



CONSTRUCTS OF SLOVENIANNNESS IN SLOVENIAN PARTISAN FILMS

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The article addresses the question, whether there could be identified a consistent pattern of representations of Slovenianness in Slovenian partisan films, the film genre about communist-led guerrilla fighters (so-called 'partisans'), and their struggle against the German and Italian occupying forces during WW II. The analysis of all feature films made in this genre shows that the official communist discourse on Slovenian national identity, at least as revealed in the partisan films, was in Slovenia in many respects not really along the orthodox Marxist lines of understanding national identity as an essentially disposable bourgeois ideological construct, since it actively encouraged it, to a large extent even in terms of the established, conservative construct of Slovenianness as something that in its essence is likened to a simple, rustic life in the midst of unspoiled nature. In the films made after the late 1960s, however, the pattern changes and the Slovenian partisan films with their new, distinctive urban character turn into a medium of restructuring of national identity.

Key words: representation, constructivism, national identity, Slovene partisan film, Slovenianness



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INTRODUCTION

Slovenian partisan film is a term which denotes films glorifying Slovenian communist-led guerrilla fighters (so-called 'partisans') and their struggle against the German and Italian occupying forces during WW II. These films were made during

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the decades of communist rule in post-war Yugoslavia and comprised an important part of the official ideological propaganda. However, after the fall of communism in 1989 and Slovenia's secession from former Yugoslavia two years later partisan films fell into complete neglect. This is regrettable since they not only represent an important (and not necessarily unattractive) part of Slovenian film history, but also allow unique insights into the workings and complexities of the official ideology during the country's decades of communist rule (1945–1989). Namely, while in accordance with the Marxist agenda the official ideology stressed the importance of social equality (mainly only in class terms), it never managed to stand completely outside of various locally-specific social, cultural and historical frameworks. In fact, in some instances it reproduced them to some extent, even if they were in essence against what communism should stand for. Nationalism is a good case in point: while Marx regarded nationalism as an essentially bourgeois ideology preventing workers coming to understand the true exploitative nature of capitalism, various communist elites in former socialist Yugoslavia did not always refrain from it. There are complex reasons for this but in the most general terms the fact was that former Yugoslavia comprised so many nationalities (Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Muslims from Bosnia, to name just the most important ones) with such conflicting histories and interests that, even in the context of the official ideology of brotherhood and unity between the Yugoslav nations, practically all of them felt under some kind of threat from the others. Clearly, this was not a productive context for transcending the deep-rooted nationalist sentiments.

In this sense, the communist elite in Slovenia was also covertly nationalistic, at least to some extent. While it is acknowledged in Slovenia that this contributed significantly to the country's secession from former Yugoslavia in 1991, there is a notable lack of research regarding the question of how exactly this essentially covert nationalism was reflected in – if at all – and presented in popular forms? In films, for example, which were then regarded by communist party officials as one of the most important vehicles for promoting communist ideals (Štefančič, 2005, 241–242). I argue elsewhere (Stanković, 2005) that Slovenian partisan films, although not really in accordance with communist ideals, in many respects also promoted Slovenian nationalism, primarily in the sense that the element of social revolution – one of the key reasons for the communist uprising in 1941 and an obvious communist ideal – is strongly downplayed in these films and that the partisan struggle is almost uniformly legitimised in national terms: the partisans were presented as good because they were fighting

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for *national* liberation, not for social revolution. The communist-led guerrilla struggle needed legitimisation because the post-war communist dictatorship was a direct descendant of the victorious partisan movement, whose actions were not as 'clean' as it might have seemed: many political groups in Slovenia during WW II strongly opposed the communist-led uprising, and their military forces, organised as a reaction to it, were brutally massacred by the partisans after the war ended. It is true that these troops have been collaborating with the occupiers,¹ but the systematic killing of thousands of them after the war had ended was an unnecessary act of unprovoked brutality. In this sense, the struggle for national liberation, as communists called their campaign after the war, was in many respects really an extremely bloody civil war and thus obviously needed strong ideological legitimisation. As mentioned, this was primarily articulated in partisan films in nationalist terms and not, as one might expect of communist ideological texts, in terms of social justice.

Yet the question remaining unaddressed here is what kind of Slovenianness was actually constructed and promoted in these films? Namely, the Slovenian national identity was, due to historical circumstances, at the time relatively weak and unarticulated. What is today the independent state of Slovenia was, before its secession in 1991, part of former Yugoslavia, an extremely diverse amalgam of nations, religions and cultures. In addition, before 1918 when Yugoslavia was established, it was for centuries part of the Austrian empire with something like a separate Slovenian national identity only emerging in the latter half of the 19th century. Not only was the Slovenian national identity weak in this context, it was also a conservative one defined primarily in terms of nature, peasantry and to some degree Catholicism. Slovenian partisan films did promote a Slovenian national identity, in some respects perhaps even a Slovenian nationalism but one can assume that as part of the official communist propaganda they could not draw on this traditional, quite conservative construct of Slovenianness. When negotiating between communism and nationalism, they tried to present a vision of a new, socialist Slovenianness. The kind of Slovenianness that was constructed in this context is the question this article seeks to address. To begin with, let us first examine the genre a little more thoroughly.

