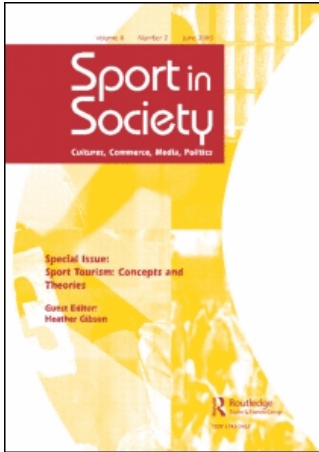


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'Šatan is God!': Re-imagining Contemporary Slovak National Identity through Sport

Peter Barrer

This essay focuses upon how Slovak national identity has been affected by the Slovak men's ice hockey team's rise from international obscurity to being crowned 2002 IIHF World Champions. Following a backgrounding of spectator sports in Slovakia, sport's relatively new role as an identifying marker within contemporary society is examined with an emphasis on the participation of the Slovak population within the mediatized sporting experience. A key contemporary sporting rivalry will be examined through an analysis of the sporting relationship with the Czech Republic and its relevance towards Slovak self-identification in the 'post-Czechoslovakia' era. The media image of the Slovak men's ice hockey team will be contrasted with that of the political elite and the team's impact upon broader national mythologies will be examined. In conclusion, this essay will highlight how Slovak national identity has been redefined through the indices analysed.

Sport and the Imagined Community

Regularly I answer the invitation to celebrate national sporting triumphs. If a citizen from the homeland runs quicker or jumps higher than foreigners, I feel pleasure. Why, I do not know. I want the national team to beat the teams of other countries, scoring more goals, runs or whatever. International matches seem so much more important than domestic ones: there is an extra thrill of competition with something indefinable at stake. [1]

Michael Billig's confessionary statement illustrates what a number of us feel about international sport and the role it plays in our personal constructions of the national community. International sport constitutes one of the major rituals underpinning the concept of the nation as an 'imagined community' within advanced societies. [2] There are two common convictions within sports discourses concerning

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as the national collective is reached when commonly-recognized symbols and practices of national allegiance are ritualistically engaged in. [13] The national sports audience – strangers, men and women, sharing perhaps nothing more than their common allegiance – are momentarily brought together as a noisy cohesion collectively recognizing and exalting in unity.

Stadia, pubs, restaurants, city squares and homes are some of the more popular locations of this national communion through sport. They momentarily become celebratory spaces of refuge from everyday life and a ‘theatre’ where sports audience members symbolically bond with each other, demonstrating their common or opposing allegiances through dress, decoration and extraordinary dramatic gesture, and in the process symbolizing their nation as much as the sports performers themselves. [14] All involved – from the sports performers, coaches, journalists, sponsors, to the audience itself – become ‘players all’ within a totalizing ‘sporting experience’ of which the actual match is only one integral part increasingly inseparable from the larger spectacle. [15]

It is not only on the level of extraordinary sporting occasion that mediatized sport plays its role as a generator of national identity. Mainstream media outlets dedicate considerable space to sport, placing it alongside domestic and international affairs to define it as an important part of the national life. In addition to the media, dedicated national agencies work towards the continual development of international sportive prowess in the grooming of elite sports performers and in the bidding for rights to host prestigious sporting events. As an exceptional flag-waving occasion and on a far more subtle everyday level, sport has become embedded within the contemporary nation’s common sense as a form of ‘banal nationalism’, which Michael Billig asserts is the prevailing means by which the construct of national identity is reproduced through a consistency of officially-sanctioned ideological habits. [16]

While the above discussion has averred the general importance of sport to contemporary constructions of national identity, there exist a myriad of multifaceted connections and complexities within individual national contexts. Bearing these complexities in mind, this essay will now attempt to place the hitherto theoretical discussion into a concrete setting by examining the national impact of one sporting event – the triumph of the Slovak men’s ice hockey team at the 2002 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Championships held in Sweden.

Backgrounding Sport in Slovakia

Modern organized sport was first developed in Slovakia during the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–38). The inter-war republic had one of the strongest European traditions in football and ice hockey, yet sports programmes and facilities in the Czech lands were far more developed than in Slovakia and hence Slovak representation within Czechoslovak national teams was a rarity before the Second World War. [17] The clerico-fascist Slovak state (1939–45), a collaborative satellite of the Third Reich, saw the first ever operation of Slovak national sports leagues and Slovakia’s

independent participation in quasi-international sporting fixtures. This process was reversed when Czechoslovakia was reformed in 1945, though Slovak participation within domestic leagues and at international level subsequently increased in the latter part of the twentieth century. [18]

