



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

Research Report

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RESEARCH REPORT IREX IARO

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Topic of Research

My dissertation is titled *Neither Private Nor Public: Women's Domestic Spaces In Socialist Slovenia*. This represents a modification of my original conception of my project, as my early research in the field clarified the exact focus of the questions that drive my dissertation.

While many North American scholars have examined how the "official" culture of socialism permeated the "unofficial," everyday sphere, I explore the dynamic nature of the interaction between these two arenas, as this has yet to be studied in-depth but appears to represent a key to understanding everyday life under socialism.

To explore this topic in a manageable way, I focus on women's experiences of lived, domestic spaces in one area of the socialist Yugoslavia, from 1950 to 1990. Over these four decades, the Trnovo neighborhood of Ljubljana, Slovenia, was transformed from a "salad-village" that fed the capital city to a downtown neighborhood that boasted a cross-section of building typologies found throughout urban socialist Slovenia. My research examines how the socialist government of one former Yugoslav republic, Slovenia, attempted to shape female citizens through the space of the domestic built environment, and how women responded to official attempts to order their lives spatially. My research question begins with the architectural history of the Trnovo neighborhood in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and how the domestic spaces there functioned and changed over time. The core of my project, however, lies in an in-depth examination of

women's sense of the gendered, "morally correct" political self, as this was shaped by the multi-faceted constitution of private space.

Relevance and Contribution to Field

In subject matter, my project moves beyond the standard purview of folklore, gender studies, and history, to seek an in-depth examination of the functioning – and constitution – of space(s) under socialism. Most significantly, a solid study of the material culture of socialism has yet to be produced within any North American discipline.

In very general terms, I understand the field of Folklore to study the "ways of being" found among everyday people, in their everyday lives, as understood by these people, and that they pass along to others in unofficial ways. These "practices" are generally seen as unimportant, yet they play a crucial role in constituting and maintaining sub-sections of society. Good examples from the US include fraternity hazing rituals, dating practices among middle-aged US divorcés, hoax virus e-mails, and stories about grant-writing practices among graduate students. This contrasts with the field of Anthropology, which in very rough terms has historically focused on categories established by anthropologists and "exotic" peoples in remote parts of the world.

My dissertation builds on the long-standing folkloristic study of vernacular housing (Glassie 1975, 1982; Pocius 1991; M.A. Williams 1991), as well as the more exciting aspects of theoretical folkloristics into the study of lived spaces (Dorst, 1999; M. Hufford 1986, 1992). This work parallels much of the "space studies" in Anthropology, although I focus on the co-constitution of people and space(s), rather than the politics of spatial formations that currently predominates as a topic in Anthropology research (Low 1999, 2000).

My work additionally builds on existing work on gender under socialism, much of which has flourished in Anthropology (Bringa 1995; Gal and Kligman 2000, 2000a; Kligman 1988, 1998). I intend to borrow the concerns of these scholars with the position of women in political life, but focus on the *emic* – or, insiders' – experience of these politics of relations in a particular space. This represents a significant contribution, as this perspective has yet to be fully developed in the North American literature.

And, while the history of the former Yugoslavia has been well-researched, most of this work falls within the realm of political histories, a reflection of the Cold War legacy on North American scholarship. Although some studies have been produced on everyday life under socialism (Fitzpatrick 1999), many deal with the post-1989 period. Thus, my dissertation represents a contribution to literature in the fields of Folklore, History, and Gender Studies.

The policy significance of my research lies in its contribution to US understandings of current Slovenian attitudes which have been inherited from the socialist era that are very different from those in the US. While my research is still mid-way, I believe that these include Slovenians' understanding of the role of government, the role of "morality" in the interpretation of history, the related morally "correct" position of the socialist government and socialism in general, and the binds that Slovenians believe their history imposes on them.

