Chapter 3

Potica: The Leavened Bread That Reinvented Slovenia

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What do you feed him? P*otica*!

When the American president Donald J. Trump and First Lady Melania visited the Vatican in May 2017, the Pope asked Trump's Slovene wife, who had moved to the United States in her twenties to pursue her modeling career, what she feeds her husband. "*Potica*?," asked the Pope smilingly, to which Melania, looking rather surprised, quickly replied: "*Potica*? Yes!" This seemingly innocent joke, through which the Pope signaled his appreciation of this quintessentially Slovene leavened bread, immediately captured the attention of the media and audiences worldwide. It was at first at the center of a confusion which was later called "Pizzagate", as the majority of the world media thought the Pope was enquiring about pizza, but it soon emerged that the dish was something much more unknown and even exotic.

The media, including newspapers such as the British daily *The Guardian*, wrote about its origins and provided recipes. The American media in particular, however, were also quick to pick up on the joke that the pontifex was seemingly making: by choosing to comment on *potica*, the Pope was essentially making a comment on President Trump's weight, since eating *potica,* which is normally a heavy, nut-filled bread, full of calories, was considered a non-everyday, festive treat. The Slovene

Vezovnik, Andreja and Ana Tominc (2019): Potica: The Leavened Bread that Reinvented Slovenia. In Atsuko Ichijo, Venetia Johannes & Ronald Ranta eds. (2019): *The Emergence of National Food. Dynamics of Food and Nationalism.* London: Bloomsbury.

media, on the other hand, proudly reported on how the Pope himself knows all about "Slovene *potica*" since it was the Slovenian community in Argentina, the Pope's home country, who had often gifted it to him before he became the Pope (Štok, 2017).

The media storm in Slovenia, in the middle of which *potica* has found itself thanks to an innocent personal remark at this center-stage political meeting, brought out all the national pride that *potica* as a Slovene national culinary symbol can possibly encapsulate: from its place on the Slovene festive table to the questions raised about its originality and protection, all underlined with anxious commentaries about its "correct" recipe. However, the media attention surrounding *potica* was not surprising given the centrality of *potica* to the national identity of the Slovenes. Given the distinct regionality of Slovene cuisine, which is located at the crossroads of Mediterranean, Central European, and Ottoman gastronomic influences, *potica* is the only dish that can be found in all regions of ethnically Slovene territory (Bogataj, 2014).

Despite this centrality of the dish, very little, if anything, has been written about it academically, which may be explained with low academic interest in such topics until very recently (but see Bogataj, 2014). What little academic literature exists generally highlights and even celebrates *potica*, by providing it with the patriotic historical narrative it requires to be constructed as a national dish, often uncritically echoing (or supplementing) the narratives found in the media and elsewhere.

In this chapter, we therefore aim to fill some of this gap by exploring critically how this filled leavened bread has emerged as one of the key culinary symbols of Slovene national identity. By relying on data from cookbooks, magazines, and newspapers, we show how (supported by the media) *potica* was constructed as one of the definite cornerstones of national self-differentiation during the times of Slovenia's transformation from a Yugoslav federal state to an independent nation between 1984 and 2004, when Slovene nationalism was particularly in resurgence. First, in the late 1980s, as

the country was heading towards an exit from Yugoslavia, and, after finally declaring independence in 1991, as it was establishing itself as a sovereign nation in the 1990s; and second, as it prepared to enter the European Union (EU) together with a number of other Central and Eastern European countries in 2004. Throughout this period *potica* re-emerged in the national media, and was linked to discourses surrounding tradition, rurality, gender, religion, and class that proved to be crucial in re-framing Slovene national identity from the mid-1980s onwards, often repositioning the national narrative in terms of the re-emerging pre-modern ideas of family and femininity.