During communist party rule (1948–89), the regime centrally administered all sports development in Czechoslovakia and implemented the Soviet ideological model of using sport as a means of preparing citizens for the ‘work and defence’ of the country. [19] Sports clubs were named after those state factories, mining concerns, state security forces and armed forces which sponsored them, giving rise to such inventive team names such as *Plastika Nitra*, *Baník Prievidza*, *Červená Hviezda Bratislava* and *Dukla Banská Bystrica*. Top sports performers were often falsely employed by their sponsors to maintain the illusion of amateurism in what was essentially a quasi-professional elite sports culture. [20] Events of mass public participation, such as the *Biela Stopa SNP* cross-country skiing event and the now defunct *Spartakiada*, were manipulated by communist party ideologues to appear as ‘spontaneous manifestations’ illustrating apparent and widespread public support for the regime. [21] Czech and Slovak sporting culture was however not as ideologically charged as those of their counterparts in East Germany. Genuine national pride was felt by the Czech and Slovak public in the achievements of their sportspeople in the realization that international sport provided one of the only ways Czechoslovakia could express an identity independent from the Soviet Union, which strongly dictated the political and economic development of the country for most of communist party rule. [22]

All the vestiges of the Soviet-style sports system were dismantled following the political changes of November 1989. State funding was reduced and sports administration decentralized, leaving sports clubs reliant upon self-financing, private sponsorship and voluntary assistance for further survival. [23] Slovak sports bodies suffer from low levels of corporate sponsorship and one of the lowest per-capita levels of state funding for sports in Europe: facts which hamper the retainment of elite performers in Slovak national leagues and the grassroots development of domestic sporting talent. [24]

The impending split of Czechoslovakia in late 1992 saw the formation of a Slovak Olympic Committee and the re-establishment of Slovak national sports leagues. Since 1993, Slovakia’s international sporting achievements have been primarily in the fields of water sports, tennis, men’s ice hockey and women’s basketball. The Slovak public follow the achievements of their elite sports performers through the dedicated daily newspaper ‘*Šport*’ and sports programming on television and radio. National representative sports performers often compete in leagues and events abroad, causing a ‘brawn drain’ [25] of talent from the domestic leagues. However, they readily return to Slovakia to don the national colours in international fixtures. Like elsewhere in the world, the Slovak media gaze is primarily on male sports performers. With the exception of women’s basketball, Slovak sportswomen attract only sporadic media attention which tends to focus on specific personalities (such as *Daniela Hantuchová* and *Martina Moravcová*) rather than offering regular coverage of developments within Slovak women’s sport.

Ice hockey in Slovakia has a tradition stretching back to the hosting of the 1925 European Championships and has profited from a post-1980s decline in Slovak football performance standards and spectatorship levels to assume the mantle of Slovakia's flagship sport. [26] Representing Czechoslovakia, Slovak ice hockey players took part in some of the most memorable matches the sport has ever known and contributed significantly to the sporting mythologies of the republic. [27] The mythicization of the Slovak men's ice hockey team and their journey from obscurity towards claiming a place amongst the IIHF ice hockey elite has become an important part of national identity formation within Slovakia, yet there are significant problems facing the domestic development of the sport, particularly in relation to ice hockey facilities and the high financial costs of involvement thrust upon Slovak families. [28]

Slovak and Czech Sporting rivalry

The creation of two separate Czech and Slovak states triggered a keen sense of sporting rivalry towards the Czech Republic within the Slovak sports audience which did not exist to any significant level during the common state. [29] This sense of rivalry has manifested itself at times in a highly unfriendly fashion: a football World Cup qualifying match in 1997 between Slovakia and the Czech Republic for instance witnessed the mass chanting of 'České kurvy!' ['Czech whores!'] amongst a 32,000-strong Bratislava crowd. [30] The performance of such crude gestures *en masse* has been directed at other international sides visiting Bratislava – as was evidenced by the widely-reported abuse directed at black players of the England football team during a match in 2002. Anti-Czech and other racist outbursts from the sports audience are however more of an exception than the norm within Slovak sports culture. [31]

Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the IIHF demoted Slovak ice hockey to the status of a Group C qualifier within the international hierarchy; whereas the Czech Republic assumed the place of the former common state amongst the elite nations in Group A – this appropriation of Czechoslovakia's elite placing by the Czech successor team was much to the chagrin of the Slovak Ice Hockey Association (SZLH) and the wider Slovak public. Following its establishment, the Slovak men's ice hockey team suffered from a string of losses to the Czech team, which became commonly dubbed the 'Český komplex' ['Czech complex']. This jinx was not considered broken until Slovakia defeated the Czech Republic at the 2003 IIHF World Championships. [32] There is an evident apathy and antagonism towards Czech sporting endeavour within Slovak sporting culture which appears to contradict the intensely positive nature of the Czech and Slovak bilateral relationship, yet there are no current social, political or economic difficulties between the two nations upon which such sentiments can be substantially based. The Czechs have been a long-standing point of primary evaluation by which Slovaks measure their own collective well-being and the Czech Republic remains Slovakia's most significant and closest Other in terms of people-to-people interactions, cultural links and bilateral economic relationship. While appearing antagonistic, there is no genuine anti-Czech malice present in Slovak fandom

practices. In contrast to other similarly close nations, this sporting rivalry has not been primarily shaped by the mass media, [33] nor does it act as a substitute for the political nationalism of a non-dominant party within a 'multinational' Nation State. [34] While no doubt confusing some outside observers – and indeed the Czechs themselves [35] – the Slovak reluctance to support Czech sides can be simply explained as another way in which the Slovak sports audience seeks to reaffirm its distinctiveness as an equal and separate national identity within the international sports arena.

Despite having an air of condescension about it, common Czech views and stereotypes of Slovaks portray a sense of lingering protective fraternity. [36] In recent Czech-Slovak ice hockey encounters, resonances of 'Československóó!' chanting around the entire stadium audience further illustrate a feeling of commonality felt by the Czech and Slovak sports audience. Moreover, Czech sports fans readily support Slovak sports performers, as 'Czechoslovaks', once their own representatives have been eliminated from a tournament – a sense of camaraderie which is not returned by Slovak sports audience to the same degree. [37] The main reasons behind the benevolence of Czech support for Slovakia lie within the high level of mutual cultural familiarity, the ease of integration by Slovak immigrants into Czech society and a sense among the Czech sports audience of being a 'more successful older brother' to their hitherto 'less successful' neighbours. [38]

From Ice Hockey Zeros to National Heroes

Despite their demotion to Group C, the Slovak men's ice hockey team gained almost immediate recognition as an elite side by finishing sixth at the 1994 Winter Olympics and securing regular participation in the IIHF World Championships (Group A) by 1996. Slovakia reached the gold medal match of this tournament for the first time on 14 May 2000. On this day, public and private spaces around Slovakia filled with young crowds, unseen in magnitude since November 1989, gathering to communally watch the live images beamed from St Petersburg of the final match, wherein the Slovak team were defeated 3–5 by the Czech Republic. Despite this loss to their arch-rivals, the Slovak audience celebrated long into the night, displaying a collective appetite for national celebration reminiscent of the 'hockey riots' of 1969. [39]

In contrast, the disappointed Slovak public and mass media scarcely reacted when the Slovak team returned to Bratislava following a dismal performance at the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. [40] Yet within three months, the national side was to perform a remarkable turnaround in form and transfix a nation's attention in the process as they became 2002 IIHF World Champions. Following the World Championship semi-final win over Sweden, an ice-hockey hysteria enveloped the Slovak media, sports audience and wider population. Dominant discourses of everyday life were put aside for the weekend as seemingly everyone prepared to watch the final match against Russia on 11 May 2002. Whole chartered planeloads of Slovak supporters flew to Gothenburg at the last minute, whereas most people communally gathered before television sets and projectors in public and private spaces in the hope

of witnessing victory and a rare explosion of Slovak national pride similar to that which had occurred two years earlier. [41]

The live free-to-air telecast of the final allowed the whole public to participate in the event as ‘post fans’, detached from the event by distance yet connected via technology, within an exceptionally intense ‘carnavalesque atmosphere’ transforming the televised hockey rink into a dais and otherwise mundane everyday spaces into areas of extraordinary congregation. [42] When Peter Bondra scored the winning goal in the final minutes of play, there ensued widespread and fundamentally inclusive expressions of sporting nationalism transcending age, gender and ethnicity, which contradicted the divisive nature of those nationalisms present within Slovak politics. [43] The nationwide spontaneous jubilation which this event set off constituted quite literally the largest and loudest ever celebration of Slovak nationhood, easily exceeding in scope and size those crowds which had celebrated Slovak political sovereignty on 1 January 1993.