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Slovenian partisan films were part of the larger film production of former socialist Yugoslavia: in other former federal republics, perhaps even more than in Slovenia, many partisan films were also made. For the above reasons of ideological pro-

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paganda, the state invested hugely in the genre² which resulted not only in big quantities of these films but also in their more than just occasional formal quality and their reasonable popularity with audiences. After all, there were many stories to be told: during WW II in Yugoslavia the strongest guerrilla movement in Nazi-occupied Europe emerged. The partisans involved fought many spectacular battles and caused many serious problems for the occupying forces and managed to liberate the country with only the marginal help of the Soviet Red Army. This allowed a certain autonomy from the Soviet Union in the post-war period of the new, socialist Yugoslavia (compared with other Eastern bloc countries), which quickly led to the famous row in 1948 between Stalin and Tito, the charismatic Yugoslav communist leader, and subsequent introduction of an independent, definitively less autocratic and oppressive form of Yugoslav socialism.

Accordingly, is it possible to analyse the genre of Slovenian partisan film as a separate unit irrespective of the wider context of the genre of Yugoslav partisan film, or perhaps given that partisan films were also being made in the Soviet Union, North Korea and Vietnam, of the partisan film genre in the most general sense? While it is obvious that any analysis should take into account the fact that Slovenian partisan films form part of this wider tradition, it should be noted that the films made in Slovenia during the socialist period could be regarded as a separate unit since they were made in Slovenia (at the time the Socialist Republic of Slovenia) by Slovenian studios with their own set of recognisable stylistic peculiarities which at least partly set them apart from the other film traditions in the genre. Let us take a quick look at these peculiarities, apart from the obvious one that they address the relatively peculiar Slovenian historical situation during WW II compared with other former Yugoslav socialist republics.

The first one is an *almost exclusive focus on the individual* in the Slovenian partisan film, encompassing their struggle against their fears, existential dilemmas about the war and the act of killing itself, on the way they are tormented when the situation requires them to take sides in the conflict etc. While the pattern is certainly complex, one can argue that in the partisan films stemming from other former Yugoslav republics the hero is definitely not a mere individual (it is instead 'the bare-handed people' – a collective), and if there ever is an individual hero they are usually a quite literal metaphor for the whole collective and, in any case, they have no problems supporting and joining the partisans. Some notable exceptions are the rather personalised Serbian *Crni Val* (Black Wave) films and the Slovenian *Na svoji zemlji* [On Our Own Land] (France Štiglic, 1948), which is clearly a Soviet-style story a-

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about an impoverished collective from a remote valley (a metaphor for Slovenia?) stubbornly resisting the occupiers. *Na svoji zemlji* is actually the first ever Slovenian feature film and was shot before the row occurred between Stalin and Tito so it clearly displays a relatively clumsy story and lots of Soviet influence. However, after this one in Slovenian partisan films the individual immediately becomes the hero (compare: Munitić, 1974, 69; Furlan, 1994, 14), and quite a peculiar one, too: in many instances he is not very brave as was usually the case with the heroes in the other partisan film traditions, and above all, he does not represent the collective. He usually stands for himself, and if he is to be understood as a symbol of anything, it could be argued that his uncertainties more than anything else reflect the filmmakers' increasingly pronounced doubts about the over-simplified interpretations of history that they had to make (more on that: Stankovič, 2005, 55–60).

Not unrelated to this is the second feature of Slovenian partisan films: their *topics*. While in the other former Yugoslav republics partisan films covered many different topics and issues, they also consistently covered all the major battles (Kozara, Neretva, Sutjeska, Drvar etc.) fought by the partisans during WW II. Yet Slovenian films with only one exception (again *Na svoji zemlji*, which depicts the partisan offensive on German communications in Baška grapa in 1944) leave this option out in favour of the abovementioned subjective-existential focus. There were many spectacular occasions during the war in Slovenia which could no doubt make great material for stunning epics, however, for some reason this avenue was not taken. This might have something to do with the Slovenian tradition of individualism, but it is difficult to be sure. What in any case is clear is that screenwriters, directors, producers etc. definitely, and quite unusually for the genre, preferred the dilemmas and anguishes of simple, small people in small, historically insignificant, yet subjectively definitely most dramatic situations.

Another distinctive feature of the Slovenian partisan film is its recognisable *literary* or *theatrical note*. This is actually not only typical of the Slovenian partisan film, it is more like a quite consistent feature of Slovenian film in general (though things have recently been changing), but it still contributes to the recognisable quality of Slovenian partisan films compared to other national traditions of the genre. The quality itself probably derives from the fact that Slovenian culture emerged in the 19th century precisely from the tradition of the written and spoken word, which led to the elevated status of literature and theatre in Slovenian public life and their subsequent influence on the other arts, perhaps on film even the most. This theatrical or literary dimension of Slovenian films is re-

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cognisable in the quite theatrical style of how the performers act, the levels of attention given to use of the "proper" Slovenian language in dialogues (making them quite unnatural), the relatively static film language and frequent adaptations of Slovenian literary classics (Furlan, 1994, 10). In the context of this serious, literary and theatrical pedigree of Slovenian films, Slovenian partisan films consistently display a dimension of artistic inclination which are otherwise rare in the genre in former Yugoslavia. One can therefore argue that Slovenian partisan films were caught up within the parameters of different demands, functions and expectations: the directors wanted them to be serious works of art, the party officials at the ministry of culture which produced them expected them to be in line with the official ideology, while the people wanted them to be entertaining and – as they grew increasingly disillusioned with socialism in the 1970s and 1980s – critical of the official interpretation of WW II (compare: Furlan, 1994, 10). How the films negotiated these often conflicting demands is difficult to say since some films were really successful, sometimes even with all three dimensions at the same time, while others were not. What really matters, however, is that deriving from the established literary and theatrical traditions in Slovenia there was a recognisable artistic dimension in partisan films, something quite uncommon in the partisan films from other republics of former Yugoslavia.³ The artistry of Slovenian directors was of course sometimes artificial and unconvincing, but there was obviously an expectation that these films should involve more than just official propaganda and/or popular entertainment.

