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## Contested Rites – Janša’s Politics of Statehood Celebration in Contemporary Slovenia

*Kwestionowane rytuały – polityka J. Janšy a obchody ku czci  
państwowości we współczesnej Słowenii*

**Summary:** Political division, which re-emerged after Slovenian independence and parliamentary democracy in 1991, has strongly influenced Slovenian social life. The article focuses on official and parallel celebrations of statehood day as a political tool in political arena. The author analyses those manipulative and discursive techniques used by opposition leader Janez Janša that were the most evident in the critique of the official celebrations of statehood and the construction of parallel ones. Presented taxonomy of his interventions is based on extensive ethnographic work and offers a summarised review of some basic ideological disputes during the Slovenian post-socialist transition.

**Key words:** political ritual, ideology, social memory, social process, symbols, Slovenia

Translated by Author

**Streszczenie:** Podziały polityczne, jakie odżyły po uzyskaniu przez Słowenię niepodległości i wprowadzeniu demokracji parlamentarnej w 1991 roku, w poważnym stopniu wpłynęły na życie społeczne Słoweńców. W artykule opisane są oficjalne oraz alternatywne obchody święta państwowości, jako narzędzie walki politycznej. Autor analizuje te z technik manipulacyjnych i dyskursywnych stosowanych przez lidera opozycji Janeza Janšę, które były najbardziej widoczne w krytyce oficjalnych obchodów święta państwowości oraz organizacji obchodów alternatywnych. Zaproponowana kategoryzacja działań Janšy oparta jest na szeroko zakrojonych badaniach etnograficznych i przedstawia zarys tematyki debat ideologicznych, jakie toczyły się w Słowenii w okresie transformacji systemowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rytuał polityczny, ideologia, pamięć społeczna, proces społeczny, symbole, Słowenia

Tłumaczenie: Klaudyna Michałowicz

The Republic of Slovenia appeared as an independent State in 1991. It was previously part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. Before World War II, most part of today’s Slovenia was included in Yugoslavian kingdom. Before World War I, the territory belonged to Austria-Hungary. Changes in political landscape and consequent adaptations were frequent in the 20th century.

We will trace geopolitical and economical shift of the new state through its major celebrations of statehood from 1991 to 2016. Emphasize will be on the main actors and criteria of yearly ritual preparation, ritual structure, symbolism and media perceptions. Slovenia was special in this regard, since transitional political confrontations soon lead to two separate celebrations of Slovenian statehood. The main protagonist of parallel celebrations was politician Janez Janša.

A focus on the individual agrees with certain contemporary theories in political anthropology. On the one hand, political anthropology is interested in the *processes* – not just institutions and structures – that enable individuals to become agents of (structural) change. Another, simultaneous encouragement in this direction arises from game theory, establishing itself within the discipline of economics in the fifties of the 20th century. Within both these theoretical frameworks, the individual is considered a strategic planner, a “manipulator” in the game of possibilities and social rules (Barth 1959; Lewellen 2003 [1992]: 95–110; Varoufakis 2011). Graeber (2015) pointed out the difference between *game* and *play*: the game agrees to a certain set of rules, while play acts with no regard for – or even in spite of – the ruleset. I believe this distinction is highly significant for understanding the politics of Janez Janša. The political opportunism and pragmatism of Janša perverted the standing fundamental postulates of the nation/state and political participation within. Symbols, politicians, institutions, veterans, the elderly, mass media, holidays and so on, all these were to Janša not “immutable realities, but idealizations that may be subject to active manipulation” (cf. Turner 1996 [1957]; Lewellen 2003: 98).

Other representatives of the Slovenian “political spring” (former members and acolytes of the Demos coalition from the early nineties of the 20th century, which brought about the first domestic multi-party elections) were in Janša’s game of symbols mere side protagonists, shrinking in number as time went by.

I am interested in Janša’s (discursive) management of socially objective fact: the content of his interventions into the celebration/ritual space, temporal dimension of the interventions, the various persons participating in the process, the style of political competition (confrontation, cooperation), aims, symbols, rules and arbiters and so on (Edwards 1997; Bailey 2001; Lewellen 2003: 99–101). In this light, celebrations represent one of the tools for the realization of political-economic ends (political and economic power, election success) (Gluckman 1940; Kertzer 1988).

### **Janša’s public life**

From a proponent of *communist ideology*, he first morphed into an advocate of *nationalist sentiment* (from 1988), then signalled a positive attitude towards the *Slovene*

*Home Guard* (from 1995), and finally established himself as a defender of the Ljubljana-Lower Carniola *village militias* from the Second World War, and with that, the Roman Catholic Church (from arr. 2000)” (POP TV 2015). Janša’s socio-political career ought in this sense be more concisely delineated into three periods, since the World War II subjects of the Home Guard, relationship with the Church, and the village militias represent a singular ideological-historical unit in the political imaginarium of Slovenia, though they can naturally also be treated as separate entities. Discussion relevant to our subject may also operate using just two distinct periods of Janša’s public life – before and after 1994, since it was that great political break, which triggered the phenomenon of parallel celebrations, resulting in a wealth of research material at our disposal.

