



Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.

**Sredl, Katherine
Predoctoral Student
University of Illinois U-C
IARO 2006-2007
Croatia**

Gendered Market Subjectivity in Post-socialist Croatia

Topic of research:

Consumer behavior, consumer culture, social stratification, gender, marketing and development in economic transitions, international marketing

Relevance and contribution to field:

My research lies within the stream of consumer culture theory and, more broadly, consumer behavior. This research project, "Gendered Market Subjectivity in Post-socialist Croatia" asks how consumers in transition economies adjust to marketization through the use of goods. I selected Zagreb, Croatia as a research site because its marketization represents specific and profound changes. Croatia had one of the most developed consumer cultures in Eastern Europe. Marketization in Croatia took place alongside war, political independence, corruption and migration: it was one of the most turbulent in Eastern Europe. The focus of my data collection was special possessions, specifically tableware, with working, middle and upper middle class informants. I collected qualitative data in Zagreb for nine months during academic year 2006 – 2007. Preliminary data analysis suggests a woman's social status during state socialism, and her family's status before, influences how they experience marketization. This innovative view implies development in economic transitions occurs as marketization influences local structures rather than introduces stratification and consumer culture, as is often assumed by outsiders looking in.

A concise summary of your approach and research methodology:

I used ethnographic research methods including long interviews with over thirty informants who represent three class positions in Zagreb: upper class, middle class and working class. Nine of the interviews were with women alone and three were multi-generational: mother-daughter pairs. I accessed the informants through the snowball method, starting with a key informant at the University of Zagreb and my social network. The heuristic employed for informants' class was education and employment: professionals, who had completed advanced University degrees, then skilled laborers who finished high school and may have some further education, and unskilled laborers, working for hourly wages outside the official economy, who had completed compulsory education. I sought informants who came of age during state socialism (using a heuristic cut off date birth before 1963) with the goal of discussing memories of tableware use during state socialism. I used date of birth 1970 or after as the heuristic for second-generation informants. I conducted the interviews in the homes of informants or, in the case of many upper middle class informants, their offices.

In the interviews (conducted by me in Croatian), there was a mix of open-ended questions and an interview guide, developed iteratively in the research process. They opened with questions about the informant's parent's place of birth, migration and education, and then her place of birth, migration, education, marriage, work, childbearing, and childcare. We then moved to tableware. Tableware can be understood in this article as: china (*posudje za stol, stol servis*), fine china (*tkani porcelan*), glasses (*šalice*), crystal (*kristal*), cutlery (*bešteck*), silver cutlery (*srebro*), tablecloths (*stolnjak*) and napkins, serving dishes (*roštrafi*) and tureens (*zdeli*), candlesticks and napkin rings. This is typical of what most people in Zagreb would expect to find on a table for a family meal, regardless of the style of the objects. Across the interviews, discussing residence changes easily led to discussion of favorite tableware, its movement across generations, its arrival into the household, meanings in different cultural contexts in recent history, and social linkage.

A summary of your research findings and preliminary conclusions:

My research proposal focused on gender dynamics and class stratification in Croatia's marketization. I also sought to understand these in a historical way, that is, understand the antecedents to the current dynamic. How informants understand current class differences is rooted in notions of state socialist middle class equality and pre-socialist class stratification. I chose to focus on consumption of tableware as a way to explore this since the kinds of tableware women have, how they acquire it, and how they use it marks class difference. My main question is why marketization has influenced women's lives the way it has.

It is easy to assume there were no social class differences during state socialism because of the ideology of equality and the massive middle class that had a similar living standard and consumption practices. Yet it was not the case; there were subtle differences then in consumption and education and way of life. Some people were professionals, for example architects, and lived better than others, for example bakers. And those differences set up the ground for social stratification in the present. Since privatization, middle class women, who are clerks or skilled laborers, have steady work. Upper middle class women have less job security, more working hours and higher incomes than in the past. Working class women have the same situation, yet their income is lower. Education, profession, the status of one's parents – are the foundations of social stratification in Zagreb.

Marketization has changed gender dynamics in different ways in each class and this has influenced women's experience of transformation. Working class women are now often the primary breadwinners in their families because their husbands are retired from factory jobs (or the factory has closed) and have not found new employment or veterans who have not found

work. These women work outside the official economy and their husbands do not work. This gives women some authority as they are bringing in the larger income. In the middle class, gender dynamics have also given married women with children more authority in the home because they are often the ones who bring in the steady income and health care benefits through their factory or government jobs; their husbands may be entrepreneurs or farmers/fishermen/seasonal workers. Upper middle class married women bring in about the same income as their husbands, as reported. For the working class, marketization has destabilized the former system of security. That shake up has meant more work for women, and that work brings some authority in spending and in the operation of the household. Middle class women may continue to have some security, although their husbands less so, and in the security of their jobs, they have some new authority as well. Upper middle class women seem to have more possibilities, and unlike the experiences of other women, their husbands have more possibilities as well.