According to these peculiarities the object of analysis will be the Slovenian partisan film or, more specifically, all feature films produced in Slovenia which in at least one substantial sense depict WW II in Slovenia. This latter qualification is important since some films do not really focus on the partisan struggle for national liberation and social revolution yet still do touch or reflect on it in more than just a marginal way (*Ti-stega lepega dne* [One Fine Day] (France Štiglic, 1962), *Christophoros* [Christophoros] (Andrej Mlakar, 1985), and *Dediščina* [Inheritance] (Matjaž Klopčič, 1984) for example). They are hence not truly partisan films in the strict sense. However, given there are not so many Slovenian strictly partisan films (Slovenia is a small country with less than 2 million inhabitants – its film production is thus small) and that I am interested in as many nuances in the regime of representations, I will also include these films in the sample. Therefore the films (with their English translations, directors and respective years of production – in the following pages I omit these in order to avoid too much repetition) included in the analysis are:

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Na svoji zemlji [On Our Own Land] (France Štiglic, 1948);
Trst [Trieste] (France Štiglic, 1951);
Trenutki odločitve [Moment of Decision] (František Čap, 1955);
Dolina miru [Valley of Peace] (France Štiglic, 1956);
Kala [Kala] (Andrej Hieng and Krešo Golik, 1958);
Dobri stari pianino [Good Old Pianino] (France Kosmač, 1959);
Akcija [Action] (Jane Kavčič, 1960);
X 25 javlja [X 25 Reports] (František Čap, 1960);
Balada o trobenti in oblaku [Ballad about a Trumpet and a Cloud] (France Štiglic, 1961);
Tislega lepega dne [One Fine Day] (France Štiglic, 1962);
Ne joči, Peter [Don't Cry, Peter] (France Štiglic, 1964);
Nevidni bataljon [Invisible Battalion] (Jane Kavčič, 1967);
Peta zaseda [The Fifth Ambush] (France Kosmač, 1968);
Sedmina [Funeral Fest] (Matjaž Klopčič, 1969);
Onkraj [Beyond] (Jože Gale, 1970);
Begunec [The Fugitive] (Jane Kavčič, 1973);
Čudoviti prah [Beautiful Dust] (Milan Ljubić, 1975);
Med strahom in dolžnostjo [Between Duty and Fear] (Vojko Duletič, 1975);
Draga moja Iza [My Dear Iza] (Vojko Duletič, 1979);
Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni [See You in the Next War] (Živojin Pavlović, 1980);
Dediščina [Inheritance] (Matjaž Klopčič, 1984);
Ljubezen [Love] (Rajko Ranfl, 1984);
Christophoros [Christophoros] (Andrej Mlakar, 1985);
Doktor [Doctor] (Vojko Duletič, 1985);
Čas brez pravljic [Times of No Fairytales] (Boštjan Hladnik, 1986);
Živela svoboda [Long Live Liberty] (Rajko Ranfl, 1987).

In these films I will try to identify the construction of Slovenian national identity. Before doing that however, I make one last comment: in the analysis I completely leave aside questions about the meaning of partisan resistance during WW II. This issue has been plaguing Slovenian public life today probably just as much as it did during the war itself,⁴ but it has nothing to do with the focus of the present analysis: the point of interest are films about a certain era in Slovenian history and not the era as such.

REPRESENTATIONS OF SLOVENIANNES

A detailed analysis of Slovenian partisan feature films shows there is actually something like a consistent regime of representations of Slovenianness in these films. This can be identified at two basic levels: on the first one, there is a consistent portrayal of heroes in these films and through them of a national identity in general (since the heroes, as the best part of the nation, obviously represent its 'essence') in terms of their pervasive 'warmness', while on the second – more com-

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plicated – binary oppositions are articulated in these films (nature/civilisation and rural/urban) where up to the second half of the 1960s Slovenianness is related to the first terms in these oppositions and in the subsequent years to the second one. Let us begin with the first level.

Since Slovenian partisan films are (obviously) films about partisans and since the partisans, as the ultimate 'good guys (and girls)', stand in these films for the whole idea of communist revolution including the new national identity the revolution was supposed to bring about,⁵ it is important to note that in Slovenian partisan films the partisans are represented not only as the good side of the conflict, namely only in these most general and obvious terms, but are more precisely portrayed in terms of something we may call their essential *warmness*. As a rule they are caring, kind, compassionate, unselfish, witty, simple and good-natured. Together with their German counterparts (for ideological reasons the element of civil war was downplayed so in Slovenian partisan films the principal enemy of the partisans is the German army), who are invariably portrayed in a cold way, they form a very clear binary opposition (warm versus cold), which makes them a fine example of mythological texts (Levi-Strauss argued that myths essentially translate traumatic paradoxes of human existence to simple and manageable binary oppositions (compare: Wright, 1994, 117–121)).

