

Stiob*continued from page 9*

tions. The overriding emphasis on entertainment and consumer-oriented programming also marks an obvious divergence from the sober high-modern rationalism of state-socialist media. We certainly do not deny the existence of these differences. Our argument is that discursive hypernormalization can occur regardless of the specific epistemic or ideological content of the media in question.

In this respect, two important trends in Western media over the last 20 years deserve our attention. The first is an intense concentration and consolidation of basic content production leading to the familiar experience of receiving more iterations of similar media content despite diversified media platforms. To take a striking example, in the US news media, the Associated Press

(AP) has attained a virtual monopoly position in the production and circulation of basic news content, a situation analogous to the centralized news services of socialist era Eastern Europe. In virtually every small- and medium-sized newspaper in the US one can find the same national and international news coverage produced through outsourcing of non-local news production to AP. Second, digitization has significantly accelerated the temporality of media-making, cultivating new standards of “real time” media work that ethnographers of digital news have described as engendering an increased tendency toward imitation as media professionals draw upon ideas and information already in circulation in order to keep pace with rising productivity demands.

Ideological Dilemma

Finally, institutional analogies are necessary but not sufficient to account for the emergence of American Stiob. We also see an

acute ideological dilemma in post-1989 liberal capitalism, since the ideological field of “the West” had been organized for decades through reference to the external presence and threat of communism. The evaporation of this external presence on a geopolitical scale magnified ideological tendencies toward discursive self-referencing and self-aggrandizement, just as occurred under late socialism. This has allowed US political ideology to gradually consolidate its universalism and the ideological slippage between the political imaginations of “American life” and “human life” has become more drastic. If the core liberal political virtue of “freedom” used to be defined, for example, in opposition to communist authoritarianism, now it is defined largely with reference to itself. In other words, the performative repetition of discourse—in this case, speaking constantly of freedom—seems sufficient to give freedom a content and presence (as

we recall from the build-up to the two Iraq wars). This combination of ideological universalism and self-referentiality is strongly reminiscent of the political culture of late socialism. And so, to understand contemporary political ideology in the West, deeper comparative ethnography of socialist ideology should prove a remarkably helpful resource.

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Reconsidering Postsocialism from the Margins of Europe

Hope, Time and Normalcy in Post-Yugoslav Societies

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It is inevitable that any subfield or regional subset of anthropology faces an occasional reckoning. The social world and its meanings shift beneath our feet no less than for those people we study, and anthropologists are equally susceptible to corresponding flurries of interpretation, questioning and “crisis.” It is not surprising that anthropology of postsocialism faces precisely such a moment, particularly among a new generation of scholars who began their research a decade after 1989. We struggle to understand a period that is inadequately captured by any one “ism,” be it (post)socialist, neo- or late liberal, or national. This struggle is complicated by the

stakes of postsocialist analysis in the “real” world of policy and politics. Scholarship on the former and current socialist world has served as justification for neoliberal economic restructuring and for militarized democratization efforts across the globe. Now, in 2008, policymakers, economists and funding agencies have declared Eastern Europe to be fully “transitioned,” socialism dead and gone and liberal democracy a cure-all for the difficulties of global economic and political transformations. Anthropologists of postsocialism are left scrambling for funding and wondering just how many glasses of Milton Friedman’s Kool-Aid the rest of the social sciences have been drinking.

Yet as anthropologists of postsocialism have demonstrated, this liberal triumphalism over the “end of history” is a much more complicated story. The stakes of the anthropology of postsocialism are only heightened by the self-congratulatory narrative of successful transition. The postsocialist experience resonates with and exemplifies critical social, economic and polit-

ical transformations globally: post-industrial political and economic restructuring; the reconfiguration of personhood around flexible labor and niche-market consumption; the displacement of alternate forms of political practice in favor of liberal models of representation and participation; and the wedding of military intervention, US foreign policy and democratization.

Beyond arguing for the relevance of our subfield of anthropology, we are also responding to something more tenuous, emergent and energizing. We find ourselves chasing swift and fleeting forms of possibility outlined against (and sometimes in terms of) disappointment, anger and despair. Such possibilities have spurred many of us to look for new vocabularies, concepts and frameworks to capture both the entrenched and the emergent, and the ways in which they are inextricably entwined. In the wake of the “end” of one of modernism’s greatest narratives of inevitability and possibility, revolution and stasis, promise and despair, we find that there is still much to say about socialist life

worlds and the social ties, personal aspirations and political configurations that they animated.

Last November, with the support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the British Academy, we brought together two senior anthropologists and a group of junior scholars working in the post-Yugoslav societies of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for a workshop at the University of Manchester. We sought to revitalize the region’s relevance to postsocialist studies, and the relevance of postsocialism to anthropology more generally. Yugoslavia and its successor states have always occupied a tenuous position in the study of socialism and postsocialism. Recent analysis of the region has more often been centered on the study of ethnic conflict, nationalism and “failed states,” rather than socialist and postsocialist processes. This position, both marginal and central, forced us as scholars in and of the region to bring (post)socialism “back in,” and offered the opportunity to thoroughly interrogate the usefulness of postsocialist analytic frames. Throughout the workshop we focused on the multiplicity of imaginaries and practices in the region that are shadowed, but not exhausted, by the recent history of war and violence. The rest of this essay offers some reflections that

emerged from the workshop on how the anthropology of postsocialism can contribute new frameworks and conceptual vocabularies for these historically grounded and emergent social forms.