The first phase of Janša’s activity encompassed his participation in youth organizations in the eighties of the 20th century, when he set out to make a name for himself in the then-framework of political life – Yugoslavian and single-party. Later on, he ideologically linked his work with the Slovenian economic-liberal movement from the early seventies of the 20th century (Čepič 2010: 10–12). He published various scientific, politico-economic, civil society theory and military science texts, establishing himself as a man diligent, knowledgeable, lucid and witty, but also vitriolic, one who does not cherry-pick words in his descriptions and critique of the (“barren and conceited”, pro-system) authorities (see Janša 1988; Kavčič 1988).

In the spring of 1988, Janša profiled himself in the public space as a rebel against the dominant ideology and military apparatus. His arrest followed the disclosure of military documents (known as the “JBTZ Affair”).<sup>1</sup> The Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Janez Janša (later becoming the Human Rights Protection Committee), led by Igor Bavčar, then organized a mass public assembly in front of the military court on Roška Street in Ljubljana (Bibič 1997: 23). The martyr-Janša persona was born and cultivated on Roška, in the widely read magazine “Mladina”, the Radio Študent student radio, as well as in other mass media, growing with time. At the outset of 1989 he was already among the co-founders of the republic’s first opposition party – the Slovenian Democratic Union (Čepič 2010: 11) – announcing thus his future parliamentary career.

Nationalistic content had appeared in Janša’s writing and public appearances before, but the arrest and later independence process logically granted it an essential status in his political life. The Slovene-ness became ever more pronounced, especially in relation to the Balkans, specifically the (Socialist Federal Republic) Yugoslavia, with which Slovenia had shared a common fate since 1918. Because Janez Janša was the Minister

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<sup>1</sup> JBTZ stands for Ljubljana military trial against four persons charged for betrayal of secrets (arrest plans) of the Yugoslav People’s Army in the weekly magazine “Mladina”: journalists Janez Janša, sergeant Ivan Boštner, journalist David Tasič, and editor Franci Zavrl.

of Defence during the successful defence of Slovenia's sovereignty from the attacks of the Yugoslav People's Army, his national-cultural capital after the independence war was immense, and it was eventually parlayed into an aura of national heroism. In 1991, Janša was awarded the Order of General Maister,<sup>2</sup> 1st Class with Swords, and then in 1992 with the Golden Order of Freedom of the Republic of Slovenia (Vasle 1992: 3).

In 1992 Janša joined the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia (SDSS) of dr. Jože Pučnik, renowned political dissident and returned expatriate from Germany. A year later Janša took over the leadership of the party, having stayed its single president to this day.<sup>3</sup>

For post-war Janša and his followers, at the height of their political and military glory, the year 1994 was that more dramatic: Prime Minister dr. Janez Drnovšek then deposed Janša from his position of Minister of Defence due to suspicion of plotting a military coup (the "Depala Vas Affair"). After that, *spring parties* under Janša's leadership ramped up their demands in the parliament and began organizing their own Statehood Day celebrations with distinctive narratives. Janša was made into a victim of the "forces of continuity"; roughly, he characterized this power group as the near and far descendants of the old socialist nomenclature and administration, which during regime change shifted their apparent worldview so as to be able to stay in power in the new multi-party system, while their political and social networks continued to maintain a stranglehold on the state and society (cf. Michnik 2012). Janša did not include himself in that portrayal, though he began his career at the same time as many of those he was accusing of "continuity".

His confidence, insolence and composure during public appearances and his celebrated independence contributions made good material for the shaping of Janša as a charismatic personality, even a cult of personality that defied criticism and perpetuated his socio-political capital and legitimacy. Not the arms trafficking scandal (purported smuggling of arms into the Balkans during and after the Slovenian independence war) (Šurc, Zgaga 2011–2012; Perčič 2011: 4), not the accusations of plotting a coup in 1994 ("Depala Vas Affair") (Štrajn 2003), not his illicit manipulation of archive materials (Pečauer, Belovič 2011), his government's speculation with shares of the Delo publishing house and the Laško Brewery in 2005, not the vicious political attacks on nearly all the presidents of Slovenia, not his ties with domestic radical right-wing groups (public media accusations 2006–2007), neither the underhanded bartering with the Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanader concerning the situation in the Gulf of Piran (Žist 2013: 2), nor the chauvinist statements on the SDS website accompanying Zoran Janković's election victory (the

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<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Maister, World War I legend.

<sup>3</sup> In 2003, the SDSS renamed itself into the SDS – the Slovenian Democratic Party (*Slovenska Demokratska Stranka*).

