpose or another, become important for the reproduction of nationalism and national identities?

The Nationalized Everydayness

The problem with studying everyday life – as highlighted by Tim Edensor (2002), one of the first authors to consider the role of everyday life and everyday culture in the reproduction of nations and nationalisms – is that it is too obvious, too self-evident. That is why those researching and writing about nations and nationalisms have devoted themselves above all to the conspicuous, visible, spectacular, official, institutional, and instrumental aspects of nationalism. The first in-depth critique of the understanding and study of nationalism as a phenomenon that only appears in the form of spectacular events and manifestations and for the occasion of special events (celebrations, wars, etc.) was offered by Michael Billig in *Banal Nationalism*, in which he highlighted the banal aspect of the everyday as a central condition of nationalism. As Billig says, in the life of the nation in the long term, flags waved opportunistically by patriots do not count as much as those flags hung limply but constantly along everyday paths, "unconsciously" reminding people that they are members of a given nation.

This daily reminding of nationality, which is so continuous and dense that we practically never pay any attention to it, frequently operates with the everyday, banal, prosaic words that make nations and nation states something self-evident. Little words, rather than big phrases, impress themselves on our memory and constantly, and for the most part probably unconsciously, remind us that we are members of a given nation and that we live in a world of nations. As Billig (1995, 78) rightly points out, the keywords of banal nationalism are usually the smallest ones: "our," "this," "here" – words that cannot be clearly understood without an additional semantic background. As I have shown for the period of socialist Yugoslavia (Mlekuž 2020), the possessive "our" is probably the adjective most frequently attached to slivovitz. This central adjective of banal nationalism appears more rarely in connection with slivovitz during the period of the first Yugoslavia, but can nevertheless still be found, for example in a "discussion" about hangovers: "He offered me a swig of it, assuring me that I would be completely recovered within an hour at most. Thinking that grain spirit was like our slivovitz or *brinjovec*, I took a hearty swallow ... and it blew my head off. The

enormously strong spirit burnt my mouth and I began running around the room like a madman” (Slovenec 1922).

Nationalism is not, as Billig emphasizes, merely one of several identities. Nationalism is far more than this: it is a way of thinking or an ideological consciousness. National identities appear “natural,” and the world of nations and nation states seems like the “natural” order. This conceptualization of “us,” “them,” and “the other” must therefore be as unobtrusive as possible. Billig (1995, 6) emphasizes that the entire system of beliefs, customs, representations, and practices must be reproduced at the banal everyday level, since the world of nations and states is today the everyday world.

But what does banal nationalism in general tell us about daily life and its role in the reproduction of nations and nationalisms? Banal nationalism describes how nationalism trickles down from structural forms of nationalism, how nationalism from the top works quietly, “mindlessly, rather than mindfully” (Billig 1995, 38), without resorting to the use of violence (for more recent evaluations of Billig’s contribution to the study of nationalism, see Skey and Antonsich 2017; Duchesne 2018; Hearn and Antonsich 2018). It does not, however, tell us anything about how these trickles influence the growth and spread of nationalism on the dirty ground of the everyday, how they emerge in the feelings, mentality, and actions of ordinary people. This, however, also reveals the inherent problem of the concept of banal nationalism, as pointed out by Jon E. Fox (2017, 2018): how can we show that this banal, largely unnoticed reminding actually works if its essential characteristic is that it takes place without us being aware of it?⁶

Let us therefore descend (at last) to the dirty ground of everyday life, that elusive concept with which practically all major theorists of society and culture have attempted to grapple and which has in recent years witnessed a burgeoning interest within the social sciences and humanities. Everyday reality defines “our way of life” – something that, with Raymond Williams (2005), we could call the “structure of feeling,” a specific experience of life at a given time and place that is shared by a generation, a subculture, a nation, etc., which is most clearly articulated in cultural forms and conventions, and lies at the limit of semantic accessibility.⁷ The structure of feeling defines a shared vision of the world, an exchange of reference points that enable a basis for everyday actions and understandings. These common, similar, largely unreflective customs, assumptions, and routines structure and normalize everyday reality and support understandings of “how things are,” “how we do certain things,” and, last but not least, “how we speak about certain things.”