The Slovak double cross and national anthem – symbols which had in the past been insincerely used by nationalist politicians and skinheads – were reclaimed and rehabilitated by the mainstream population through the extensive victory celebrations. Face-painted strangers greeted and shared with each other, waved flags, sang and chanted. They became ‘players’ within the media sports text itself: for not only did they watch the match and celebrate its outcome, they also watched images of themselves celebrating on the screen. Sporting the national colours in any way possible, this collection of individuals and strangers amassed in public spaces formed a sportive ‘neo-tribe’ – a diffuse and temporary collective sharing both the sporting experience and a common tenor of reciprocal Slovak sportive nationalism. [44]

The amassed crowds were young and carried a large female contingent. While having a marginal presence within the Slovak media gaze as sports performers, women symbolized the Slovak neo-tribe to at least the same extent as their male compatriots. Beyond the Slovak sports audience, the entire country seemed to participate regardless of one’s inclination towards ice hockey, or indeed sport in general. The strong sense of temporal connection engendered between the sports performers, coaches, sports officials, broadcasters, journalists and the public was made clear in the linguistic practices within the Slovak media at the time of victory. [45] The rituals of the most committed Slovak ice hockey fans became common property and were copied and transmitted nationwide: Alongside the national anthem, there was the constant chanting of ‘heja, heja, Slovenskóoo!’ [‘Hey-a, hey-a, Slovakia!']; ‘Šatan je Boh!’ [‘Šatan is God!']; ‘My sme majstri!’ [‘We are the champions!'] and ‘ciky-caky-ciky-cak, hej, hej, hej!’ [no translation possible] The crowds sang in Slovak and English (notably Queen’s ‘We Are the Champions’). A dedicated pop single entitled ‘My na to máme’ [‘We are good enough’], recorded two years earlier by Milan Špaňo, received constant airplay throughout the Championships and semantically placed the whole population of Slovakia alongside the men’s ice hockey team as indeed being ‘good enough’ to achieve significant international success.

The sports performers were no longer strangers, but rather close acquaintances of the Slovak public: the captain Miroslav Šatan for instance became ‘Miro’ and following

victory simply ‘Boh’ [‘God’]; Ladislav Nagy became ‘Laci’; Richard Lintner, ‘Rišo’; Žigmund Pálffy, ‘Žigi’; Peter Bondra, ‘Peťo’ and Jozef Stümpel, ‘Jožo’. The team were treasured sons of the Slovak neo-tribe, who were collectively celebrating a national milestone. By contrast, such widespread affection has eluded Slovakia’s political elite, whose adoring circle is restricted to small bands of loyal party supporters.

Politicians as Anti-models

The juxtaposition of the Slovak men’s ice hockey team and Slovakia’s politicians reveals some interesting contrasts. Slovakia’s political elite – many of whom tacitly supported the communist party regime – enjoy one of the lowest levels of public trust in Europe. [46] These image problems did not however deter a range of political parties from associating themselves with the ice hockey team’s success in public statements and publicity campaigns. [47] Some politicians were more brash than others in claiming personal ‘involvement’ in the team’s victory. The controversial former prime minister Vladimír Mečiar, playfully ignoring the funding crisis within Slovak sport, made one of the more remarkable statements by rationalizing that he was ultimately responsible for the rise of Slovak ice hockey due to his role in the creation of a sovereign Slovak Republic. [48] The Speaker of Parliament, Jozef Migaš, and the Slovak President, Rudolf Schuster, scrambled to get aboard a taxpayer-funded government flight to Gothenburg in order to be present at the final matches. The exorbitance of this gesture in light of the government’s refusal earlier that year to increase state funding to the cash-strapped SZL’H was greeted with much disdain by the Slovak public, who summed up public feelings towards those politicians who were ‘rinkside’ with loud booing and whistling every time the politicians’ images appeared on screen. [49] The stark contrast in public sentiment towards the Slovak men’s ice hockey team and Slovakia’s politicians was poignantly summarized by President Schuster, who commented to the Swedish media following the Slovak team’s victory that: ‘[the Slovak men’s ice hockey team] has done more for its nation than all its politicians combined’. [50]

Well aware of public perceptions placing the ‘hockey heroes’ in opposition to those ‘political villains’ sitting before him in the Slovak legislature, team captain Miro Šatan took the opportunity to give a moralising lecture to Slovakia’s members of parliament upon the virtues of solidarity and the responsibilities these politicians carried to the Slovak citizenry:

I want to use this occasion to tell you that we gained this victory because we bonded and created a great team. In doing this we set a great example for this country. You people have a chance to do a great deal for Slovakia. But in order to do this, you have to put aside your personal interests and become a part of the team. [51]

Perhaps more renowned for being mired in financial scandal and political disunity than for acting as stimuli towards national solidarity, Slovakia’s politicians were left in no doubt of the vast gulf separating them from the likes of Šatan and the other players as national role models in the public eye.

World Famous in Slovakia, but is Slovakia World Famous?