Majer scandal); not the disclosed secret co-financing of free publications as means of propaganda, nor his interventions into the school curriculum, his bribery scandal during the purchase of armoured vehicles for the Slovenian army (Perčič 2011), or recent allegations of tampering during the establishment of the Bank Asset Management Company (DUTB) in 2012 – neither of these have managed to bury his political persona, and many voters continue to believe, or have even grown in their conviction, that Janša has all this time been on the right side of history – a victim of shadowy conspiracies. It should be noted, indeed, that his act was always balanced on speculation and innuendo, and that no concrete court process he was involved in resulted in a permanent guilty verdict – while Janša always made sure to reject them all as staged, illicit, in the meanwhile also discrediting the court apparatus of the state (allegedly another stronghold of the “forces of continuity”). Media pressure and unsuccessful court proceedings thus did not endanger his political career but rather, much like his arrogant behaviour at large, merely broadened the divide between his detractors and supporters, driving polarization and increasingly infusing paranoia into the society (Vezjak 2010).

Political adversaries (as well as companions) frequently decried Janša’s cynicism and disrespectful demeanour, and a sizeable part of the voting body resented his fierce rhetoric. Many branded Janša a demagogue: “His polemics are corrosive, he keeps making base insinuations, he is callous, mean and ruthless. He doesn’t look for allies but worshippers, seeking servants rather than colleagues” (Rupel 2004). Spomenka Hribar dedicated a book to Janša’s political philosophy and practice, fittingly titled *The World as a Conspiracy* (1996). The time of Janša’s deposition, the first significant parallel celebrations he orchestrated and the period of the emergence of the above characterizations of Janša mark a drastic departure from his previous political agenda and a radical rift in his public image.

In his two mandates as Prime Minister (2004–2008; 2012–2013), Janša notably failed to realize a credible “alternative politics”, and the economic legacy of his several years of governance was poor. He was even toppled from the seat of power in 2013 by “the street” (Simonič 2013a, b).<sup>4</sup>

### **Parallel Statehood Day celebrations**

Stage oratories, celebrations and parades were regular and common in socialist states (Lane 1981; Rihtman Auguštin 2000; Roth 2000). New Slovenian state inherited practices and relations of previous central ritual specialists (Rozman, Melik, Repe 1999;

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<sup>4</sup> In autumn 2012, the Maribor uprising against a corrupt mayor soon sparked a wave of national protests and riots against the government of Janez Janša and its austerity politics.

Simonič 2009). Consequently, the discussions after 1991 touched mainly the question of the right place and semantics of stage celebration, not the modernist form of televised commemoration it-self.

Janša and other leading opposition politicians (Lojze Peterle, Marjan Podobnik, Ivan Oman, etc.) did not participate in the official state celebrations, while the oppositional celebrations in Ljubljana were not attended by the representatives of the dominant government parties (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, later also the Social Democrats and their coalition partners). This situation exposed and helped to maintain certain schism in Slovenian society.

For quite some time, the celebrations held by spring coalition were staged a day after the official Statehood Day celebrations (24 June); then post-1999 sometimes a day before it. Most took place on the Congress Square in Ljubljana (and the Ljubljana Castle) or in Prežganje near Ljubljana, Vrhpolje near Vipava, in Celje, in certain Ljubljana hotels and in 2016 on Ljubljana's Republic Square. Evidently, the media and social reach of these events varied. "Spring celebrations" were most forceful and resounding in the years 1995–1999 (following the break with then – Prime Minister Drnovšek and President Kučan in 1994 – "Depala Vas Affair"), 2006–2007 (more disagreement as PM, with then-President Drnovšek and ex-President Kučan) and 2012 (Janša's rise to power). Political marketing ahead of parliamentary elections also influenced the intensity of the opposition's polemics and parallel celebrations in their first decade.

The origins of the parallel celebrations in Slovenia trace back to the year 1993, when the Slovenian Spring movement decided to organize a separate public gathering before the Trnovo Church in Ljubljana (Roglič 1995: 3). In 1994 same opposition parties organized public assembly on the Ljubljana Castle by way of the Ljubljana municipal authorities (Mekina 2001: 18). Especially important in the preparations of this oppositional event was Dimitrij Kovačič (SDSS), then President of the City Council and head of the Ljubljana Protocol Services. Those in attendance were most enthusiastic about Janša's speech, which stressed the national importance of the armed resistance of 1991, promoting the values of national sovereignty and internal harmony (Alič 1994: 4). It was in 1994 that Janša entirely separated himself from the official statehood celebrations. Throughout this period, Janša devised and organized a great number of parallel celebrations, as many as fourteen in twenty-five years.