Daniel Miller, who advocates the idea that things make us as much as we make them, emphasizes the significance of the everydayness of material culture, saying that things are most powerful and effective when they are silent and unnoticed. The less we are aware of things, the more powerful they can be by setting the scene and ensuring normative behavior, without being open to challenge. So, things are important not because they are so visible, but because they are so invisible. As Miller (2010, 50) puts it, things “work by being invisible and unremarked upon, a state they usually achieve by being familiar and taken for granted.” Things appear as the very medium through which we know and make ourselves. They do not simply reflect preexisting ideas, values, and social distinctions, but they recreate, transform, and reassemble the human or social world. By using, making, consuming, exchanging, living, and interacting with things, human beings place themselves in a constant process of being and becoming. This “humility of things” bears important consequences for our behavior and identity. Such an idea “implies that much of what makes us what we are exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us” (Miller 2010, 50; cf. Tilley 2006, 60–61; Miller 1987). Humble things of the quotidian – woven immanently into daily living, saturated with the sensibilities of a particular time to the point of embodying them, a locus of objectification – are meaningful for the reproduction of nations and national identities. Orvar Löfgren (1996, 34) has coined the term “the microphysics of learning and belonging” for such elusive processes – how trivialities and everyday routines create a feeling of national belonging. In comparison with banal nationalism, which trickles down from “structural nationalism,” this everyday nationalism “operates as a domain in its own right, governed

by the mundane rhythms and contingencies of everyday life” (Fox and Ginderachter 2018, 547; cf. Antonisch 2016). Thus, as well as in conscious manifestations and affirmative actions, national identity appears and is reproduced in everyday, banal, imperceptible interactions, customs, practices, and behaviors.

Food and drink, through repeated and everyday actions such as preparation and consumption, are important elements of this daily, largely unnoticed reproduction of nations and nationalisms. These structures or patterns of normalization tell us what, how, when, and where we eat and drink. At the same time, these banal, everyday, largely unconscious patterns also define the nation through a specific culture of food and drink (for more on this, see Edensor 2001 and, specifically with regard to food, Ichijo and Ranta 2016). In the words of Pierre Bourdieu (1998), food and drink significantly serve to substantiate the national *habitus* – the system of dispositions that organize and unconsciously shape the roles, categories, perceptions, identities, and differentiations associated with nationality.

The difficulty with studying the everyday and its role in the reproduction of national identity, however, is that it is too obvious; so, an understanding of it most often remains at the level of theory instead of being based on the analysis of actual practices or processes. This is especially the case for the exploration of everyday life in the past, where we cannot rely on direct participation and typically depend on very scarce sources instead. The question that Fox puts to banal nationalism can also be asked, at least to some extent, of everyday nationalism: How do we actually know that this everydayness (of slivovitz) is important for the reproduction of nationalism and national identities, if it largely operates without us being aware of it?

And yet, this unreflective everyday reality can also be challenged, pricked, shaken, placed in situations that upset the everyday routine and disrupt the flow of everyday life. Harold Garfinkel argued in his influential study (1967) that the best way of exploring the significance of these rooted taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life is by breaching them. These unreflective feelings of belonging register when the everyday routines and practices are violated or brought into juxtaposition with alternatives, when the national order of things is shaken, when people are confronted with a relatively novel set of “national circumstances” (cf. Foster 1999, 271; Edensor 2002; Skey 2011; Fox 2017; Fox and Ginderachter 2018; Ginderachter 2018; studies applying Garfinkel’s insight: Blokland 2003; Wise 2010; Skey 2018). This point is nicely illustrated by Marcel Mauss in his “classic” *Techniques of the Body* (1973 [1934]) where he writes about how French soldiers in the First World War struggled to use British spades when digging trenches (and vice versa). We can also add Louis Althusser’s (1971) idea of interpellation to the existing discussion of imperceptible or cold nationalism: since and when we get used to limp flags as an integral, indispensable part of “our environment,” we can easily recognize ourselves among the waving flags when nationalism tugs at our shirt. Because of the everyday limp flags, a waving flag therefore never misses its target, never misdirects its point of view. Below, I shall present some examples that demonstrate how this unreflective national identity, based on the everyday, becomes at least partially the subject of reflection, and about how things, events, situations that disturb the everyday routine provoke at least a partial awareness that certain things – in our case, slivovitz – are important, an omnipresent part of our everyday reality and, consequently, of our national identity.