‘Our lads united the whole nation – something which no politician can ever achieve’; ‘I never thought that with my whole family I would sing our national anthem with my hand on my heart. That moment came and I am immeasurably happy that I have lived to see all of our Slovakia, at least momentarily, finally unite’; ‘Let’s hope that from Saturday the world will no longer confuse us with Slovenia’ [52] – comments such as these resounded in the Slovak media on 13 May 2002 in reaction to the success of 26 elite sports performers. Representing a country comparatively small in economic stature and international profile to its opponents, the Slovak men’s ice hockey team had humbled Canada and twice defeated Sweden and Russia to claim the title of 2002 World Champions, sending amassed television audiences in Slovakia and the Czech Republic into euphoric hysterics.

In spite of its title, the international significance of the IIHF World Championships is limited outside of Europe. North American sports media barely covers the event, being ritualistically far more focussed on the concurrently running NHL Stanley Cup playoffs. Some competing nations, notably Canada, regularly send ‘second-string’ sides stacked with non-NHL players in the perception that ‘the Worlds’ are more of a training camp for upcoming new talent rather than a premier international competition. The Swedish sports audience showed only a passing interest in the 2002 event, leaving the stadium half empty in a qualifying round game between the host nation and Slovakia. [53] Yet despite the rather small amount of world attention this event attracted, the Slovak men’s ice hockey team’s crowning as 2002 World Champions was of huge domestic significance as the event created a forum within which Slovak national identity could be reappraised, reformed and ‘re-imagined’ through sporting success.

The economic centralism of professional ice hockey around the NHL meant that the Slovak team played in a fashion little different from those who they played against – making any considerations of a distinctive ‘national playing style’ [54] a difficult source from which to draw any conclusive connections regarding Slovak national identity or stereotypes. Perhaps a more useful connection could be located in the apparent ethnic diversity of the players themselves: many of whom sported German, Ukrainian, Hungarian and Czech surnames. Yet while being an attractive symbolism, this does not in itself offer any redefinition of Slovak national identity along the lines of a ‘cultural mosaic’. [55] The backgrounds of the team members after all merely reflect Slovakia’s pre-national heritage as a multicultural society and a veritable goulash of established regional ethnic strands. Moreover, Slovakia’s Roma population remain completely excluded from any such representation. Rather, the true significance of the team’s success in terms of Slovak national identity is that it provided an opportunity for Slovak society to *reflect upon* itself and encouraged a change in domestic self-perceptions of the Slovak national community.

In 2001, the film director Martin Šulík commented that Slovak culture suffered from a constant rejection of the national past, which had in turn resulted in a loss of cultural memory and a negative self-identification as ‘not being Czech, Hungarian or

Polish' rather than along lines of a positive identity. [56] Such negative constructions of Slovakness were countered and turned on their head during the 2002 World Championships through the association of contemporary Slovak national identity with sporting success. For Soňa Szomolányi, the amassed crowds represented the emergence of a capable and confident Slovak nation which had disassociated itself from the negative and troublesome discourses of the past:

For the first time in recent memory, a public demonstration in Slovakia had nothing to do with history, oppression, politics or nationalism. It was a celebration of Slovakia's potential, an acknowledgement the country is capable of taking its place alongside global partners. We now have a new Slovak generation – that of 2002. [57]

For Elena Akácsová, this sporting occasion provided a significant stimulus finally allowing Slovak nationhood to be positively envisaged:

The hockey players showed their frustrated compatriots that to be born in Slovakia need not be by law a tragic fate, predestining one to failure and a role as life-long outsiders. They showed that with badly dealt cards it is possible through one's own efforts, talents and character to not only achieve a draw, but win over the outside world. [58]

Akácsová's comments illustrate how the Slovak men's ice hockey team provided the population with a positive 'demo-meritocratic' model of nationhood [59] – a pathway through which Slovak society could negotiate the contradictory demands of a contemporary multicultural society by championing both collective effort and individualism. Their success temporarily created both a practical prescription for Slovak social development and a sense of national solidarity which had been previously missing from the social environment.

Concluding Remarks

There have been more recent developments outside of the sporting arena, notably within international politics and economics, which have given Slovak citizens further opportunities to 'wave their flag' with pride. However, the 'horizontal comradeship' of Slovak national identity is a feeling only vividly experienced on exceptional occasions and is not a part of everyday life. Appropriating and basking in the sporting success of the Slovak men's ice hockey team – as embodied in the cry 'We are the champions!' – does not after all challenge the fundamentally individualistic world views people hold. The fandom centred around the Slovak team needs to rather be seen as an incorporated part of dominant consumer practices. The reimagining of Slovak national identity through sport as analysed above was after all a significant economic activity, witnessing record levels of television viewership and sales of national regalia, comestibles and beverages. Through intense media promotion and its association with sporting success and consumer pleasures, Slovak national identity became an attractive 'brand' to the domestic population and one commercially viable for sponsors and advertisers.