However, the importance of this all-pervasive warmness of the partisans in the context of the present research lies in the fact that it signals the symbolic imagery with which the new Slovenianness was constructed in the Slovenian partisan film. What emerges in this respect is that this new Slovenianness, as articulated in the partisan films through the images of warm, caring and good-natured heroes, was in reality nothing new, at least on this level. Namely, Slovenian national identity – just as many other identities of Slavic peoples across the Middle and East Europe – emerged in the second half of the 19th century precisely in these terms of warmness obviously because it was articulated against the dominant German national identity which was then – and probably still is – stereotypically understood in terms of signifiers designating cold efficiency. This is in point of fact a textbook example of the constructed nature of social identities showing these are not natural essences but are instead social constructs emerging only through processes of differentiation (compare: Woodward, 1997): as Slovenians grew more dissatisfied with life in former socialist Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and 1970s Slovenian nationalism re-appeared with great force, however, since this time Slovenians were not trying to differentiate themselves from Germans but from other former Yugoslav

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nations, they started to construct Slovenianness precisely in the terms of the markers they had in the late 19th century articulated themselves against (traditional markers of German national identity): as something characterised by cold efficiency, dependability, punctuality, orderliness, cleanness etc. Other former Yugoslav nations were in the Slovenian popular discourse of this time correspondingly constructed as lazy, irresponsible and dirty (yet, at the same time, as warm, good-natured and witty), which is precisely the set of signifiers that not so many decades before the Slovenians thought had described themselves. What this example reveals, in short, is that national identities are not eternal essences but social constructs dependent, just as de Saussure's linguistic signs, on their positions within networks of binary differences. The fact that Slovenian national identity did not change with the social revolution the partisans brought about in 1945, but only some three decades later when Slovenians began to understand them against the other former Yugoslav nations proves, in a very clear structuralist manner, that, at least in this case, it is the relation towards the Other a nation is defining itself against which defines its self-perception and not real historical changes, let alone certain trans-historic essences.

What might be some examples of warm and caring partisan heroes? It would definitely take too much space here to list them all so let us briefly mention the most obvious ones: Sova, Drejc, Tidlica and Daddy Orel in *Na svoji zemlji*, Vida and Borut in *Trst*, Dr. Koren in *Trenutki odločitve*, Anuška in *Dobri stari pianino*, Mirko in *X-25 javlja*, Temnikar in *Balada o trobenti in oblaku*, the priest in *Tistega lepega dne*, Dane, Lovro and Magda in *Ne joči*, Peter, Bregar in *Peta zaseda*, Niko in *Sedmina*, Ana in *Begunec*, Anton in *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*, the boys from the neighbourhood in *Ljubezen*, and the mother in *Čas brez pravljič*.

More complex than this consistent reproduction of the construct of Slovenianness in terms of warmness in the Slovenian partisan film are elements at the second level where Slovenianness is articulated through the binary opposition of nature/civilisation (or, closely related to this, rural/urban) in a way that up to the late 1960s the first term in the opposition (nature, also rural) and since then the second one (civilisation, also urban) is privileged. The symbolic aligning of Slovenianness with nature and an idealised rustic life that prevailed in the Slovenian partisan film up to the late 1960s was again actually only a continuation of the established pattern, namely nothing new, even though the partisan films were made in a political and ideological context radically different from that which engendered the pattern in the first place (basically liberal/bourgeois intelligentsia and the local catholic

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church promoting Slovenian national identity as something separate in the second half of the 19th century). This element of a strong continuity between the pre-war, essentially conservative construct of Slovenianness and its post-war revolutionary counterpart is interesting and significant. However, before looking at partisan films from this perspective, let us say a few words about this context, namely the traditional construct of Slovenianness as something deeply related to nature and an idealised rustic life.

It is almost a rule that nations construct their identities around their distinctive and appreciated *cultures*, their urban and cultural heritages. However, in the Slovenian case, from the very earliest attempts at self-definition Slovenians tended to understand their national identity differently, primarily as something most deeply related to *nature*, sometimes literally and sometimes mediated through the notion of a simple and authentic rural life. This persistent image of the healthy natural/rural roots of Slovenianness can be seen at many levels: in literature (in the famous Slovenian realist novel *Cvetje v jeseni* [Flowers in Autumn] where, for example, writer Ivan Tavčar typically allows his urban hero to find his happiness only in a small village with a simple country girl), in Slovenian language studies (where many respected academics argue that the small Slovenian language can only compete with bigger languages if it keeps drawing on the language created in the past by 'our' peasants (compare: Gradišnik, 1967, 123)), in the arts (famous Slovenian painter France Kralj, for example, built his work around images of authentic rural life – something he believed was the healthy cornerstone of Slovenianness (Komelj, 1998, 277)), in symbols of Slovenian heraldry (the Slovenian coat of arms typically features one cultural symbol (three stars of the Dukes of Celje) and two 'natural' ones (Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain, and the sea), in films which often glorify nature (the first two Slovenian films, the semi-documentaries *V Kraljevstvu Zlatoroga* [In the Kingdom of Zlatorog] (Janko Ravnik, 1931) and *Triglavske strmine* [The Steep Slopes of Triglav] (Ferdo Delak, 1932) are for instance mountain films full of admiring shots of nature), in the pastime of mountaineering – something all Slovenians are supposed to do at least occasionally, in idealised pictures of a happy rustic life which as a rule provide a visual (and ideological) background for the music videos of Slovenian ethno-pop music, to mention just a few examples. This construction of the national identity primarily in terms of nature and/or an authentic rustic life can probably be interpreted as deriving from a specific historical context where for most of the time, or at least until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1918, the Slovenian-speaking population was pre-