Most often, this everyday reality is privy to at least some partial reflection of the many different contacts between Yugoslavs (their state and their nation) and foreigners (foreign states and citizens), as can be seen from this report on an international Scout camp entitled “English lords and our *čevapčići*”:

Darlington in England is this year the scene of a vast Scout camp. Thousands of Scouts representing 42 nations have gathered with their colourful tents. Understandably, this giant camp in the home of the Scouting movement has become a major attraction for the English. Among those present at the camp are Scouts from Yugoslavia, who have made many new friends here. They even organised their own Yugoslav evening, which was attended by

numerous dignitaries, including Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden and a whole series of lords. The menu consisted entirely of specialities from Yugoslavia: *čevapčići*, *ražnjići* and *slivovitz*. All the distinguished guests were pleasantly surprised and satisfied, all the more so because the English love meat cooked on the spit, which they like to accompany with strong spirits... Evidently the frank cheerfulness of the Slavs overcame their traditional English reserve. (*Jutro* 1939)

National identity is, in fact, always defined by differentiating one's own nation from other nations. It is always, as Orvar Löfgren (1989) puts it, a "project of differentiation" (11). Or as Michael Billig (1995) puts it, "there is no 'us' without 'them'" (78). Nationalism, then, is not only an ideology of the first person plural, which talks about who we are – it is also an ideology of the third person, which talks about others. Nationalism inevitably includes a mixture of the particular and the universal: if "our" nation is conceived in all its specificities, it must also be conceived as a nation among other nations. Awareness of national identity presupposes an international context, which must likewise always be conceived in terms of nations and national communities (83). A nation is always a nation in a world of nations (62). And nationalism is much more than just a feeling of identity; it is more than merely an interpretation or a theory – it is also a *way of living* within the world of nations and nation states (65). *Slivovitz* undoubtedly helped consolidate this special way of living within the world of nations and nation states, as shown for example by the following "Observations from the Leipzig Trade Fair":

"How good life must be in Yugoslavia, where they can make such good things," people sighed as they gazed at the giant wheels of Bohinj cheese, the crates of eggs, plums and raw butter, the sacks of good white flour, the various cereals, beans, and so on. Particular interest was shown in the bottles containing genuine *slivovka*, *brinovec* and various dessert and table wines. There were plenty of serious bidders for all kinds of drinks! (*Slovenec* 1937)

If we return for a moment to the possessive adjective "our" – perhaps the principal adjective of banal nationalism – it is worth pointing out that it appears most frequently in cases when Yugoslavs find themselves abroad and come into contact with the everyday things of a foreign country, a circumstance that provokes (national) comparisons. On a wander through the "cafés of Paris," *slivovitz* thus finds its way into the writings of the anonymous wanderer or reporter: "These Parisians sip with pleasure their aperitif mixed with water, which is as good in the smallest bars as it is in the finest cafés – despite costing half the price. The once notorious absinthe has almost entirely disappeared from the bills of these establishments, but where it is still served, it is a relatively innocent drink that is far outstripped by our own *slivovitz*" (*Jutro* 1939). Or there is the "oceangoing sea captain," whose published reminiscences of his voyages around the world include an "evening among the geishas" at which *slivovitz* makes an appearance: "After being shown the house, we sat down in a salon furnished in the European manner. They served us tea, cakes, pastries, liqueurs and also a Japanese wine called *sake*, which is made from rice and is quite similar to our *slivovitz*" (*Jutro* 1937). *Slivovitz*, a generally unremarkable drink "at home," is transformed into a nationally distinctive beverage when people travel abroad and are confronted with the foreign.

Discourses about food are a significant part of banal nationalism: they "discursively construct" and reproduce the nation, highlighting national differences and significances (Ichijo and Ranta 2016). However, as stressed by Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008, 540), "the nation is not something ordinary people talk about; rather, it's something they talk with." Thus, the nation is not usually the subject of talk, but rather "an unselfconscious disposition about the national order of things that intermittently informs talk." This "talking the nation" is a part of "everyday nationhood"⁸ – the term emphasizing human agency and reflexivity or the idea that people are not just passive consumers of national meanings, but are simultaneously their contingent producers (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; cf. Skey 2011)⁹ and therefore contrasted with Billig's top-down,

state-centric banal nationalism (Knott 2015; Antonsich 2016; Skey and Antonsich 2017; Duchesne 2018; Hearn and Antonsich 2018).

Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) outlined “four modalities” of everyday nationhood – the reproduction of nationhood in everyday life and by ordinary people: “talking the nation,” “choosing the nation,” “performing the nation,” and “consuming the nation.”¹⁰ If in the articles presented up to now we have mainly considered the discursive or linguistic practices and representations of newspaper writers (who were mostly anonymous and hard to identify and categorize, although from their writings they would appear to be quite a diverse category, rather than a homogeneous one), we will now look at articles that talk about how ordinary people also reproduce nationhood in everyday life, not just through linguistic practices and representations.

Slivovitz, then, not only helped the process of “talking the nation” (as it was not merely part of the discursive or linguistic practices and representations that reproduced nationalism), but, as we can read in numerous articles of different kinds, and even taste on a flight from Belgrade to Berlin, it also aided the process of “consuming the nation”: “Below us are vast tracts of beautiful forest. Many kilometres of broad road separate one village from the next. Happy to have already carried us over the German border, the steward serves slivovitz, the only Yugoslav product aboard, for everything else we have eaten and drunk was brought by air from Berlin” (*Jutro* 1934).

Many scholars have stressed that ordinary people are not just passive consumers of the nation but can be also producers through acts of consumption (Miller 1997; Edensor 2002; Foster 1999, 2002; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). Consuming the nation relates not just to symbolically charged or vital national products and their use in explicit nationalist actions (e.g., glorifying or boycotting special “national products”). Consuming some products provides a “quotidian experience of sameness” (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 550) or, in Anderson’s (2006, 145) words, an “experience of simultaneity” – a loose self-awareness of shared dispositions that materialize through consumption, as we can read in this waggish New Year’s toast in 1940:

Our hale nation has a sense for solemn moments, and therefore cannot miss such a fine opportunity to drink a few toasts to the old year and welcome the new one, even more auspicious in that it is a leap year. We are never at a loss for things to drink to. We can drink, for example, to the plum harvest, and express the hope that it will be as good in the coming year and that this year, too, will be blessed with slivovitz. May the new year, then, bring as much slivovitz and as little potato as possible. May there be no reduction in the price of bread, lest we eat too much of it, but no increase in the cost of the “divine drop,” so that we can celebrate all the easier on all festive occasions, just like this year and many years before it. (*Slovenski narod* 1940b)

Consumption involves a range of behaviors through which the nation is commodified and national identities are defined. By choosing¹¹ to eat, cook, drink, offer, or, in the example that follows, give, people engage with their national identity and project who they are (cf. Ichijo and Ranta 2016):

Buers expressed his thanks in a fine, lyrical speech, in which he emphasised above all that he was overwhelmed by the beauty of our land and moved by the cordiality with which he had been received in our country. Then Dr Žižek [the manager of the Foreign Travel Association in Ljubljana] presented Buers and Löwisch, the manager of the travel office of the Leipzig Trade Fair, with a lamp each as a souvenir – a lamp containing a remedy for inner ailments: slivovitz. These lamps were to light them on their long journey home. (*Slovenec* 1939)

The choices people make regarding what to offer or give as gifts (usually to foreigners) are related to how they “perform the nation.” What to give as a gift to foreigners is a question that has not yet found a visible place within the study of nations and nationalism. Slivovitz as a gift to strangers can also be found in other articles. As stated by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008, 546): “National bonds don’t

simply become transparent through their ritual performance; they are constituted through the collective act of performance.” But nationhood is not only performed through symbolically highly charged, explicit national rituals (national holidays, commemorations etc.), as Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008, 546) stress, but also through unofficial rituals and events (private, family celebrations, etc.) that are not directly connected to the national. Let us conclude, however, with slivovitz at the royal court. This time it did not find its way into the hands of foreigners; this time it touched the very pinnacle of the state, in an anticipation of its more “official” and “institutional” role in the later period of socialist Yugoslavia and in a context that speaks most directly about “bottom-up” nationalism and slivovitz in interwar Yugoslavia:

Farmer Mate Božić of Srem was received at the royal court in recent days. Božić is well known as a tireless and dedicated worker for national unity. In an audience that lasted more than an hour, King Alexander expressed great interest in the conditions and situation of the rural population in Srem. Božić wished His Majesty the best of luck in his marriage and presented him with 20 litres of old slivovitz. As Božić took his leave, the King promised that he would visit “Uncle” Mate at his home in Srem when the occasion presented itself. (*Jutro* 1922)

These examples indicate the ways in which ordinary (or “not so ordinary”) people are actively involved in reproducing national ways of being and doing (cf. Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Thompson 2011; Skey 2011). More than in consciously activated or intentional actions, however, the “everyday nationalism of slivovitz” operated subliminally, as an unnoticed “national background” in daily life. As Karl Marx (1909, 83) puts it, “They are not aware of it, but they do it.”