Communist party rule in Slovakia had witnessed the forced presentation of 'spontaneous manifestations' of collective identity which could not survive beyond the

oppressive protection offered them by the totalitarian regime. By contrast, the sporting experience of the 2002 IIHF World Championships brought with it a 'pleasure saturated reminder' of national identity which carried no sense of permanence, responsibility or commitment. Rather than forcing participation in the ideological nation, the sporting success of the Slovak men's ice hockey team simply invited public involvement in a pleasurable and positive reaffirmation of their post-Czechoslovak identity.

Notes

- [1] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 125.
- [2] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6–7.
- [3] See Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 120–5; Jarvie, 'Sport, Nationalism and Cultural Identity', 78; Johnes, "Every Day When I Wake Up I Thank the Lord I'm Welsh", 52; Rowe, *Popular Cultures*, 102; Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization*, 1; Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 78; Rowe, McKay and Miller, 'Come Together: Sport, Nationalism and the Media Image', 123; Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell, *Sport and National Identity in the European Media*, 122; Smith, 'Black against Gold', 184.
- [4] Rowe, *Popular Cultures*, 136; Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, 22; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 142–3; MacClancy, 'Sport, Identity and Ethnicity', 4; Vande Berg, 'The Sports Hero Meets Mediated Celebrityhood', 152; Marks, 'The French National Team and National Identity', 49–53.
- [5] See Edensor, *National Identity*, 78. In contrast to the interdependency of national political and economic structures, national identities within international sport remain clearly demarcated from each other. Most of a nation's sports audience can be readily assumed to support their own nation over others, regardless of the international prowess of their elite sports performers or their ethnicity. In this way, a nation's sportive nationalism may contradict elements of its political nationalism. See also Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization*, 167, 177.
- [6] National identity is considered by corporations to be a more widespread and stable identity marker for consumers than corporate brand loyalties. International sporting events and elite national sides are therefore highly attractive sponsorship options. See Miller *et al.*, 'Playing the World', 498.
- [7] Vande Berg, 'The Sports Hero Meets Mediated Celebrityhood', 138.
- [8] Rowe, McKay and Miller, 'Come Together', 123; Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 175. Male sports performers' larger spectatorship, media space and sponsorship can be explained as a reproduction of gendered body stereotypes and a reflection of gender inequalities in other social domains (Rowe, *Popular Cultures*, 135). There are exceptions to the marginality of female sports in the mass media. Consider the significant domestic coverage given to New Zealand's women's netball team and the 1999 United States women's soccer team, who in that year received the highest ever local ratings for the sport on US television. For more on this, see Miller, *Sportsex*, 127–34.
- [9] David Rowe (*Popular Cultures*, 134) suggests that women are lured into sporting partisanship through a 'double ideological movement' which differentiates performance by gender yet unites the sports audience as a nation.
- [10] Whannel, *Fields in Vision*, 1–3.
- [11] *ibid.*, 123.
- [12] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7. Horizontal comradeship within national sports audiences is strikingly represented through the use of colour and visual symbols. South Korea, New Zealand and the Netherlands are three countries whose sporting audience, either in stadium attendance or watching on television, readily wear the appropriate colours whenever the Red Devils, All Blacks or Oranje play international matches.