Method and data

The analysis presented in this paper is mainly based on primary data from *Delo*—the Slovene daily quality newspaper since 1959—and *Jana*, the most popular Slovene weekly family magazine (since, 1972). Articles featuring the key-word "*potica*" were searched for in *Delo*'s official archive (this includes the newspaper's supplements and the special Sunday edition *Nedelo*), for the period 1984–2004 with the help of *Delo*'s Documentation Service, while *Jana* and its supplements were searched for the same key-word manually, focusing only on November, December, March, and April issues since during these months around the Easter and Christmas holidays the magazine is more likely to feature festive dishes. *Potica* was generally rarely discussed in the national media before the 1980s, leaving it to the regional, and often more rural, newspapers and magazines to write about it, often in articles related to festivities, tradition, and identity. Overall, the number of articles on *potica* in *Delo* and *Jana* increased after 2000 so that our sample altogether included forty-nine articles from the national media (sixteen from *Delo* and twenty-three from *Jana*, including five adverts), that were then coded so that a thematic analysis could be conducted.

Apart from this, we also examined the cookbooks published during the period under examination to see whether an increase in recipes for *potica* could be found. The first (and apart from Bogataj, 2014, the only) cookbook that only includes recipes for *potica* was published in 2003 (Goljat, 2003), leaving *potica* recipes to be published as part of specialized cookbooks that discuss festive dishes in general since.

Defining and defending *potica*

Breads similar to *potica* are prepared throughout Central and Eastern Europe, although with different names, and sometimes variations in recipe and final appearance. In essence, these are leavened, sometimes sweetened, sometimes savory, egg-enriched doughs, which are rolled out, and then spread with various kinds of fillings, such as walnuts, tarragon, or poppy seeds before they are rolled, left to rise and baked, preferably in a round, *bundt*-like, traditionally clay mold, although this is not always strictly necessary.

Discussions surrounding its name—and even origin—reveal how ideologically invested the topics surrounding *potica* as a national dish tend to be. Its standardized Slovene name, *potica* (pron. /po-TI-tsa/) arguably derives from the verb *poviti*, to roll, although depending on the region, historically significant language influences (such as German and Italian) and the exact procedure involved in the making of the dish, it can also be called by various other names. More commonly these are found in the regions surrounding Slovenia, such as, for example, *putizza*, a mere dialect (and spelling) variation of *potica* found in Trieste, and *gubana* (from *gubati*, to wrinkle), used in the Italian region of Friuli, both to the west of Slovenia. To the north, where Slovene dialects meet German, expressions used for similar breads are, among others, *pohače* and *šartelj* (but see also Bogataj, 2014; Kuhar in Goljat, 2003).

The uneasiness that surrounds *potica's* possible allegiance to "the other" is as telling as the apparent disregard for recognizing its linguistic variations. Reporting about a culinary fair in Rimini, Italy, one journalist shares his concerns about "our" *potica*, which he encountered at the stall of a farmer from Udine/Videm, a town in Friuli in North-Eastern Italy:

> at the neighbouring stall, a farmer from around Udine/Videm who offered traditional Friulian walnut *potica*, the kind made with brown walnut "curves" in the middle and sugar sprinkled on top, brought me down to Earth. If (we) Slovenes have any pride, we need to protect *potica*, before it will be pulled out of our hands in Europe. (Resnik, *Nedelo*, February 1, 2004: 14)

Here, the journalist is confronted with *potica* being claimed as someone else's "traditional" dish, which he reports as a threat, since after entering the EU, *potica* can be taken away from "us." Likewise, *potica*—this time in the form of *la putizza*—can be found in a Venetian patisserie, also described as a "typical" dish of the other:

> In the centre of Venice it is possible to read in one of the patisseries: La putizza—dolce tipico triestino, *potica*—a typical Trieste sweet. (Izgoršek and Jež, *Nedelo*, April 20, 2003: 18)

In some cases, such worries result in seeking a solution in the form of European protected status, through which *potica* could finally be "protected" as Slovene and hence, its origin sealed. But, as one commentator rightly finds, there would be issues:

> The adjective *slovenska* [Slovene] would cause problems in the first place since the exact same product exists in Friuli and in the south of Austria. The Slovaks also roll walnuts and poppy in the same dough as we do! Not to talk about Croatian *orehovača* and *makovača* which could be called, without any problem and in the cold light of day, nothing else than … *potica*. Trouble would also be with product specification. Some very similar types of doughs

> are used to roll over eighty kinds of fillings in various combinations. We wouldn't be able to protect them all. Does it therefore make sense to do this just for some basic ones? If we protected them following geographical characterisation, we would need to justify what is the difference and what is the influence of the environment on Gorenjska and Štajerska walnut *potica.* (Resnik, *Nedelo*, February 1, 2004: 14)