The first massive parallel celebration of the spring movement took place in 1995, on the Congress Square in Ljubljana. The script was titled *Straight into this Light, Forever*, prepared by Mojmir Tozon, a member of the SDSS party. Live transmission on Slovenian national public television provided significant reach and impact to the event. In the

era of the state's beginnings, the press reported in equal measure on the actions of all the independence actors to avoid accusations of playing favourites. Equal attention to the official and parallel statehood celebrations became unacceptable only later. The spring celebration of 1995 featured the Slovenian Chamber Choir, the Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra, the Kamnik Carol Singers, also certain well known solo artists and actors. Among the speakers (Dimitrij Kovačič, dr. Dimitrij Rupel, Lojze Peterle, dr. France Bučar, Milan Kučan), Janša enjoyed the honour of the final speech. In contrast to president Kučan's performance – who was heckled at times – Janša's oration was met with cheers and chanting, an overwhelming manifestation of approval that led some observers believe Janša had brought an organized contingent of supporters to the site – “paid clappers (...) an assembly of a social aggregate whose two powerful binding forces are nationalism and anti-communism” (Jež 1995b: 3). Although the media and the parliament put the blame squarely on Janša, we should note that this first great parallel celebration was organized by several parties, all of which had their chance to speak to the people.

Soon after the rift in the Slovenian political space of the years 1994–1995 (origin of Janša-ism), Maja Breznik analyzed in brief the contrasts between the official and parallel celebrations in the arena of state spectacle. She posits it was a conflict between two fractions of a political class competing over which one gets to dictate the overarching state-building nationalist ideology: on the one side, there was the conservative *patriotism/folklore* of the spring parties (Slovenian songs, pop-folk music, 19th-century patriotic poetry, religion et cetera), and on the other the *techno-managerial progressivism* of the ruling Liberal Democracy of Slovenia party, with the inscenisations of dramatist Matjaž Berger (including planes, parachutes, athletes, military, etc.), as the far end of this paradigm (Breznik 1996: 9).

In this conceptualization, the conflict between the parties of the “right and left spectrum” acquired the characteristics of a contrast between the rural and the urban, between the faithful (religious) and the secular (profane), between national community and its globalisation. It also reinforced the consciousness of two distinct historical periods of Slovenian politico-economic „evolution” of the 20th century: the Catholic-folk period before the World War II (dr. Ivan Šušteršič, Janez Evangelist Krek, dr. Anton Korošec; Čepič 1991) and the post-war socialist period (Edvard Kardelj, Boris Kidrič, Stane Dolanc and other influential ideologues and politicians; Čepič 2010). The great divide happened during the World War II.

In the socialist era, besides Marxism, the National Liberation Struggle (NOB) was considered the essential historical and military foundation of the contemporary emancipation of the Southern Slavs in the Balkans region. It was precisely the attitude towards

the past (communism, world war) and its actors that emerged as the engine of the political divide and its marketing in present (cf. Bongrand 1997), since the contemporary proposed political-economic solutions of the two poles of the spectrum were rather similar: free market, lean state, privatization, global competitiveness, the EU, NATO. Thus, their mythologies were their core means of differentiation, the catalysts of the identifications that could be harnessed during each election.

The arguments and techniques utilized by Janez Janša and other representatives of the spring bloc during the Statehood Day are in the following treatment classified into several units. Some were more evident during the first period of transition, some remained a constant, and many reappeared and intertwined across the years. Some of the arguments may be specified as procedural, logistical; other as thematic, semantic. I see the latter as the ideological program agenda of Janša and the spring parties, the central concept of their social-economic (re)vision. The former thus serve as performative techniques, channels of presentation that open and pave way for the advertisement of the spring politics' content schemes. We shall return to this issue at the conclusion.

Summarised into sentences, the corresponding units of argumentative content generated by Janša's political circle can be classified thus:

### **„The celebration committee and the state protocol are corrupt”**

Post the Slovenian independence in 1991, a void occurred in the state protocol apparatus, since new protocol rules and responsible government body were not a priority in the massive amount of legislative work. Only in early June 1994 the Government of the RS adopted the Decision on the Implementation of State Protocol Rules (Government of the RS 1994) to avoid emerging issues.

In the spring of 1995, the Committee for the Implementation of State Protocol Rules was formed, featuring representation from all the significant state bodies and political parties – “like a tiny parliament in a nutshell, an apparent charade”, remembered Tomaž Štrucl, one of the directors who defended his celebration concept before such a forum. “To avoid further arguments”, then-President Kučan in 1996 established the Honorary Committee for the Celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of Independence (featuring many with independence credit). Janez Janša was resolute in his demands that the government protocol Coordinating Committee takes into account the inputs of the Honorary Committee and change the concept of the celebration accordingly (Roglič 1996a: 5).

After a successful National Assembly vote of no confidence in the government of Janez Drnovšek in 2000, the new spring politics authorities replaced some of the Coordinating Committee's members just days before the Statehood Day celebration. Its new head



became Dimitrij Kovačič, who immediately intervened in the already adopted scenario and selection of participants “(...) behaving like an elephant in a china shop” (Vogrič 2000a: 2). Aleš Jan, the event’s director stated: “In 2000 the meddling of the authorities was extensive, and I must say rather obtuse. In their statements, especially (...) The Coordinating Committee even falsified meeting records from 16 June 2000.” Due to the hostile atmosphere, many artists cancelled their participation.