- [13] Cerulo, *Identity Designs*, 17.
- [14] Rinehart, *Players All*, 6–7; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 143.
- [15] Rinehart, *ibid.*, xiii, 6–7.
- [16] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 6–7.
- [17] Vic Duke, 'Going to Market: Football in the Societies of Eastern Europe', 88–90.
- [18] The 1976 Czechoslovak football side (European Champions) had nine Slovak players, mostly from Slovan Bratislava. See Ian Chadband, 'Slovaks Inspired by Their Class of '76', *The Evening Standard*, 8 October 2002.
- [19] Riordan, 'Soviet-Style Sport in Eastern Europe: The End of an Era', 54–5; Crampton, 'Foreword', 675.
- [20] See Duke, 'Going to Market', 92–4; and his earlier work, 'Perestroika in Progress?: The Case of Spectator Sports in Czechoslovakia', 146–56.
- [21] Kostka, 'Czechoslovakia', 62. Biela Stopa is still held every year and no longer carries with it any political or military subtext. The last such vestige, the initials 'SNP', was removed in 2005. See 'Biela Stopa pozmenila názov', *Sme*, 10 February 2005.
- [22] Riordan, 'Soviet-Style Sport in Eastern Europe', 54.
- [23] Duke, 'Going to Market', 95–7.
- [24] Sekcia štátnej starostlivosti o šport [The Section for State Involvement in Sport], 'Zhodnotenie športovej reprezentácie slovenskej republiky a zámery do roku 2010' [An Evaluation of Sports Representation of the Slovak Republic and Aims to the Year 2010].
- [25] Maguire, *Global Sport*, 107–8.
- [26] See Duke, 'Perestroika in Progress', 147–9 and 'Going to Market', 97.
- [27] Among the most famous of all ice hockey matches were the two games played between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union at the 1969 IIHF World Championships less than six months after the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. The public celebrations in Prague and Bratislava following the two Czechoslovak victories constituted a symbolic sporting 'victory' in response to the effective loss of Czechoslovakia's political independence. These so-called 'hockey riots' created a pretext for the complete removal of the reformist Dubček government and the instalment of the pro-Moscow Husák regime by the Soviet leadership. See Crampton, 'Foreword', 677; Dubček, *Hope Dies Last: The Autobiography of Alexander Dubček*, 236–7.
- [28] Št'astný, 'Št'astný: říkali mi separatisto' ['Št'astný: They Called me a Separatist'].
- [29] Acrimony between Czech and Slovak club supporters within Czechoslovakia only became an issue, in football, once the split of the common state was already a surety. See Duke, 'Going to Market', 94.
- [30] Nicholson, 'Valentine's Wish: Nech sa darí Slovak hockey'.
- [31] This behaviour is well documented in other parts of Europe and can be considered to be an example of 'banal racism' – a form of crowd behaviour whereby, at the initial behest of a paltry minority, spontaneous taunting is directed at visiting sides by a larger spectator mass of 'strikingly ordinary people'. The confines of crowd anonymity and dramatic occasion allow the practice of conduct considered socially unacceptable in everyday life. See Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 'Racism in Football: Patterns of Continuity and Change', 71–87, and their subsequent 'Beyond the Racist/Hooligan Couplet: Race, Social Theory and Football Culture', 419–42.
- [32] '[ims 2003 v hokeji] [2003 Ice Hockey World Championships] Zlomený Český Komplex'.
- [33] As has been argued in the context of New Zealand-Australia sporting rivalry. See Smith, 'Black against Gold'.
- [34] As has been argued in the cases of Scotland and Catalonia. See Kowalski, "'Cry for Us, Argentina": Sport and National Identity in Late Twentieth-Century Scotland', 69–87; Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia?*

- [35] Czech News Agency (ČTK), 'Čechům někteří Slováci porážku přáli' ['Some Slovaks Were Wishing the Czechs Would be Defeated'].
- [36] Czech views of Slovakia include seeing them as an exotic and less culturally-developed branch of the same nation (a view now in considerable decline) and the more common perception of the Slovaks as occasionally 'ungrateful younger brothers' who benefited immensely from the close Czecho-Slovak political and economic union. See Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation*, 6, 104–13.
- [37] Jana Matúšová, 'Sme Majstri Sveta Alebo', *Slovo*, 15 May 2002.
- [38] Šídlo, 'Hokejové finále na MS vo svetle česko-slovenských vzťahov' ['The Hockey Final in Light of Czech-Slovak Relations'].
- [39] 'Cheering Crowds Salute Silver Slovaks', Tlačová Agentúra Slovenskej Republiky (TASR), 15 May 2000.
- [40] Deprived of using its best players in the preliminary rounds of the Olympic tournament because of a lockdown on players still competing in North America's National Hockey League (NHL), the Slovak men's ice hockey team was eliminated in the earliest stage of competition. The importance of playing for Slovakia and the bitter disappointment at elimination was made apparent in the tearful comments given by the Slovak captain Robert Petrovický to the media. See Matt McHale, 'Men's Hockey: Slovakia Fit to Be Tied; Palfy Sits as Slovaks Ousted with Assist from NHL; Latvia 6, Slovakia 6', *Los Angeles Daily News*, 11 February 2002; Slovenská Tlačová Agentúra (SITA), *Slovak Press Today*, 19 February 2002.
- [41] 'Chceme zlato, odkazujú fanúšikovia', ['The Fans Send Their Message: "We want gold"'] *Pravda*, 11 May 2002. Ice hockey success has had a significant positive effect on Slovak national pride which bucks the previous trend. Data collected during the 1990s, for example, ranked Slovakia as having one of the lowest levels of national pride of those nations assessed when measured upon common perceptions of 'national achievement' in the arts, sciences, economics and sport. See Evans and Kelley, 'National Pride in the Developed World: Survey Data from 24 Nations', 320–2.
- [42] Redhead, *Post-Fandom and the Millennial Blues*, 29; Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, 175.
- [43] *Pravda* (Bratislava), 13 May 2002; see also Soňa Szomolányi's comments cited in Nicholson's article, 'Hockey Title Marks Birth of New Generation'.
- [44] Michel Maffesoli's concept of the 'neo-tribe' is a useful way in which such gatherings around the televised broadcasting of a sporting event can be explained. Maffesoli stresses that individuals in post-industrial societies structure their own identities by having multiple memberships in multiple neo-tribes, which are typically 'characterized by fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal' (76). Neo-tribes forming around sports events have a lifespan centring only on the sports event itself and its associated media gaze. See Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes*.
- [45] *Majstri: zlatá cesta slovenských hokejistov na MS 2002* ['Champions: the golden journey of the Slovak ice hockey players at the 2002 World Championships'].
- [46] In contrast to the Czech lands, which underwent a process of collaborationist lustration after 1989, many of Slovakia's post-communist political and economic elite were from the 'grey zone' of technocrats and managers who had worked with the communist party and accepted rewards for their conformist behaviour. These 'grey-zoners' effectively reinvented themselves as free-market advocates and nationalist politicians in order to appear palatable to the Slovak public within the post communist political climate. See Brokl and Mansfeldova, 'Czech and Slovak Political and Parliamentary Elites', 131–40. The levels of trust Slovak citizens have in their political parties, government and parliament are among the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe according to Eurobarometer surveys (see Table 3.1c on page B-27 of The Gallup Organization, *CC-EB 2004.1 DG Press Annexes* (Budapest: EU Director-General of Press and Communication, 2004), Available: http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb61/cceb2004.1anx.pdf (accessed 4 June 2005).