Despite these difficulties, branding *potica* as Slovene is seen as a step towards defending what is "ours" in contrast to what is alien. It has to do with the symbolic reinvention of a national identity that during the transformations of the 1990s had to be detached from the strings of Yugoslavia while retaining its sovereignty in relation to the EU. As we will show in this contribution, this process of re-inventing national identity was largely, but also specifically in the case of *potica*, based on denying socialist history on one hand, and on the other, on searching for its essence supposedly originating around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Potica, national identity, and the media

The formation of Slovene identity as a distinct nation, as with many other Central European nations, can be traced to the nineteenth century when the majority of its hereditary lands formed part of the multilingual Austro-Hungarian Empire that spread across much of Central Europe. Slovene nationalism, following Herder's romantic ideas that placed language, history, and culture (especially tradition) at the core of a nation's soul and therefore identity, was constructed based on the ideology of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil), where people forming a nation were considered somehow related by blood and territory (Rotar, 2007: 85). The Slovene leaders of the time aimed at first for a federal reform under the Habsburgs, while at the same time warming up to the idea of an independent Slavonic—and even specifically Slovene—state. This was achieved in 1918, following the collapse of

Habsburg rule after the First World War. Then, a large part of the Slovene lands were united and incorporated into the Kingdom which became known as Yugoslavia (literally, Southern Slavia) in 1929 and was ruled by Serbian kings until 1943, when it was annexed by Hitler's Germany. In postwar Yugoslavia, the name Slovenia was for the first time attached to a federal state that united the majority of Slovene speakers into one political unit and that retained considerable cultural and political independence until 1991, when it proclaimed independence (e.g., see Luthar, 2013).

In this process, the formation of national identity from the nineteenth century onwards was heavily dependent on culture and, especially, as one of the cornerstones of national culture, the media, whose ability to publish and broadcast in the Slovene language (standardised "practically *ex-nihilo*" through the nineteenth century as Rotar (2007) remarks), formed the underlying ideological justification for a national unification that sought its foundation in linguistic distinctiveness. Throughout this process much of the preexisting multilingualism, so characteristic of Austrian provinces, was denied, and the idea of the Slovene nation as a nation of farmers was constructed by ejecting much of the earlier (although small) cultural and intellectual elite class, while replacing its intellectual institutions with the reaffirmation of Catholicism (Rotar, 2007: 264). As a result of such nineteenth century *Nationbildung*, anyone outside of these parameters was no longer considered an essential part of the national body.

In nationalism, culture "is but a selected set of social symbols that is being favoured by ideology in power" (Rotar, 2007: 106) and distributed not only by the media, but also other ideological apparatuses of state, such as the schooling system (Althusser, 2001). In this sense, then, media discourses surrounding *potica* as a traditional Slovene, Catholic, and rural dish create narratives about its origin, national importance, and uniqueness that complement other similar discourses which shaped the idea of the nation in much the same way. In the years preceding Slovenia's accession to the

EU (2004), the media in general supported the narrative that framed the nation in terms of its Catholic and rural nature including the importance of women as carriers of tradition (Vezovnik, 2009: 152).

Despite being a symbol for national unification, *potica* is also a symbol for class—including intra-class—distinction, as it also speaks for the plenty and poverty of the past Slovene population. For the predominantly Slovene speaking and rural population, *potica* reflected the stratification of the seemingly egalitarian society that lacked major urban centers, a development that could be linked to the geographical reasons, but mostly the inward looking conservatism of the nineteenth century discussed above which rejected industrialization, development, and cosmopolitanism of the towns as anti-Catholic and foreign (Uršič, 2015; see also Rotar, 1985). In such context, the look of *potica* and similar festive foods and its ingredients did suggest the social status of its makers through subtle symbolism. Poorer farmers, as one newspaper interviewee remembers, “sweetened [*potica*] using honey, since there wasn’t any sugar available. In fact, there was nothing available!” Housewives from richer rural households were able to present “big and fuller” *poticas* during Church food blessings although even they were not able to “order a ready-made *potica*, as is the habit today” since this would suggest they were “very, very rich.” According to this interviewee, the rural populations were, however, still better off compared to the town dwellers, since they had basic ingredients, such as eggs, flour, and walnuts, or they were able to “plan far in advance and hide away eggs, save walnuts, especially if the harvest was not good” and mix walnuts with carob. In towns, on the other hand, “there was no money, but even if there were, there was nowhere to buy all the required ingredients” (Unknown author, *Nedelo*, April 20, 2003; 19).