Concise Summary of Approach and Research Methodology

My research is grounded in two well-known methodologies, those of social history and ethnography. I examine women's understandings of selves and their role in social reproduction by combining archival research, into official policies, with ethnographic examination of individuals' lived experiences. Governmental policies that determined the development of a mixed-housing neighborhood, like my study site, are revealed in policy statements, professional discussions and popular magazines. I consider women's response to these attempts to control their physical space and their social reproduction, by ethnographically investigating their uses of domestic private spaces, as well as their interaction with neighbors. I pay particular attention to the mix of messages negotiated by women, the interplay of these different agendas, and to these women's (differing) responses over time. This second portion of my research allows me to delve into Trnovo women residents' negotiation(s) of morality, vis-à-vis "appropriate" housing culture, "appropriate" social relations, and social reproduction.

My research sites include, for ethnographic work: the neighborhood of Trnovo, in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and sites around Ljubljana where I meet with residents of Trnovo to discuss their lives. My archival research sites do, and will, include: the National Archives of Slovenia, the City Archives of Ljubljana, the National University Library, the Urban Institute, and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana.

Summary of Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions

I am currently in the midst of my research, and thus both my findings and my conclusions are preliminary. My research to date suggests that for socialist Slovenia, the lived experience of being is as much a reflection of pre-socialist, "unofficial" ways of being, as much as socialist-era interventions into this culture. The interaction between these two competing forces, which defined sense of self and everyday practices, played out as a complex, dynamic struggle. The resulting ways of being – or "cultural practices" – reflect a deep politicization of personal life, and this politicization transformed decisions on everyday behaviors into direct statements of one's personal sense of morality. Such daily practices could even constitute what I term "non-physical violence," which appears to have played a particularly significant role in early socialism. From my research to date, I expect that many aspects of life that appear banal and that included a corporeal engagement – such as rumor, gossip, and daily visits to neighbors – played a key role in maintaining socialist society. These daily ways of being took unexpected forms, and they included "social control" through pre-socialist daily habits, such as rumor, gossip, and innuendo. Additionally, they combined with a "morally correct" view of history in which public and private histories were intermingled, and the use of public *and* private spaces for self-censorship and supervision of others, through both socialist and pre-socialist uses of space, to entrench socialism and socialist leaders' beliefs among residents.

Suggestions for Future Agendas in Field of Study for Scholarly Community

The interdisciplinary focuses of Socialist and Post-Socialist Studies would profit greatly from research into arenas of Eastern European life that differ greatly from seemingly similar arenas in the United States. Topics that would make an excellent

contribution to US understandings of these societies include: the current replication of elites, Eastern European women's understandings of self, the role of government in society, the interpretation of the recent past, and conceptions of race/ethnicity. The field of Folklore, and the related field of Anthropology, could make powerful contributions in these areas, particularly in regard to everyday life and the workings of large-scale processes at the micro level.

Recommendations for US policy community

As I am not been able to access IREX's website with examples of policy recommendations and am still in the midst of my research, I am unable to provide the specific form of policy recommendations that IREX requests. In the absence of a model, I can suggest the following general thoughts from my research.

During socialism, the former Yugoslavia was as much an ally of the Communist world as it was of the capitalist West. Today, the successor state of Slovenia is also torn between allegiances to both these blocks. This torn allegiance exists both in the government and among everyday citizens. Contemporary Slovenia is very much the heir of socialist Yugoslavia, and its politics today are complex and not immediately apparent. Although Slovenia may look "just like Austria," it has an extremely different history, a complex set of politics, and a very distinct set of political beliefs. Slovenian politics are rendered particularly complex to an outside observer as they are shaped by historically present, inherited allegiances – among individuals and groups – that are never expressed openly. This situation is reflected in the difficulty of accessing accurate information, a direct inheritance from socialism, despite appearances to the contrary. It is also reflected in many Slovenians continuing to believe that socialism is morally "correct," that the socialist interpretation of history and society is also morally "correct," and that the former communist elite and their beliefs represent the best political choice. Thus my main policy recommendation is that all analyses of Slovenian politics must include these "hidden" historical allegiances, of both individuals and groups, as these ties direct behind-the-scenes Slovenian politics.