Following victory at the 2004 parliamentary elections, Janša’s government established a new Coordinating Committee for National Celebrations, which fell directly under the Protocol Services of the RS. In 2009, the new government of Borut Pahor established the National Commemorative Events Office, transferring to it all the relevant programme and production tasks.

### **„Architects of the official celebration fail to appreciate the independence effort”**

In the pre-celebration period of 1995, Janez Janša attacked the “left” (liberal) authorities with charges of their “insufficient commemoration of independence” and “showing no regard for the nation.” When it became evident director Janez Pijan was preparing the official celebration in the Cankarjev Dom Cultural Centre, President Milan Kučan and the Ministry of Culture were criticized for the event’s “dry academic nature”, “failing to show due public enthusiasm” and “operating along the path of least resistance” (Roglič 1995: 3; Jež 1995a: 3). Spring parties and certain intellectuals were further upset by the memorandum of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, advising diplomatic representation offices abroad to refrain from Statehood Day receptions that year due to budget constraints back home. In this context Janša made claims the Government was “effectively prohibiting the celebration of statehood” (Jakopec 1995: 2; Starič 1995: 3).

### **„The hierarchy of the speakers is warped”**

In 1993, the first speaker on the Republic Square was supposed to be dr. France Bučar (President of the Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia 1990–1992, co-author of the constitution, author of several books on the Slovenian transition; Kovač 2013), but president Milan Kučan was eventually chosen instead (Roglič 1995: 3). Notably, five key independence actors who had one year prior received the Golden Order of Freedom of the RS, in 1993 returned their medals to President Kučan in a plastic bag (“The Bata Affair”), due to their inability to seriously influence the course of political life in the state (Jež 1993: 3).

In 1995 Dimitrij Kovačič had an extended argument with then-Mayor dr. Dimitrij Rupel (Karneža 1995: 2). On the subject of the resulting events, Mayor Rupel wrote in the “Dnevnik” daily:

If Janša couldn't be the only speaker he had to be the last one, his speech had to be longer than the others, it had to feature clapping and loud support. The organizers of that alternative gathering brought along their standard contingent of supporters, notoriously seen already in the live broadcasting of Janša's deposition from the Ministry of Defence on 29 March 1994 (Rupel 1995: 7).

Another reason for the dispute were supposedly some 25,000 written invitations sent out to the supporters of the SDSS by Kovačič and Janša on the expenses of the Ljubljana Municipality. Mayor Rupel was additionally irked by the fact Janša was not even a citizen of Ljubljana (Karneža 1995: 2).

In 2000, the central celebration featured, alongside president Kučan, also the prime minister dr. Andrej Bajuk.<sup>5</sup> His government insisted that there was no evident mandate regarding “which of the authorities' top officials have the right to speak” (Kajzer 2000: 4). During his speech at the Republic Square, PM Bajuk was interrupted several times by people showing their support with unusually frequent and loud applause. That official celebration was the first and last to display a number of banners and flags of the SDSS party (from the Styria region). The party's president Janez Janša received noisy ovations and approval upon his appearance on Republic square (Natlačen 2000: 2).

Finally, Janša first spoke at an official celebration as prime minister in 2006, after recurring clash with then-President Drnovšek. Some accused Janša of copying his optimism-promoting speech at the event from a speech of the British PM Tony Blair (Mekina 2009). A year later, President Drnovšek again refused to speak at the celebration “(...) or any other state celebrations for the foreseeable future” (Pečauer 2007: 2). The disagreement between the prime minister (Janša) and the president of the republic (Drnovšek) had the appearance of an open (media) conflict between “two sets of the royal court” – the presidential and the parliamentary (Miheljak 2002); at the same time, it was a visible struggle between the figureheads of two competing parties (LDS – SDS), and a small repeat staging of that political drama of 1994, when both leading protagonists were the same.

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<sup>5</sup> Bajuk's family fled from Ljubljana to the Austrian Carinthia in 1945, and from there to Argentina due to his father's sympathising with the Ljubljana-based Catholic politician, professor, priest and ethnologist Lambert Ehrlich ([https://www.wikiwand.com/sl/Lambert\\_Ehrlich](https://www.wikiwand.com/sl/Lambert_Ehrlich)) who opposed the communist revolution and in April 1942 disclosed to the Italian military authorities an analysis of conditions and proposals for the eradication of the Partisan Resistance. The security service of the Liberation Front executed Ehrlich for his activity in the so-called Home Guard, sending the Bajuks into exile ([https://www.wikiwand.com/sl/Andrej\\_Bajuk](https://www.wikiwand.com/sl/Andrej_Bajuk)). They became representatives of larger dissidents' migratory flow to South America, mainly to Argentina (Repič 2006). After the declaration of Slovenian independence in 1991, their off springs attempted to rehabilitate their image and influence in Slovenian society.