Potica and tradition

While in the Slovene national media, *potica* is rarely discussed before the 2000s, it was strongly linked to the identity of Slovene emigrants in the United States, Argentina, Australia, Serbia etc. who had left Slovenia over the last two centuries (Godina Golija, 2014; Ilc Klun, 2006). Some of the material discussing *potica* before the 1980s and even earlier—although not included in our corpus—comes from the newsletters and newspapers produced by or intended for this diaspora; it often links *potica* to other elements also discursively associated with the Slovene community abroad, including specific genres of music, such as polka music, and other foods also deemed "traditional Slovene" (e.g., Krajska sausage, see Mlekuž, 2015: 64).

In Slovenia, however, *potica* became one of those signifiers of Slovene-ness proudly appearing on TV spots and billboards promoting tourism only from the 1980s onwards, as the pressures for and possibility of independence increased. In the 1980s, one of the first times *potica* appeared explicitly linked to Slovene-ness in the national media was in a famous 1983 commercial campaign entitled simply *Slovenija, moja dežela* (Slovenia, my country) by the leading Yugoslav marketing agency Studio Marketing targeting foreign tourists as much as the Slovene public. The campaign aimed to invent, establish, and communicate a new and much more positive self-image of the Slovene people and to nurture patriotic feelings (Repe and Kerec, 2017: 119–20).

The campaign was successful in homogenizing Slovenes by constituting a national identity that worked independently from the signifiers of socialism and Yugoslavism, presenting the nation as kind and hardworking, while also introducing signifiers such as *potica*—the only food that appears in this iconic advert—that were being employed clearly to distinguish the nation from others. An important aspect of this reinvention of national identity from the 1980s onwards was also the process of re-traditionalization that appeared as differentiation from both socialism and Yugoslavia occurred throughout media and political discourses. As the "back to Europe" narrative went, not only is

Slovenia a culturally distinct unit within Yugoslavia, but it is also a European, not a Balkan nation (Velikonja, 2005; Petrović, 2009; Vezovnik, 2009).

During this time, *potica* and similar festive breads as well as some other dishes started to be described using adjectives such as "traditional," "homemade," and "home-baked" but also "Slovene" and "national" (see Tivadar and Vezovnik, 2010; Kamin and Vezovnik, 2017), as for example: "Walnut *potica* should not be missing on the traditional Slovene festive table" (Unknown author, *Jana*, xiii (50), December 13, 1989: 33). On the one hand, the media were pointing out the importance of homemade dishes by contrasting them to the industrial and processed ready-made foodstuffs that were commonly promoted during the 1970s (and even earlier) as a way to national modernization (see Vezovnik and Kamin, 2016; Kamin and Vezovnik, 2017) while on the other, adjectives such as "Slovene" or "national" were being used to clearly delimit "ours" from "theirs."

During the early 2000s when Slovenia was about to join the EU, *potica* became an even more important signifier of "us," meaning "Slovene" was no longer being opposed only to "Yugoslav," but also to the EU from which "we" now needed to differentiate ourselves from. As Caldwell (2002) points out, the promotion of local, national, or traditional foods in such contexts might be a reaction to the fear of the growing abundance of foreign foods and a nation's desire to be recognized as unique and distinct from other nations. This point is clearly demonstrated by the following example from *Nedelo*, where *potica* is positioned as something of "our own" and "special" that can be offered to the "spoilt" neighbors (i.e., the EU):

> This year, Slovenia is going to Europe and we won't be able to charm the spoilt neighbours with salt and bread only. We will need something more Slovene, more special, more own. Why should this not be *potica*? (Resnik, *Nedelo*, January 25, 2004: 14)