Hope

If anthropology is the social science of the present, it ought to offer insight into the future *in* the present. It was this idea that led us to frame the workshop around the notion of hope. A social historiography of the future—a futurity to complement historicity—could track horizons, the narratives and forms of belonging they inspire, and their impact on everyday practice in the now. In the process, we unabashedly sought to resist despair as a framework for analysis, even as we acknowledged it as a real and lived experience on the ground. Representations of the former Yugoslavia are powerful social facts, as people discuss and reflect on geopolitical and scholarly narratives of hopelessness, violence and failure in the Balkans. We saw a need to challenge such representations by offering alternative conceptual frameworks that complicate these narratives of inevitable failure.

Of course, hope is not without its problems. In addition to carrying significant normative and moral baggage, hope raises difficult ethical and methodological questions as we engage the hopes of those whose sense of future possibility lies in illiberal, populist or ethno-nationalist horizons. However, participants proposed several possible avenues for a productive scholarship of hope. For one, the study of hope reveals the intersection of futurity, contingency and constraint as people work to

achieve (often conflicting) aspirations and desires. Such aspirations include changing senses of self, shifting social obligations and norms of gender, kinship and generation. Examining how people's sense of the possible and desirable have shifted over time would also shed light on the intersection of political subjectivity and the ways in which narratives of hope have been strategically deployed in political discourse. Further, it would go a long way toward accounting for the often simultaneous articulation of bitter pessimism and hopeful optimism in personal, institutional and other narratives. In turn, a political economy of future-oriented desires reveals "hope" as a set of material possibilities and opportunities, defined by state institutions, changing administrative regimes and state entitlements.

Simultaneity and the Subject of Time

The challenges of periodizing past, present and future modes of aspiration raised other productive questions for anthropology in the region. For example, does one privilege war or post-conflict moments, socialism or postsocialism, or even the 1990s, as critical historical time frames? In reality, such periodizations overlap, often within the same social interaction, personal narrative or public performance. Our research shows that these multiple temporalities are mobilized as metadiscursive frames, affective states and forms of political persuasion. Indeed, many with whom we work seem to experience and occupy multiple temporalities, often simultaneously. As people mobilize latent chronotopes in interactions, they draw on the moral valence, authority or iden-

tity embedded in different temporal horizons. For example, notions of transition or European civilization call forth different aspirations or definitions of "normalcy" than those of national time or "Balkan tradition." Yet people mobilize and move between such conceptions of time, differently positioning themselves from moment to moment. Such temporalities both shore up discursive oppositions and, in their intersection, cut across neat divisions such as East/West, war/post-war and capitalism/socialism. Anthropology in the region presents evidence for how people live within and in terms of temporal multiplicities, and how these overlapping temporalities nonetheless cohere in a sense of self. Such ethnographic cases will allow us to extend anthropology's unique approach to social difference, plurality and multiplicity to incorporate these complex experiences of space and time.

Normalcy and Europe

The final set of insights we want to highlight clustered around the notion of "normalcy" and the relationship of the postsocialist world to the idea of Europe. We all found that being able to call on certain norms has been a powerful strategy for our interlocutors, whether as a basis of critique ("this is not normal") or to domesticate emerging or "outside" practices. In this regard, post-Yugoslav societies are an excellent place to interrogate the concepts of European and Western modernity. Indeed, we felt it was an important strategy to resist studying or analyzing the Balkans against a set of supposed "European" norms (while recognizing that our interlocutors regularly do this). Rather,

we saw that the gap between such "norms" and what is happening on the ground was a fruitful place to begin to theorize socially productive forms of practice that are otherwise glossed as failure, apathy, anti-politics and corruption. If we understand that the contradictions and tensions embedded within contemporary European imaginaries are being worked out at Europe's Balkan margins, the study of post-Yugoslav societies may thus have something to teach us about democratic, capitalist and nationalist forms *as such*, and not just about their "Balkan" versions.

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The ideas developed here emerged in collective discussion among the participants in the workshop "Towards an Anthropology of Hope? Comparative Post-Yugoslav Ethnographies" held in Manchester, England in November 2007. The participants in this collective conversation were Gerald Creed, Ildiko Erdei, Azra Hromadžić, Carolin Leutloff Grandits, Slobodan Naumović, Monika Palmberger, Frances Pine, Sanja Potkonjak, Michaela Schäuble, Marina Simić, Anders Stefansson and Larissa Vettors. ■

Writing against the New "Cold War"

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Recent work on formerly socialist states is poised to disrupt both the resurgence of "Cold War" media imagery and the lingering influence of such imagery on social thought. Anthropologists and historians are publishing research that can achieve this in three ways: (1) by refusing to posit Eastern Europe or the former USSR as passive recipients of "transition"; (2) by questioning domi-

nant accounts of the recent, late-socialist past and the ways the past moves in the present; and (3) by opening lines of inquiry that might seem irrelevant to political events but in fact reveal generative practices.

Multidirectional Influence

Many descriptions of postsocialism focus on incursions of US ideas, organizations and objects into Eastern Europe and Russia—just as hegemonic accounts of globalization tend to stress Americanization.

It is certainly true that McDonald's restaurants have become landmarks at Moscow metro stops and that local businesses run *trenings* drawing from Western management standards, but the most illuminating new research also looks intently at movements of values—concretized not only in bodies and commodities, but also in ideas and techniques—across socialist and post-socialist borders.

Historians are currently doing this best, and if we pay more attention to their work, it may

change how we do ours—saving us from assuming the geographical and temporal unilinearities of transition. Young historians have been moving away from documenting Stalin-era repressions in order to detail times in living memory. They are, in the process, also fleshing out trajectories of cultural and social connections across socialist state borders that have left lasting traces on structures and institutions across the globe. Such traces have been erased by US-based journalists (and even by many scholars) or

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