### **„Official celebrations exhibit a pro-regime narrative and artistic elitism”**

Janša, for example, in 1996 accused the Coordinating Committee it was selecting its celebration directors through invitations rather than public tenders, preventing access to those cultivating different, non-regime and “less expensive” poetics (Leiler 1996: 3; Kovač, Potić 1996: 11). With its annual invitation of three to five chosen artists, the organizer – Government of the RS – could of course ensure its guidelines for the content, aesthetics and standard of execution were met (cf. Benjamin 2003). After 2004, when Janša took over leadership of the government for a full mandate, he no longer saw the practice as problematic, choosing his own directors and concepts the same way as they had been chosen before.

Yet, between 2004 and 2008, Janša’s government consistently selected directors and screenwriters *outside the circle* of those graduating from the Ljubljana Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, or who were employed in Ljubljana. Selected directors were: Iztok Kovač in 2005, Katja Pegan in 2006 and 2007, Janez Dovč and Ivana Djilas in 2008, Matej Filipčič and Rok Golob in 2009.

### **„Official celebrations are out of sync with the people”**

At the Ljubljana celebration of 1995, Janša proclaimed: “My gratitude goes to Ljubljana for lending us a proper celebration, or else Statehood Day would have been reduced to the debacle of a half-empty Cankar Hall.” He ridiculed “Pipan’s miserable script” (director’s scenario of the official state celebration) and the elitism of the invitations, which he claimed alienated the spirit of the event from the regular citizen (Starič 1995: 3).

In 1996, the opposition/spring parties heavily criticized the script created by Matjaž Berger, titled *Kons. 5* – they deemed the concept far too “postmodern”, the title already (an allusion to the poem of Srečko Kosovel) too “arcane” for the “regular Joe”, likely to result in a poor turnout again (Roglič 1996a: 5). Representatives of the Slovenian People’s Party (SLS) clamoured for more folk sentiment (accordion, etc.). The loudest in his critiques and repetition of the spring movement’s objections was Janša. Later, at the parallel celebration in that pre-election year, Alojz Peterle (“spring coalition”) spoke thus: “We’ve been recognized by the world (...) yet in our own homeland, those who monopolized the state’s celebrations force us into some macabre symbolism (...) entirely out of tune with the newfound spirit of Slovenian freedom” (Simonič 2009: 290).

In my research interview, Janša measured the success of his parallel celebrations on the Congress Square by their attendance. While the official celebrations between 1995 and 1999 were “academic”, enshrined within the intellectual circles present in the Cankarjev Dom (Cankar Hall) Cultural Centre, the opposition organized theirs in the open air. In the

spatial-symbolic sense, the perceived popularity of the spring concept of Statehood Day certainly surpassed the official one (Simonič 2009: 289–310). In this way, the opposition parties indirectly pressured the organizers of the official celebration into outdoor sites for their events post-2000.

### **„Official celebrations are too expensive”**

In socialism, the authorities threw feasts for the participating artists and staff: food and drink for everyone – but no artist fees; after the independence, in addition to losing much of their spirit of free-for-all revelry, the bacchanalias were replaced by payment for the contributed work – as explained by a producer employed at the Cankar Hall. Janša claimed, the official celebrations were “lavishly inefficient” because the “court directors and artist” as he described them were making huge profits. Those in the Coordinating Committee defended their case by highly expensive preparations: the rental of parking space at Republic square and technical equipment, the production services of the Cankar Hall, security etc., with perhaps one fifth of the total funding reaching the artists according to Meta Hočevar, director of the 2002 official celebration in the Republic Square.

Janša’s government in 2004 shrank the state celebration budget, and in the crisis year 2010, and the succeeding government of Borut Pahor once again reduced it. In Slovenia, the National Commemorative Events Office then organized five yearly public celebrations: the Prešeren Day Slovene Cultural Holiday (8 February), the Day of Uprising Against Occupation (27 April), the Statehood Day (25 June), the Reformation Day (31 October), and the Independence and Unity Day (26 December). Some countries, conversely, had but a single state-organised celebration in their calendar year (Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Italy, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Great Britain), while others had four at most (Finland, Germany, Romania) (Škrinjar 2010).

### **„The official narrative and symbols celebrate the socialist state and ideology”**

This set of objections put forth by Janša and some other spring politicians (Lojze Peterle, Ivan Oman, dr. Franc Zagožen, Janez Podobnik, also dr. Dimitrij Rupel and others) belongs to the framework of the dominant symbols, myths and narrations (Turner 1967: 32–3). In 1996, in the great excitement of the initial parallel celebrations, Janša said on the Congress Square: “Slovenia is unique in the fact that our ruling party names itself liberal (LDS), yet collects signatures for the preservation of monuments to communism and its revolution.”