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dominantly peasant and lived in rural areas, while the German- or Italian-speaking populations were concentrated in towns (it is difficult to speak about Slovenians, Germans and Italians here as up until the 19th century people usually did not understand themselves in these national terms, so I am using this more neutral formulation about spoken languages). As a distinct Slovenian national identity emerged in the 19th century, it was consequently largely articulated through this distinctive trait, its rural origins and a deep feeling for nature, while in many respects the country's mountains and especially Mount Triglav represented (and still represent) the ultimate symbol of both the Slovenian national identity and its supposedly essential connectedness with nature (see Šaver: 2004 and Kučan, 1998). The question now arises of how this construct was reproduced in Slovenian partisan films?

The pattern was already established in the first Slovenian partisan film, *Na svoji zemlji*, which in a most stereotypical way constructs Slovenianness in terms of a small, authentic village community (in Baška grapa – a remote valley under Slovenia's most prominent mountains), closely tied to beautiful surrounding nature. In complete accord with the traditional construct of Slovenianness, the villagers are warm yet strong, determined and healthy peasants, while the foreigners (Italian and German occupying forces) as well as so-called 'traitors' (members of the Slovenian anti-communist MVAC and Home Guard units)⁶ are typically more urbane, sophisticated and urban. Their sophisticated manners though, do not help them: the Slovenian peasant populace defeats them with their breath-taking bravery and stubborn determination. A very nice case in point here is the character of an MVAC officer who shows up with his unit in the village. He is a typical bourgeois intellectual (pale, skinny, slightly neurotic, wearing glasses...) and what matters here is that he looks thoroughly unhealthy, bitter, broody and resentful. The obvious implication is that not only are members of the MVAC as such the unhealthy and bitter part of the Slovenian nation but also that their historical error of not recognising the importance of the partisan uprising at least partly derives from their lost connection with the 'true' gist of Slovenianness, its peasant essence. This is interesting as historical evidence proves that the partisans were mainly (urban) manual workers and young intellectuals, while the MVAC recruited its members predominantly from small villages. In order to retrospectively align the partisans with 'true' Slovenianness Slovenian partisan films did not hesitate to bend the historical facts a little.

Slightly different, yet ultimately the same, is the construction of Slovenianness in *Dolina miru* and *Kala*. In *Dolina*

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miru (Valley of Peace) two little children – a boy Marko and a girl Lotti – look for shelter from the horrors of war in a typically Slovenian phantasm about a peaceful farm in the middle of quiet and 'unspoiled' nature (valley). The unreal, imagined nature of this phantasm becomes apparent at the moment an American pilot, who has jumped out of his ailing bomber and who the children have befriended on their quest for 'the valley of peace', gets shot by the Germans on the very doorstep of the sought-after farm, while its persistence in the Slovenian imaginary symbolic register is underlined in Lotti's last sentence in the film: 'This valley must be somewhere!' In *Kala*, Slovenians are portrayed exclusively in beautiful natural/mountainous contexts (the film was shot on and around the Velika planina mountain, one of the most beautiful natural areas of Slovenia) and as authentic, stubborn and resourceful peasants. The only exception is the girl Ana who moves to town to get a better job but soon learns that 'not everything is perfect' in towns. In this sense, *Kala* fixes Slovenianness to the notions of nature, mountains and peasantry which is further emphasised by many cinematic elements, for instance by the admiring shots of nature and the rustic life of the simple people in mountains or the commentator's voiceover telling us that 'wilderness is freedom'.

One might add to these films those which do not glorify nature and the supposed Slovenian rustic essence in such an explicit way, but still reproduce the pattern. *Balada o trobenti in oblaku*, for example, focuses on an old man – the film's hero – who lives on a remote farm (!) somewhere in the mountains (!), *Tistega lepega dne* is set in an idyllic village from the picturesque Primorska region, *Ne joči*, Peter portrays simple but warm Slovenian heroes (apparently of a rural origin) who function very well in a wild natural habitat (in contrast to the Germans who are after them). Two films stand out here as exceptions, *Akcija*, which is at times really claustrophobically urban and *X-25 javlja*, which was so urban that it was actually shot in Zagreb (the capital of neighbouring Croatia – Slovenian towns were apparently not big enough). Still, the dominant pattern of the Slovenian partisan film up to the late 1960s was very close to the traditional construct of Slovenianness as a nation, defined by its peasant roots and closeness to nature. After all, the hero in *X-25 javlja* is only half Slovenian (and half German – after initial hesitation, he decides to take sides with the partisans) and the film itself was shot by a foreign director, the Czech František Čap, who did much in the 1950s to bring Slovenian cinema to maturity but obviously did not understand very well the Slovenians' understanding of themselves as people of nature.⁷

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Yet after the late 1960s things changed dramatically: nature had suddenly turned into a silent, dark, meaningless and often even menacing force completely outside of the heroes' control, loving shots of beautiful mountainous scenes simply disappeared, and peasant life completely lost its previous charm. Besides, instead of heroes of healthy rural descent, in the Slovenian partisan films made after the late 1960s (the turning point is *Peta zaseda*, made in 1968) the heroes are predominantly urban, in many instances even middle-class (in the early partisan films the filmmakers preferred, in accordance with Marxist ideas, to portray people of bourgeois origin negatively). Most importantly however, the very textures of these films became distinctively urban. Settings, cultural references, dynamic camerawork, claustrophobic shots, and so on, do not only give the later Slovenian partisan films a specific atmosphere but in fact challenge the until then dominant and unquestionable construct of Slovenianness as such.