These cases also open up the question of the singularity/plurality of the nation and challenge the image of the nation that is blind to the ethnic, cultural, social, and other diversity of the people who populate it. The nation is also “a product of everyday contestation and disagreement, an extremely dynamic and ambiguous process made of multiple, conflicting ordinary voices. Not listening to this polyphonic production would be to treat the nation as something out of history, something which does not adjust to the changing of people and times” (Hearn and Antonisch 2018, 601).

Last Round

Based on analysis of texts containing the word *slivovka* (slivovitz) in the three principal Slovene daily newspapers and three smaller Slovene pro-Yugoslav newspapers, we can conclude that slivovitz does not (yet) have a clear role as signifier of the Yugoslav state, the Yugoslav nation, and other elements connected with Yugoslavism. Unlike in the socialist period, slivovitz did not yet act as a “symbolic representative of the country’s greatness and glory.” It was, however, on its way to become part of the “structure of national feeling” – the specific experience of life at a given time and place that was common to the Yugoslav nation. These common, similar, largely unreflective customs, practices, and assumptions, of which slivovitz was a part, structured and normalized everyday reality and supported understandings of “how things are,” “how we do certain things,” “how we speak about certain things,” and so on. Slivovitz, frequently included in repetitive and everyday habits, practices, and assumptions, was thus an important component of this everyday, largely unnoticed reproduction of the Yugoslav nation. These structures or patterns of normalization told Yugoslavs what, how, when, and where we drink. At the same time, these banal, everyday, largely unconscious patterns also defined the Yugoslav nation through a specific culture of food and drink. National consciousness is thus reproduced, not only by conscious manifestations, but also by everyday, banal, largely unreflective interactions, customs, practices, and behaviors.

To put it in terms of material culture: besides the cognitive relation to things, there is also the unreflective, habitual, embodied relation to things. Besides items that carry more or less strong

symbolic values and meaning for national communities, there are also many mundane, everyday, silent things that have a role in the reproduction of nations and nationalities. The complex specificities of the ways in which things are used, reused, made, owned, shared, domesticated, talked about, understood, utilized, discarded, represented, etc., can become important in reproducing the “structure of national feeling” or even distinctive markers and signifiers of national identities. Slivovitz, saturated with the sensibilities of a particular time and place to the point of embodying them, silently becomes the object reproducing the “structure of national feeling” and a marker of national identity.

The difficulty with studying the everyday is that it is too obvious, so understanding it most often remains at the level of theory instead of being based on the analysis of actual practices or processes. The article therefore presents examples that talk about how this unreflective national identity, based on the everyday, becomes at least partially the subject of reflection, and about how things and events that disturb the everyday routine provoke at least a partial awareness that certain things – in our case, slivovitz – are important, an omnipresent part of our everyday reality and, consequently, of our national identity.

As we have demonstrated in the article, this reproduction of nationhood in everyday life is not only the result of discursive or linguistic practices, but also of daily consumption and habits, choices, ritual performances, and other practices. When ordinary people drank slivovitz – and also when talking, writing, thinking, or joking about it or when choosing or performing it – they were not just passive consumers of national meanings; they were simultaneously their contingent producers, actively involved in reproducing national ways of being and doing. More than in consciously activated or intentional actions, however, this “everyday nationalism of slivovitz” operated subliminally, as an unnoticed “national background” in daily life.

Nationalism, as this article insists, is not only the product of state institutions and policies, but is also reflected and shaped outside clear and dominant institutional frameworks at the level of everyday decisions, representations, consumption, and other practices. Nationalism is therefore embedded and reproduced in numerous, complex ways in all manner of everyday situations and contexts. As we have shown in the article, slivovitz was undoubtedly part of this nationalized everydayness at the time of the first Yugoslavia. Yet its role or power in shaping the nation needs to be understood more broadly. Slivovitz has – through daily linguistic practices, consumption, and habits, choices, ritual performances, and other practices – enabled human agency and reflexivity. In other words, it has actively participated in the everyday, largely un-reflected formation of the nation. The analysis of slivovitz in interwar Yugoslavia, despite being an individual and unique case, also opens up some broader insights into the much-overlooked debate on the role of material culture in the construction and reproduction of nations and nationalisms.