At the unique satirical official celebration of 2010, screen-written by the comedian Jurij Zrnec, some members of the “right-wing” politics and certain journalists were once again irked by the symbolism reminiscent of socialist times: the red five-pointed star, the setting of the stage before the Revolution Monument, even the “conspicuous flowers” around the stage (Kolšek 2010: 2; Delič 2010: 2).

After his unexpected victory in the 2011 early parliamentary election, the new government of Janez Janša fiercely attacked the symbolical domain of the historical left. In the spring of 2012, “due to the financial crisis”, the celebration of the Day of Uprising Against Occupation (27 April, a holiday from the socialist era then named the Day of the Liberation Front) was cancelled. The June Statehood Day was organized by Janša in provocative tones, teasing with cultural posturing and barbs, while his impish attitude towards the institution of the president supposedly made foreign diplomats uneasy (Frelar 2012: 16). Quite an uproar in the public media and veteran’s organizations was caused by Janša’s ban on the participation of standard-bearers whose banners portrayed the red star of the Partisan resistance (featured in former Yugoslavia’s crest and flag) – or as he claimed “the symbol of the oppressive former state and its invading army”. “Majer” (Janša’s purported pseudonym in the anonymous agitations of the SDS against Balkan immigrants) renounces the old Bolshevik symbols and colours, yet continues to cultivate the Bolshevik mentality (Miheljak 2012: 16). The celebration of the Slovenian independence in December 2013 was again explicitly boycotted by members of the SDS party for the same reason (Kocjan 2016: 5).

### **„Official celebrations are godless”**

Representing the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Alojzij Šuštar in 1991 addressed the crowd of the Statehood Day celebration as the first and last-ever representative of the RCC, blessing the independence linden tree on the Republic Square.<sup>6</sup> 25 years later, Janša referred to this in his parallel 2016 celebration, stating that Šuštar’s microphone was “on that day muted”, so that “our linden and land have still not heard their blessing”.

Dr. Andrej Bajuk, in the spirit of coalition in 2000, uttered at the celebration a special thanks to the Church – for its contributions to the preservation of the Slovenian stat (Čokl 2001: 4). Re-evangelisation pressures increased after the year 1997, when Argentine-Slovene dr. Franc Rode became the Slovenian Church Metropolitan (Piano, Poglajen and STA 1999: 2). Simultaneously, the Roman Catholic Church strengthened its material base

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<sup>6</sup> After successful tourist television commercial “Slovenija moja dežela” (Slovenia, my Country) in 1986 (cf. Klaus 2010), linden was promoted as a symbol of Slovene-ness. This nature-culture metaphor marked longevity, community (traditionally planted at village agoras and churches), and lastly statehood (Kos 2011).

through favourable procedures of denationalisation, and its active participation in securities trading (Fittipaldi 2016).

Let me share another example from 2012, when Janša's government demanded the national anthem be added two previously non-customary stanzas of France Prešeren's *A Toast*: "God save our land and nation, and all Slovenes where'er they live".

### **„Official celebrations fail to appreciate the Slovenian Armed Forces”**

During preparations for the celebration of independence declaration of 1991, some proposed the square should welcome the greatest possible number of soldiers so that Slovenia's sovereignty is on full display. Director Drago Pečko then opposed such "posturing" and "boisterousness". In the end, the middle ground was the presence of a small contingent of the Territorial Defence.<sup>7</sup> At the final parallel celebration in 2016, Janša in his speech ridiculed those who in 1991 wished to mark the independence without the army that had defended it, and "if with the army, then without the arms!" The audience erupted into laughter.

In his closing speech on the Congress Square in 1995, Janša rallied the attendance to the defence of Slovenian borders: "We shall not relinquish the Piran Bay, the Razkrižje, the Trdina Peak, nor our Primorska, and neither Slovenia!" (Taškar 1995: 2). Columnist Miheljčak was critical once more: "The ceding and conquest of territory is the vocabulary of that metaphorical (mob rule, genocidal etc.) aspect of the Balkans to which Janša keeps dragging us back" (1995: 3).

Posturing with the military returned in 2006 at the 15th anniversary of the Slovenian independence. President dr. Janez Drnovšek, who in 1995 and 1996 as then-PM had no reservations about army displays, strongly opposed the military parade proposed by Janša's Governmental Committee for Celebrations. Drnovšek even fired an internal policy advisor for not arguing against the parade at the meeting of the Coordinating Committee (Central Redaction and STA 2006: 2). In late May, the parade was then officially cancelled, and the Slovenian Army's appearance limited to its honorary corps (Pečauer 2007: 2).