The importance of *potica* during the Slovene accession to the EU was emphasized discursively by giving this sweet bread human characteristics; *potica* starts to be referred to as a person that needs to be addressed respectfully, but also taken care of well so it does not get ill:

> In some of our agrotourisms such *poticas* are being baked that one should address with the utmost respect. (Kuhar, *Jana*, December 1995, Special issue:p 40–41)

> /…/ while baking *potica* the house needed to be silent and doors were not to be opened, since the dough could get cold. (Izgoršek and Jež, *Nedelo*, April 20, 2003: 18)

The re-traditionalization of national identity was also evident in an outburst of articles published by *Jana* promoting the celebration of Catholic festivities. Christmas and Easter were not publicly celebrated during socialist years, although people could celebrate them privately in their homes. During this time, family magazines and other media mostly followed the Yugoslav state policy, hence, special recipes for dishes consumed during Catholic festivities were less likely to appear, although around Christmas such dishes could be framed in terms of belonging to New Year festivities (Tivadar and Vezovnik, 2010: 395–96; see also Tominc, 2015). After independence in 1991, Catholic festivities became publicly legitimate again, so it was acceptable to link *potica* to religious holidays in the media. At this time, *potica* becomes strongly linked to the revival of Catholicism, clearly establishing the equation between *potica* and Catholic symbols. As one journalist puts it, *potica* can now be seen as "the crown of thorns worn by Jesus Christ" (Izgoršek and Jež, *Nedelo*, April 20, 2003: 18).

Shedding light on the symbolism of *potica* helps one to gain understanding of the meaning of its revival at a time of political instability and retrieval of the nation's "true" identity. Flagging *potica* up was therefore not restricted to an act of promoting a new Slovene dish. It became an important act of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995). In other words, *potica* became a signifier to which Slovenes

started to relate when trying to understand the performance of the new Slovene identity as it opened the path to practices glorifying the pre-socialist and pre-Yugoslav identity, a process closely linked to the systematic reemergence of Catholicism in Slovene society (e.g., Jogan, 2016). Church attendance and celebrating Christmas and Easter, emphasizing traditional family values, homeliness, and domesticity are only a few segments of a much broader consolidation of Catholicism during this time, and so was the emphasis on the private domain administered by women. In this vein, one of the aspects of this re-traditionalization was also the ways in which gender roles and female identities started to reshape leading to the re-traditionalization of women's role in post-socialist Slovenia (e.g., Burcar, 2015), an aspect also clearly visible with regard to *potica*.

Re-traditionalization of women: *Potica* and femininity

After the progressive 1970s, in which women in magazines were portrayed as fashionable, independent, employed, emancipated, and keen on all the novel kitchen gadgets the market had to offer (see Kamin and Vezovnik, 2017), the shift in the late 1980s and early 1990s seemed startling as articles started to feature white-aproned elderly farm wives portrayed as true experts in the art of *potica* making. In the media, this shift was seen as a growing number of articles on *potica* appeared alongside appetizing pictures of festively set tables in which *potica* took the center stage often portrayed as the product of every proud housewife who skillfully and affectionately bakes for her family in anticipation for Easter and Christmas holidays.

This discourse, which framed the modern, post-socialist woman in terms of rural tradition, was in line with the general construction of the Slovenes as a rural nation during the nineteenth century as discussed earlier. In it, the rural population was at the core of the selected groups within the previously multilingual and multiethnic society who were included in the nation-building exercise, (at

the expense of everyone else), helping form the Slovene nation as a closed and homogeneous community. The symbol of the "peasant mother" (*kmečka mati*) played an important role in the process of homogenization. The role of the mother was strongly present in Slovene premodern history where, especially in the nineteenth century, fathers were mostly absent due to seasonal work, military duties, and emigration. In such a context, women took over and embodied the highest ethical principles, and can be therefore seen as the most important elements in constituting and consolidating the ideology of homeliness and domesticity (for a broader discussion see Pirjevec, 1964; Žižek, 1982, 1987; Musek, 1994; Vezovnik, 2009).