Sedmina, for instance, a film from the beginning of this new period, is completely set in Ljubljana (Slovenia's capital and the largest city), shot in rather experimental new wave-style, and is about a young, would-be hero Niko who wanders around the city trying to make his mind whether he should join the partisans or not. The city is cold and its inhabitants restless and fearful under the occupation regime, but it is the only refuge the hero has and in fact it works for him quite well when he finally joins the underground resistance – just as wilderness did for the partisans of the previous period. It is almost the same with Doctor from *Doktor*, a partisan informer in the ranks of the Home Guard hierarchy in Ljubljana, although he is caught just before the end of the war, and with Marjan from *Ljubezen*, who is too young to join the struggle, but nevertheless seems to be able to survive the war both physically and emotionally only in the city.

There are also some other examples in this direction, however, it is important to note that many of these later partisan films are still set in more 'traditional' surroundings of earlier partisan films, in the countryside. But there are two important differences now: nature is cold and unwelcoming, while the heroes are typically from urban backgrounds. Goli and Dečko, for instance, from *Čudoviti prah*, try desperately to come out of the empty, almost apocalyptic wilderness they found themselves in, and to rejoin their lost unit, in *Onkraj* the countryside has a distinctively nightmarish quality, while in *Peta zaseda* the landscape represents for partisans nothing but a literal threat as it proves to be essentially just a stage for ever new ambushes they are caught in. The heroes of urban background only add another layer of novelty in this respect: ma-

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ny of them are educated bourgeois individualists, which not only distances them from the simple-minded, yet good-hearted heroes of the early Slovenian partisan film, but also bring about many problems for them. Bregar from *Peta zaseda*, for instance, is suspected to be a German informer (he is eventually shot under these unjust charges), Ernest in *Begunec* gets killed because he cannot identify with either of the warring sides, while Berk from *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni* spends much time in penal battalion as he cannot adjust himself to the spirit of unquestionable partisan collectivism and communist dogmatism. His bitter comments in the film were actually aimed at the contemporary communist elite, a fact which did not go unnoticed at the time, which meant that the film was consequently not shown in theatres for years, yet the image of the partisan hero in this film is definitely light years away from the image of the hero in the early Slovenian partisan films: Berk is urbane, young, restless, educated, critical and unwilling to adapt.

And even the traditional rustic life, the symbolic backbone of the traditional "Slovenianness", does not seem to be functioning for Slovenians in the later Slovenian partisan films very well any more: life on farms appears to be empty and boring with occasional flashes of mortal danger. Husband and wife in *Med strahom in dolžnostjo* are, for instance, completely lost in their dull daily routines, in *Christophoros* a small village proves to be nothing but a stage for clashes of the lowest of human passions, and supposedly ideal rustic life is drowned in hard work and mud in *Živela svoboda*. Even an exception in this respect, *Draga moja Iza*, which ends with the hero's disappointment with the post-war revolutionary changes and his retreat to an old farm, is not really a significant exception: his act is a resigned act of desperation, rather than an act of enthusiastic escape from the urban milieu, typical of the early Slovenian partisan films.

So, what happened with equating Slovenianness with nature and/or a rural life? The change in how Slovenianness was represented in these films suggests that in the late 1960s a process of redefining Slovenian national identity began, a process which, at least according to the mentioned persistent image of the healthy natural/rural roots of Slovenianness, is far from finished albeit underway. This process probably relates to the renewed urbanisation of Slovenian cities that began at roughly the same time, a process where Slovenian cities again started to acquire a more urban character. This was seriously diminished during and after the war due to the exodus of the German and Italian urban populace along with a large part of the Slovenian bourgeoisie,⁸ while the post-war

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communist programme of the proletarianisation of Slovenian cities whereby old historic towns (Maribor, Ljubljana etc.) were quickly transformed into Soviet-style industrial centres, only finished the job.⁹ Namely, the emerging new and different, to some extent urbanised reality, which most Slovenians now found themselves in, apparently called for new and different points of identification since the old Slovenian national identity closely related to nature could not provide much meaningful orientation in this new social reality. In this sense, one can therefore assume that in the late 1960s a new Slovenian national identity started to develop, although it is difficult to be sure as there has not yet been any systematic research in this direction. What is clear, however, is that this process can be identified in partisan film, as well as in other genres of Slovenian film production. Some texts that may be understood as the most important cultural landmarks symbolising the emergence of the new, relatively urban construct of Slovenianness are, for example, the hugely successful films of the late 1970s *To so gadi* [These are Snakes!] (Jože Bevc, 1977) *Sreča na vrvi* [Hang on, Doggy!] (Jane Kavčič, 1977). It could also be argued that Slovenian films remain one of the principle sites of this process to date, actually even to the degree where it sometimes turns out relatively unnatural. Most contemporary Slovenian films, for instance, are set in old bourgeois apartments and are very urban and classy, which is not too convincing: today the vast majority of Slovenians still live either in suburban houses or overcrowded blocks of flats built in the socialist era. Nevertheless, Slovenian film does seem to be promoting a new Slovenian national identity (is this simply because film is somehow more of an 'urban' medium as such?) and even Slovenian partisan films from the late 1960s on, while set in the past, were apparently part of this process.