A day after the state commemoration of Slovenia's 25th anniversary (2016), Janša organized a parallel public event titled *For my Slovenia*, where many of the spring politicians were set to appear as usual. In a novel turn of events, his standard political companions decided to refrain from making the Statehood Day a field of political confrontation, cancelling their participation one after another. The committee consisted of representatives of civil society organizations, Catholic movements and political parties

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<sup>7</sup> Third or civil military branch in Yugoslavia, later transformed into Slovenian defence forces.

originating in the DEMOS coalition (the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia) or “those that continue its legacy”. The president of the organization committee of the 2016 parallel celebration was dr. Janez Juhant, professor of moral theology. The committee included the Society for the Values of the Slovenian Independence as the chief organizer of the event, Koordinacija 2020, the Worldwide Slovenian Congress, Assembly for the Republic, the Expatriate Society (*Slovenija v svetu*), Awakening Slovenia (*Prebudimo Slovenijo*) and other like-minded affiliates (H. T. 2016).

The presence of the Armed Forces provoked some exasperation, since the celebration was co-organized by a political party (SDS), a circumstance forbidden by the Defence Act. Actor Tone Kuntner and Janša concluded their appearance with an appeal to the Lord, the first with his expanded performance of the national anthem, and the second with his final utterance: “God save Slovenia!”, capping his speech to the frequent chanting: “Janša, Janša, Janša...”.

### The rules of engagement

In 1991, not all citizens of Slovenia entered the national community with equal political-economic capital – they emerged from an already specifically class-stratified socialist society (Đilas 2014 [1957], Šetinc 1980, comp. Michnik 2012). On the political-ritual plane, Slovenia during the period 1988–2016 reveals itself as a playground of two centralist ideologies (Breznik 1996). Given the historical sequencing of these dominant ideologies and models of managing the Slovenian society in the 20th century (e.g. political economy before the World War II [dr. Korošec], or after it [Kardelj]), and in light of the apparent seats of authority of both the competing groups, I would characterise their conflict as a struggle of *the centre with the centre*. Namely, both their ideologies are anchored in the 20th century, and both held their provincial or republic governance in Ljubljana, the capital. In their mutually empowering emergence following Slovenia’s independence, Anton Kramberger (1999a, b) saw a significant yet questionable attempt at setting up a system of two elites within the small Slovenian society.

The victorious Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) opted for a modernized version of post-socialist mythology that contained the self-evidence and finality of authority; after each election, the question of competence for the preparation and aesthetics of the statehood celebrations was in principle solved. To note, the dominant media (*Delo*, *Dnevnik*, *Večer*) showed a tendency to depict the LDS as the young forces of reason and progress while Janša especially was presented as hypocritical, rude and conspiratorial, his voters as rowdy drunks or perhaps religious zealots, uncultured simpletons. Certainly, the assortment of hearsay, accusations, charges and protest Janša managed to compile

in the past three decades absolutely and by far surpasses the achievements of any other Slovenian politician. Likewise, the positions held by Janša during this epoch dwarf the reach of most Slovene statesmen (e.g. Minister of Defence during wartime 1991, President of the EU Council in 2008, president of the perpetually strong SDS party with a running mandate of twenty-five years).

Both political fractions of the ruling class – the “historical right” and “historical left” with their retrograde ideological focus and similar progressive (neoliberal) preoccupations – behaved in a strange and conservative manner. Especially from the perspective of the younger generations who could not, or would not identify with *independence* merits, ideological clash over means of production in the World War II, neither with the *privatisation* in the first years of transition. They, as subjects of the information age, likewise did not resonate with massive-scale modernist staged celebrations of the political community and its heroes (nationalism as a civil religion).

Janša constantly deconstructed or reconstructed the symbolical space of the nation and its social fabric. His repeating and meddling interferences – brash and caustic – bothered many and empowered others, and in parts of the population he increasingly became someone who is headstrong, intelligent, capable; as well as a resentful authoritarian ever-breaking pragmatic rules to attain victory and enforce new normative rules (values, symbols, laws, curriculum; see the final three presented sets of his objections). In our case, the processual offences are Janša’s absence from the official celebrations, the masterminding of parallel celebrations, heavy-handed interference in the script of 2000, falsification of records, arguments with Drnovšek in 2006 and 2007, prohibition of participating symbolism and so forth. Janša’s frequent disrespect of protocol rules (How to win without cheating? How to cheat without getting disqualified?; Bailey 2001: 6) also cast a shadow of doubt over the normative rules and institutions represented by Janša and the spring bloc.

Adding to this his many scandals, it becomes clear Janša cannot be treated as a victim of circumstances (structure – “forces of continuity”), but rather as an active co-creator of opportunity (manipulation).

When discussing Janez Janša and other figureheads of the Slovenian right-wing (and left-wing) spectrum, it is at times difficult to ascertain who is instrumentalizing whom: how, exactly, the various centres of economic, expatriate and religious power subjugate and leverage particular political parties, or how some political agents develop the essential social networks and means that allow them to compete on the political stage (Bax 1991; Lewellen 2003: 95–9).



Just as the years between 1994 and 1996 were critical for Janša's alliances and transitional strategies, the year 2016 was critical for his status, when the other spring politics members have decided that unity (not schism) during the official Statehood Day was a protocolary and normative rule, participating instead in the official ceremony.

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