- [47] 'Politicians Closer to Voters by Cheering Hockey Players On', ČTK (Bratislava, Prague), 26 April 2002; Jana Matúšová, 'Politici si chcú privlastniť slávu slovenských hokejistov' ['Politicians Want to Take Ownership of the Hockey Players' Glory'], *Slovo* 22 May, 2002.
- [48] Matúšová, 'Politici si chcú privlastniť slávu slovenských hokejistov'.
- [49] Katarina Dzurilová, 'Pictures with Hockey Players and a Hop by Special Plane', TASR (Bratislava), 11 May 2002; TASR (Bratislava), 15 May, 2002.
- [50] ['Toto mužstvo urobilo pre svoju vlasť viac ako všetci politici spoločne'], *Pravda*, 13 May 2002.
- [51] 'Few Medals, but a Great Speech', *The Slovak Spectator*, 20–26 May 2002, <http://www.slovak spectator.sk/clanok-9009.html> (accessed 14 January 2005).
- [52] ['Naši chalani zjednotili celý národ, toto sa nepodarí žiadnemu politikovi'], *Pravda*, 13 May 2002; ['Nikdy som si nemyslel, že budem s celou rodinou spievať našu hymnu s rukou na srdci. Tá chvíľa prišla a som nesmierne šťastný, že som sa dožil toho, ako sa celé naše Slovensko aspoň načas konečne zjednotilo'], *ibid.*; ['Dúfajme, od soboty si nás už svet nebude mýliť so Slovinskom'], Martin Hric, 'Zlato nad sol', *Pravda*, 13 May 2002.
- [53] Pierre Lebrun, 'Swedes Prefer Soccer over World Championships, Slovakia Goes Home Happy', *The Canadian Press*, 13 May 2002.
- [54] Imagined national playing styles, notably within football, have been argued to be reflective and promotive of national stereotypes. See Edensor, *National Identity*, 79–80; Lanfranchi and Wagg, 'Cathedrals in Concrete: Football in Southern European Society', 133–4.
- [55] As has been argued in the case of the 1998 World Cup French football team, whose most visible players were of immigrant and post-colonial backgrounds. See Jean-Marie Lanoë's remarks in Marks, 'The French National Team', 52.
- [56] Manetti, "'Our Cultural Identity Isn't Holding Up...": An Interview with Slovak Filmmaker Martin Šulík'.
- [57] Nicholson, 'Hockey Title Marks Birth of New Generation'.
- [58] ['Hokejisti však ukázali svojim znechuteným krajanom, že narodiť sa na Slovensku nemusí znamenať zákonite tragický osud, predurčenie k neúspechu a celoživotnému outsiderstvu. Dokázali, že aj so zle rozdánymi kartami sa dá vlastnými silami, schopnosťami a charakterom uhrať sokolitým svetom nielen remíza, ale aj výhra'] in Akácsová, 'Prečo sa máme tešiť z výsledku našich hokejistov: týždeň v redakcii a v mojej koži' ['Why We Should Be Pleased with Our Hockey Players' Achievement: A Week in the Editorial Office and in My Skin'].
- [59] Christian Bromberger, cited in Marks 'The French National Team', 53.

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