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Notes

- 1 The official name of the state was changed by King Alexander I on October 3, 1929. The term “Yugoslavia” (meaning “Land of the South Slavs”) was its colloquial name and will be used in this article.
- 2 Some proponents of the ethnic definition of nation, such as Walker Connor (1994), believe that the concepts of nation and nationalism have to be strictly separated from the concepts of state and patriotism. Thus, we could speak of Yugoslav patriotism (i.e., loyalty to the state and its

institutions) in parallel with Serbian, Croatian, Slovene, etc. “ethnonationalism.” I am not sure that such a strict separation will hold up, no matter how useful it is for analytical purposes. Although Yugoslav nationalism is hard to compare, in terms of its emotional charge, with, for example, British (cf. Kearney 1989), French, or Swiss nationalism (which also relate to “multi-ethnic (formed) nations”), in practice, Serbs, Croats, and others were often unable to separate their own ethnonationalism from Yugoslav patriotism, which they also saw as their own. When the Yugoslav national football team took to the pitch, when people hung out the national flag and when Yugoslavs treated foreigners to a glass of something “typically Yugoslavian” (e.g., slivovitz), what was at play was not just loyalty to the state (patriotism) but also a consciousness or a feeling of being a part of a political community (nationalism). In other words, the identity effects of the state are, like the identity effects of the nation, a relevant phenomenon and are frequently interwoven and interdependent with them. However, identification with the nation does not promise enthusiasm toward the nation and is not an indicator of nationalism, nor of nationalist sentiment (cf. Fenton 2007; McCrone and Bechhofer 2015). It should also be added that already in the interwar Yugoslavia we witnessed not only state-building but also nation-building – different ideological mechanisms that helped lay the foundation for the formation of a Yugoslav nation (Wachtel 1998).

- 3 Tim Edensor also devotes a brief chapter to material culture in his influential book (2002). Many scholars researching banal nationalism or everyday nationalism have focused on a particular object or group of objects, for example, cars (Edensor 2004), gardens (Tilley 2008), banknotes (Penrose 2011), postage stamps (Hammett 2012), etc. It would, however, be hard to say that they devote particular interest to material culture or that they consider material culture alone. We could say something similar about the recent growth in interest in the study of food among scholars of nations and nationalism (for a review, see Ichijo and Ranta 2016), who thus in most cases do not tackle this issue from the broader perspective of material culture. The researcher who has shown the greatest interest in this topic is the anthropologist Robert Foster (1998, 2001), although he has largely focused on consumption.
- 4 The Axis powers occupied and partitioned the country in April 1941. The newspapers in question continued to be published: *Slovenski narod* until 1943 and *Slovenec* and *Jutro* until 1945.
- 5 Numerous Serbian newspapers have also been digitized but do not allow rapid searches for specific words.
- 6 Several critics have pointed to the assumption that mass media are a mirror of ordinary people’s attitudes as one of the major problems of Billig’s analysis (Wertsch 1997, 469; Van Ginderrachter 2018, 3).
- 7 For Williams, the “structure of feeling” is a social experience in development – not yet perceived and recognized as social – and understood as personal.
- 8 Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) use the phrase “everyday nationalhood” in their article. Today, the more established and broader term is “everyday nationalism,” which is also used in this article, with the exception of the reference to the authors’ article.
- 9 Siniša Malešević (2013, 130) argues that approaches focusing on human agency often overlook the preexisting institutional restrictions, such as organizations and ideologies, which shape and constrain “social action.”
- 10 Fox and Miller-Idriss’s (2008) arguably overly schematic approach (people do not only speak, consume, choose and perform the nation, as the authors simplify, but also think, ignore, enact, reject, manipulate, etc.) may obscure one of the most important contributions of everyday nationalism – the messiness, inconsistencies, and contradictions of nationalism in everyday life (Skey 2011; Knott 2015, 8).
- 11 Fox and Miller-Idriss’s definition of “choosing the nation” narrows it to the mainly institutional choices that people make.

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