In this context, Slovenian partisan films from the 1960s onward can be understood as an important medium for restructuring Slovenian national identity from an essentially rustic one into something more dynamic and urban. While this view is supported by the relative consistency of this pattern (there are almost no exceptions), it is interesting to note that even the urban locations themselves changed significantly in these newer partisan films. As we have seen, the earlier Slovenian partisan films were very rarely set in urban contexts but even in the few cases that they are, they are typically shot against the background of small, picturesque Slovenian towns which in fact only reproduces the stereotype of the Slovenian rural essence (a few lovely, small towns here and there do not disturb the image). *Kala* is accordingly partly set in Kamnik,¹⁰ *Akcija* in Celje and *Nevidni bataljon* in Ptuj,

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which are all small and nice historic towns, with the exceptions of *Trst* (set in Trst (Trieste), but this film was made for purely momentary practical political reasons and was never successful),¹¹ as well as the quite urban *Trenutki odločitve* (set in Ljubljana) and *X-25 javlja* (set in Zagreb), but the latter two were made by a Czech director (František Čap) and are consequently not truly Slovenian in their feeling.

After the late 1960s, however, urban visual backgrounds became standard. Not only are the films predominantly set in urban contexts, these urban contexts are now much more urban than before: as a rule, they are shot in Ljubljana (*Sedmina*, *Onkraj*, *Draga moja Iza*, *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni*, *Ljubezen*, and *Doktor*), with two others set in smaller towns (*Begunec* in Škofja Loka and *Dediščina* in an unidentified town in the Zassavje region), and only a few in the standard setting of the early Slovenian partisan films, in the countryside (*Med strahom in dolžnostjo*, *Christoforos*, and *Čas brez pravljič*) where, significantly, the previously so admired nature – the partisans' only true shelter – has deteriorated into an empty, cold, whimsical and alienating surrounding. In this sense, Slovenian partisan films after the late 1960s not only use different visual backgrounds for their stories but also present a compelling vision of inhabiting a different real and symbolic (urban) space. Even today for many Slovenians this vision is not something they would necessarily share but it is an important one, nevertheless: the plurality of different urban life-styles is an inevitable part of dynamic modern societies and their prerequisite. For a country like Slovenia, which has just joined the European Union and wishes to catch up with its members' more developed economies, this is an important issue.

CONCLUSION

The partisan films shot in Slovenia as prestigious productions during the socialist era are today largely forgotten. With the exception of a few popular ones, which can sometimes be seen on national TV (*Ne joči*, *Peter*, typically), they are in the best case regarded as exotic relics from an essentially 'mistaken' period of the country's history. A closer analysis of the subject, however, reveals that these films are interesting in many respects, several of them of course due to their artistic value and role in the development of the national cinema, while all of them actually work as texts allowing us to understand the complexities of the socialist ideology in this period. Namely, the official communist ideology in the 1945-89 period in Slovenia was far from simple or a straightforward Marxist one: it functioned in contexts of other different ideologies, cultures, tendencies and so on, and as a consequence in many respects something of a hybrid emerged at the end.

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This is exactly the case with the Slovenian national identity: as the analysis in previous sections proves, the official communist discourse on Slovenian national identity, at least as revealed in the partisan films, was in Slovenia in many respects not really along the orthodox Marxist lines of understanding national identity as an essentially disposable bourgeois ideological construct. The official discourse instead encouraged firm national identity, to a large extent even in terms of the established, conservative construct of Slovenianness as something that in its essence is likened to a simple, rustic life in the midst of unspoiled nature.

More specifically, Slovenian partisan films may be understood as an important medium of the construction of the Slovenian national identity. Up to the late 1960s this was essentially in the sense of reproducing the already established construct of Slovenianness, and after that in the sense of being a medium for its restructuring. It is interesting, though, that the shift in representations of Slovenianness to something much more urban is not accompanied by a corresponding shift in understanding Slovenianness as something not as 'warm' as perceived before. Namely, such a shift actually occurred in Slovenians' self-perception at the time, as their newly emerging nationalism sought to distance Slovenia from the other former Yugoslav federal republics precisely in these terms: Slovenians were according to their own belief superior to the other nationalities because they were – as the most western (and Western) nationality in the country and therefore also the most rational and cold – the most serious, efficient and reliable. This is of course merely a pragmatic ideological construct but it is nevertheless interesting that it was not reflected in Slovenian partisan films, which were otherwise quite sensitive to ideological transformations and permutations in the society which made them: the partisans were consistently portrayed as warm throughout the whole history of the genre. But it might simply be that this was something untouchable: while filmmakers did increasingly address many provocative issues from Slovenia's public life in these films, the very sanctity of the genre's principal heroes – the partisans and their good-natured warmth – could not be questioned after all.

NOTES

¹ The *MVAC* (*MVAC* stands for *Milizia Volontaria Anti-Communita*, voluntary anti-communist militia) was organised with the help of the Italian occupying forces, while the *Domobranci* (Home Guards) were organised with German support and under their supervision.

² Which made possible sometimes to cast, at least for larger productions, even Hollywood stars: Richard Burton was starring in *Sutjeska*

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(Stipe Delić, 1973), for example, and Yul Brinner and Orson Welles in *Bitka na Neretvi* (Veljko Bulajić, 1969).