Therefore, when it comes to baking *potica*, media discourses positioned women—especially older, experienced ones—as the "subject of knowledge." Women regained their premodern social status of family authority consolidating traditionalist ideologies of domesticity. Their role is demonstrated by several media articles claiming that baking a good *potica* was generally considered a special skill that grandmothers passed on to their daughters and granddaughters, who should, in turn, learn this old skill thankfully. Detailed knowledge of the recipe is no longer sufficient since when a "true expert" starts preparing *potica*, they know how to bake *potica* from the centuries-old tradition, experience, and wisdom that can only be passed down through generations. As a result, preparation required good intuition, a skill that is traditionally also ascribed to women:

> You would do best if you "borrow" an elderly auntie, grandma or any other person who has considerable experience in the preparation of *potica*. Carefully observe how she gets on with it—if you have studied the recipe prior to this, you will be horrified, how "ad hoc" a true expert starts making *potica.* (Alkalaj, *Delo*, December 21, 1996)

Preparing *potica* is therefore a mystical moment; the baking skills required are not easy to acquire since the procedure is not only about ingredients, but also about the knowledge of making dough rise

and baking, as the ability to bake "as per feeling" is considered superior to that of baking from a book (Alkalaj, *Delo*, December 21, 1996). Baking *poticas* is a secret every housewife keeps to herself and hence, every *potica* results in a slightly different taste—unlike industrially made products that can be found on the market:

> preparation of *potica* is the tiny secret of every housewife, each of them kneads it in her own way. (Kuhar, *Jana*, December 1995, Special issue, p: 40–41)

However, the ideal woman was not only a good baker. She had to be the social glue that brought family together; for this, she was prized and respected. As the following example demonstrates, a good and respected housewife was supposed to nurture family bonds and guarantee its cohesion. In an article appearing in *Jana*, the journalist quotes Sister Vendelina, a nun and a Slovene culinary authority, who wrote several cookbooks featuring '"traditional" Slovene dishes (see Tominc, 2014, 2017). Sister Vendelina suggests:

> …At home, housewives can invite all family members to a baking of *potica*, since this is a pleasant way of socialising, and also a good lesson of cooperation in the family. This way, they will respect her more as a housewife suggests Sister Vendelina with good intentions. (Ucman, *Jana*, 13, March 26, 2002: p 42–43)

Women who are able to make excellent *potica* and at the same time engage family in the process, investing emotional labor into its making, are elevated to the status of queens and champions; they become the guardians of tradition, "a queen of *potica*, a guardian of traditional knowledge, the champion of our cooks." (Lupša, *Jana*, xxxi (13), April 1, 2003: p 24–25)

Investing this kind of emotional labor is paramount since cooking with love and joy is certainly one of the crucial ingredients when it comes to baking a good *potica*; as the following

examples further demonstrate, a part of the cook herself needs to be invested in the dish, so that the self becomes part of the *potica* the part that guarantees a tasty result:

> we need to put ourselves into food, otherwise *potica* will not be tasty. (Ucman, *Jana*, 13, March 26, 2002: p 42–43)

> If the housewife bakes it with good will and love, it will be much tastier, even if we are trying out the recipe for the first time. (Ucman, *Jana*, xxxi (15), April 15, 2003: pp. 44–45)

This exclusiveness and the status that these quotes ascribe to women can perhaps be read as an empowerment of women who bake and have access to this exclusive knowledge others have limited access to; on the other hand, however, such a role also seals the social position of women as constituents of the domestic sphere and foodwork while blocking access to men adopting the same social role. In no article is *potica* linked to male bakers with the exception of professional chefs, such as Goljat (2003), who published a cookbook dedicated to *poticas*, who advise from the position of a qualified professional with experience of working in grand hotels and restaurants where a guarantee of the superior quality of the finished product is supported by the credentials that come with such a role.

Foodwork is not limited to the rational process of baking by measuring and following specific procedures but appears, rather, to be an emotional and intuitive act reserved for women who, in comparison to men, are commonly believed to have privileged access to such nonrational know-how. This clearly demonstrates how baking *potica* is presented as a gendered task recruiting women into essentialist discourses on femininity and gender (see DeVault, 1991). During this process of recruitment, women engage with discourses of emotion and (family) care by embracing broader media and cultural discourses associating foodwork as exclusively a women's duty as women only are

able to cook with the socially expected emotional investment supposedly leading to good family care (Cairns and Johnston, 2015: 68). As DeVault (1991: 90–91) demonstrates, feeding produces family, and women are largely the ones doing this invisible work of social construction. Baking *potica* therefore becomes a way to perform femininity by caring for family members (and the nation), nurturing social ties and expressing love through food.