What are the influences on class stratification? It is important to understand this if scholars and policy makers are to understand how women experience marketization. In interviews, discussion with informants of their biographies revealed working or middle class women arrived in Zagreb after finishing high school in the village in which their family has lived for generations, working as unskilled or semi-skilled agrarian laborers. Their parents often had no formal education. Matija (no real names are used), a middle class woman, aged about 45, when asked why she left the village, laughed and said, "It is a tiny village [in Podravina, a region of Croatia known for farming and the food industry] with no jobs, boring, and no future. I ran from there in 1981, after I finished high school. My husband did the same [he is from the same village]." A working class woman, Marina, mentioned the differences between Zagreb and her village in Eastern Croatia as well as the change moving to Zagreb brought in her life, "I came here 'naked and barefoot' as they say, from that tiny village, in 1960, when I was 18 and finished school. I went to the employment office and found a job at TEŽ [a light bulb factory] and worked there for 33 years. I met my husband in Zagreb. I went back to the village for the baptism of my brother's child after I came to Zagreb. I took the train to the closest village and then walked all night, in the dark, through the forest, to get there and I'll never forget how scared I was. I would never live there. Zagreb has streetlights and trams, everything is easy." Social class mobility has a lot to do with migration.

Most upper middle class women have roots in cities. They either are from Zagreb or moved to Zagreb from another city. Their mothers had always finished high school, and their fathers finished one or more University degrees. One woman was describing her family legacy, "My mother, all the women in my family, have always been educated and we have always been from Zagreb." It seemed clear to me that her framing of her personal history as constant is a contrast to larger changes in political and market structures. To probe the issue further, I asked her if any of these changes had influenced their status. She replied, "Of course not." Another upper class woman described her family roots this way, emphasizing that although her father was not from Zagreb, he was from a city rather than a village, he was educated, and his family had been educated and powerful for generations "My father, he had a PhD, he wasn't from Zagreb, he was from Varazdin, and he was from a noble family."

One question I frequently asked was, do you have more "fancy" dishes (*tanki porcelain*), how did you acquire them, how do you use them, and if it was bought, was it expensive and how did you pay for it? I asked the same question about "everyday" dishes (*posudje*). Most of these questions referred to acquisition, trying to point out the differences between what is inherited and bought, as well as the meanings surrounding buying and inheriting. Most of the upper middle class women described inheriting dishes as well as buying dishes, for example everyday dishes for a new residence after a move. Matija and Hannah, middle and an upper middle class woman, both described buying new plates for daily use when they recently moved into (finer) residences. The difference was the type of plates: the middle class woman bought glass plates

at a discounter, while the upper middle class woman bought plates by Villeroy & Boch at the most elegant department store in Zagreb. In a mother-daughter interview, I asked about the mother's biography first, as in all interviews. When Petra, a middle class woman, mentioned her husband died in 1988 when her daughter, Vanja was ten, I expressed sympathy. The daughter assured me it was for the best, as they lived in a 32 square meter (345 square feet) apartment, her parents were divorced but lived together since no one had anywhere else to go, and her father was an alcoholic who died of cirrhosis of the liver, and if they had gone on like that, who knows what would have happened. Later in the interview, I asked if they had everyday china as well as china for special occasions. When they said yes, they do have china reserved for special occasions, they revealed the china was expensive and they bought it locally, at Nama, a department store in Zagreb. I asked them how they paid for it. The daughter, a teacher at a private high school, returned to the earlier stage of the interview to talk about the death of her father. She said, "We bought that china, it isn't fine china but it is very nice, with the money that we got when my father died. When my father died, as my parents were divorced, my mother did not receive any money from the state, but I did, and we bought the china with that." I asked them when they use these plates and they said rarely, perhaps for guests. They are wrapped and stored in a cabinet at home. They use other plates because "if they break when you wash them, you can throw them away, but the others are a set." However, an upper middle class informant, whose mother died about twenty years ago, mentioned that she inherited Rosenthal fine china and used it daily, washing it in the dishwasher. She said she has so much of it, she feels guilty if she doesn't use it. Use or non-use of china differs according to class positions.

Suggestions for future research:

Social changes in Eastern Europe tend to be framed as the sudden influx of outside forces. This research suggests that local social dynamics before and during state socialism as well as the dynamics of a country's privatization, have an influence in contemporary consumer culture and social stratification. The dynamics of gender and status are more connected than is usually considered; most social science research tends to focus on males as determining status (in households with male and female adults). My research suggests that it is more complicated and an area for further research. It is also worth noting that social class is an uncomfortable topic – to think about inequity in your own life and to ask others about it. Yet these inequities form how people experience life and economic transformation. And if scholars are to understand those facts, it is important to consider social class.

Recommendations for the US policy community:

Can marketization and economic development in Zagreb be related, and if so, how? This research suggests that in many families, women bring in the larger salary, or the steady income and insurance benefits – it provides significantly to the well-being of the family. Of course, for all classes, marketization has brought instability, and women have adjusted to that – upper middle class women earning the most from the new opportunities. It would lack nuance to state marketization has brought development, but it is possible to say it has brought instability to the old structures and women have reacted to that. Those who had skills to offer in the new situation – clerical, professional, and labor – could adjust. If the goal of development is to eliminate poverty, then I think the next course would be to take this understanding of social class differences and help women find jobs given their current situation. This is not a social stratification system in which people expect to move up the ladder through education etc as in the USA. For example, it makes more sense to help working class women who could work as maids to find such employment rather than to further their education. There is something in women having their own income that is liberating, but this is not to be confused with notions of empowerment that are relevant in the USA. The reality is that, overall, since state socialism and now, wages are low, and in most families, two incomes are needed, so working and middle class women have always been expected to work, and even some upper middle class women.

*Funded by the US Department of State's Title VIII Program and
the IREX Scholar Support Fund*

Marketization can bring a chance for development if that development is in line with social and cultural norms in Zagreb, and that includes gender norms.