³ Although obviously not necessarily entirely absent. One might mention here a successful use of cinematic procedures as introduced by French new wave directors in the late 1950s and 1960s, in popular TV serials *Otpisani* [The Forgotten] and *Povratak otpisanih* [Return of the Forgotten], produced in Serbia.

⁴ Nobody actually denies the importance of active resistance to Italian and German occupation during WW II. However, communist-led partisans also brought about social revolution, obviously not according to everybody's liking, and even more and as already mentioned, their struggle was more than seldom extremely and unreasonably ruthless, above all when dealing with those Slovenians, who did not support them.

⁵ This new national identity was needed as, at least according to the official interpretation, Slovenians had not been realised as a nation yet. It was said that up to 1945, when communists took over, they had always been subservient to somebody else, to Austrians when living in the Austrian monarchy, and to Serbs, when living in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia up to 1941.

⁶ MVAC and Home Guard were in essence pro-allied, but in fact (though slightly reluctantly) collaborating with the Italians and Germans, as they perceived the partisan uprising as a greater threat for Slovenia than Italian and German occupation. Immediately after the war, the new communist government dismissed members of these units as traitors of the national cause, and secretly liquidated a vast majority of them. These liquidations were a disgraceful act and discussions about them, initiated by the emerging political opposition in the 1980s, strongly contributed to the downfall of the communist regime in Slovenia at the end of the decade.

⁷ Čap's *Vesna*, made in 1953 and most likely the most successful Slovenian film of all times, was set in Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, but in an untypical urban manner, which led some critics to observe that the story actually appears more as if it is happening in Prague.

⁸ As Slovenian middle classes by large did not support partisan uprising during the war (because of its overtly communist character), often even supporting anti-communist militias, many of its members fled the country after the war (mostly to South America).

⁹ Industrialisation obviously does not mean necessarily de-urbanisation, however, in the Slovenian case it did, since it was tied to a huge influx of unskilled workers from rural areas.

¹⁰ Only a few scenes, all others are shot in the wilderness of Velika planina.

¹¹ It was made in 1951, at the height of tense post-war political negotiations between Yugoslavia, Italy, and Western allied forces, to whom Trieste should belong. Trieste was a multi-ethnic city, liberated by Slovenian (Yugoslav) partisans, however as Yugoslavia had already got much land from Italy, it was finally decided that the city itself remained Italian. Slovenians were furious, and the film *Trst* is basically a propaganda piece, claiming that Trieste should in fact be Slovenian.

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Konstrukti slovenstva u slovenskim partizanskim filmovima

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U radu autor postavlja pitanje može li se prepoznati dosljedan obrazac predstavljanja slovenstva u slovenskim partizanskim filmovima, filmskom žanru o komunističkim gerilskim borbama (tzv. partizanima) i njihovoj borbi protiv njemačkih i talijanskih okupacijskih snaga u Drugom svjetskom ratu. Analiza svih dugometražnih filmova snimljenih u tom žanru pokazuje da službeni komunistički

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diskurs o slovenskom nacionalnom identitetu, bar kako se pokazuje u partizanskim filmovima, u Sloveniji u mnogočemu nije slijedio ortodoksnu marksističku liniju razumijevanja nacionalnog identiteta kao uklonjivoga buržoaskog ideološkog konstrukta. Taj ga je diskurs zapravo aktivno podržavao čak i u smislu afirmiranoga konzervativnog konstrukta slovenstva kao nečega što je u svojoj biti izjednačeno s jednostavnim rustikalnim životom usred netaknute prirode. Ipak, u filmovima snimljenim nakon kasnih šezdesetih godina 20. stoljeća obrazac se mijenja i slovenski se partizanski filmovi sa svojim novim, izrazito urbanim, karakterom pretvaraju u medij restrukturiranja nacionalnoga identiteta.

Ključne riječi: reprezentacija, konstruktivizam, nacionalni identitet, slovenski partizanski film, slovenstvo

Konstrukte von Slowenentum in slowenischen Partisanenfilmen

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Der Verfasser geht von der Frage aus, ob in slowenischen Partisanenfilmen, in denen die kommunistische Guerilla (die sog. Partisanen) und ihr Kampf gegen die deutschen und italienischen Besatzungsmächte im Zweiten Weltkrieg dargestellt werden, ein konsequentes Schema zur Repräsentierung des Slowenentums erkennbar ist. Eine Analyse sämtlicher abendfüllender Filme dieses Genres zeigt, dass der offizielle kommunistische Diskurs über die slowenische nationale Identität, zumindest gemäß der Darstellung in den Partisanenfilmen, in Slowenien in vielerlei Hinsicht nicht die orthodoxe marxistische Linie befolgte, wonach nationale Identität als auszumerzendes ideologisches Konstrukt der Bourgeoisie war. Der politische Diskurs in Slowenien war im Grunde zugunsten dieser Identität wirksam und unterstützte sie im Sinne eines affirmierten konservativen Konstruktes – des Slowenentums, das seinem Wesen nach einem einfachen, rustikalen Leben inmitten unberührter Natur gleichgesetzt wurde. Immerhin ist in den Filmproduktionen ab den späten 60er-Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts ein Schemawandel bemerkbar: Die slowenischen Partisanenfilme erhalten einen neuen, ausgesprochen urbanen Charakter und werden so zu einem Medium zur Restrukturierung der nationalen Identität.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Repräsentierung, Konstruktivismus, nationale Identität, der slowenische Partisanenfilm, Slowenentum