Towards a commodified tradition

Although *Delo* and *Jana* were pushing forward the image of a loving, traditionalist woman, they were not completely detached from reality; despite the generally emancipated outlook of official socialist ideology women continued to perform two roles, in the job market as well as in the domestic sphere—a feature that continued after the 1990s (see Kamin and Vezovnik, 2017; Sitar, 2017). In the early 2000s, however, women's employment was high so they did not always have time to spend long hours in front of the stove.

In a clever marketing ploy, *Zmajčkov butik*, one of the leading national bakers, started selling their *poticas* through adverts by stressing that due to busy lives, buying *potica* should be free from guilt and prejudice, emphasizing that such practices are becoming more and more common:

> Nowadays, we can find on a table, full of Easter goodies, also a bought *potica*, introduced without prejudice, baked with a number of others in one of the big bakeries. (Izgoršek and Jež, *Nedelo*, April 20, 2003: 18)

Often, such *poticas* were advertised to consumers as "homemade," and other material, describing processes of industrial food production have often supported such narrative; a journalist that paid a

visit to one of the main Slovene baking companies (Žito), reports that—surprisingly—the bought *potica* is in fact made in exactly the same way as they would have been at home:

> "The procedure for making *potica* is in its essence the same as at home at grandma's," says Mojca Primic, Head of Work Allocation at Žito, "only the quantities are incomparably larger." (Izgoršek and Jež, *Nedelo*, April 20, 2003: 18)

During the 1990s, such a commodification of tradition—the marketization of exclusive and usually homemade traditional goods intended for mass consumption—was growing in the Slovene food market riding on the wave of the westernized model of consumer culture (see Vezovnik and Kamin, 2017), which, while not novel, enjoyed a fresh push during this decade (e.g., Patterson, 2011, for consumerism in Yugoslavia). With the help of such discourse, it became excusable for the doubly-burdened women to seek help in what the food industry had to offer. Despite everything, it was more important that *potica* finds its way onto a festive table and works as a familial glue: ideally freshly baked, but almost equally good if purchased from a chain store.

Conclusion

Today, *potica* is one of the quintessential pillars of Slovene culinary and national identity; the homogenizing discourse according to which *potica* is essentially the foremost traditional Slovene—"our"—sweetbread, however, covers up a much more diverse story: the origins of the dish are not clear, the name varies from region to region, the form of the dish and its filling are not unified, and the dish itself is claimed to be traditional in other countries. This is why *potica's* character resembles a complex dynamic reflection of how nations and cultures evolve, by mixing, merging, influencing, adapting, and changing in time.

In this chapter we have showed how a dish with obscure origins emerged as a national dish *par excellence*. We demonstrated that during the late 1980s *potica* became a national signifier to which Slovene identity started to be related more explicitly. At that time, it worked as an important symbol of pre-modernity and tradition originating in pre-socialist and pre-Yugoslav times. Through it, the newly formed Slovene identity was therefore affirmed through a distinctive dish that apparently had no connection to the Yugoslav past but that could at the same time function as the distinct dish of the Slovene nation in the European Union. Being positioned as a traditional dish, *potica* consequentially became the center of discourses promoting traditionalizt approaches to gender, family, and society, bringing forward premodern conceptions of femininity. Its positioning as the national dish strongly influenced the reinvention of the Slovene woman who was suddenly invited to imitate the practices of her peasant (great)grandmother from the rural parts of the country, catering and providing for her family in the way traditional gender roles would define it. This brought readers back to pre-socialist times where traditional ways of life, not the modernization, urbanization, and progress of Tito's Yugoslavia, were at the core. The nation was thus reimagined in terms of its rural—rather than cosmopolitan—culture, an element in which the strengthened role of Catholicism also played a part. In this, the traditional role of women was also to play a significant role in bringing the family together in celebrating Christmas and Easter, and through this, ensuring national coherence. Here, *potica* took pride of place at the festive table, while at the same time also working as the unifying food of the nation.