

Visegrad Fellowship at the Open Society Archives, 2013-2014
Final Report
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Project title: "Politics of informality in socialist Yugoslavia"
(Chapter of a PhD Dissertation in Political Science at the Doctoral School of Political Science, IRES and
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1. Introduction

The objective of my one-month research stay with the OSA was to complement my PhD dissertation research project with a historical expose of political and media discourses on informality and use of social ties in socialist Yugoslavia. My dissertation focuses on external state-building and the politics of informality in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. Towards the completion of this larger project, I had investigated the actors and strategies involved in negotiating, managing and labeling informality that undermine or accompany Bosnian statehood. Through archival research in the OSA, my goal was to illuminate the evolution and discursing of these practices in socialist Yugoslavia, and thus to gain empirical material that would address the academic debate about origins of 'informality' in Central and Eastern European and its connection to socialist economies.

2. Research

As a normatively neutral concept used throughout my dissertation and in my archival work, 'informality' referred to a set of strategies and practices outside of formal state regulation, labeled variously by emic terms that originated in the Yugoslav space. These included *štela/veze*, *korupcija*, and *mito*, or social capital and solidarity. While *korupcija* and *mito* translate to English as 'corruption' and 'bribe', the concept of *štela* is unique in that its denotations are not purely positive or negative. In colloquial language, *štela* (derived from the German word *Stelle*, entered Bosnian vocabulary under Austro-Hungarian rule) denotes a person or an act needed to set things up, in terms of provision of public goods and services¹. After conversations with my OSA supervisor, senior archivist Mr. Robert Parnica, I decided to gather media clippings from pre-1989 Yugoslavia that related to the use of informal practices in the major areas of (1) politics and administration, (2) employment, (3) service provision. Additionally, I decided to scan daily press for humorous depictions of informality in cartoons, and parts of Yugoslav cinematography which capture and artistically depict vernacular uses of social ties in public domain and employment. At a later stage of my research, this material will be subjected to critical discourse analysis, in order to illuminate the way informality got shaped during socialism in respect to its normative labeling (i.e. what use of ties would be socially tolerable, neutral or ostracized).

During my research period, July 2014, I have researched the following archival material:

¹ Other emic terms that relate to these phenomena in former Yugoslavia include *veze*, *znjora* and *spaga*. The latter terms, in colloquial Croatian, refer to shoe laces or strings used to connect various types of material.

Archival Catalog, Communism, the Cold War and their Afterlife; Records of Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty Research Institute; Balkan Section: Albanian and Yugoslav Files, 1943-1994

Yugoslav Subject Files I (HU OSA 300-10-2), boxes:

42 BH [Bosnia and Hercegovina]
43 Bosnia, Bosnian CP [Communist Party]
61 - 67 Central Committee
91 - 93 Corruption
109 Delegation System
123, 124 Economic Crimes
134 Economic Policy: Employment
136 Education
141, 142 Employment
186-188 Government
241 Labor Employment
242 Labor Unemployment
250 Local Community, 1974-1979
302 - 304 Organization
306-307 Party CC [Central Committee]
350- 351 Private Enterprise, Private Ownership, Private physicians
382 - 389 Selfmanagement (1963 - 1986)
404 Social Inequality, 1971-1974
454-455 Unemployment
497 Yugoslav Survey: A Record of Facts and Information, 1968;

Yugoslav Subject Files II (HU OSA 300-10-2):

69-71 Self-Management

HU OSA 205C Open Media Research Institute

HU OSA 205-4-90 Bosnia Herzegovina Subject Files, 1992 - 1997:

5, CSCE [Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe]
8, OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe], 1995-1996
15-17, Politics: Government: Local Government
28 Social Issues: Living Standards, NGO

Digital repository:

Films:

Otac na sluzbenom putu (When Father was Away on Business, 1985)

Books:

Dizdarevic, R. (1999) *Od smrti Tita do smrti Jugoslavije, Svjedocenja*. Studio OKO, Sarajevo.

Ramet, P. (1984) *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1963-1983*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

3. Preliminary findings

The initial position, or assumption, with which I started my research, was that during socialism, informality would have been covered only in the blatant ways of big corruption scandals, while the larger part of the iceberg, including use of ties, connections and *stela*-like practices would remain uncovered by mainstream media. Throughout my research at the archives, I did not find a direct reference to the vernacular, emic concepts described above, however, I was surprised to find evidence that shows that Western (etic) concepts of favoritism, nepotism and clientelism were very well known and described by the media and criticized at the meetings of Workers' Alliance, Central Committee, and local governance meetings. This material gives grounds to support my anti-balkanist thesis that informality is not a necessary side product of socialism and shortage economy, inherent to 'cultures' of South Eastern Europe, and that the way the major malversations of informality were depicted by pre-1992 media was identical to their understandings in the West. To quote one of the analysis re-printed by RFE, "if you grease the proper hand doors open more easily no matter whether you are looking for a flat, passing a driving test or wanting to secure a better place for the dead in the graveyard. All this is corruption."²

Starting from the obvious suspects, I first directed my attention to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute collection HU OSA 300-10-2 on 'Corruption'. Articles collected here refer foremost to the media scandals connected with the embezzlements in major Yugoslav enterprises, such as Agrokomerc, INA and Aluminij Mostar. While current scholarship on ex-Yugoslav countries criticizes the publicly accepted discourse in which the political domain is closely associated with corruption (Helms 2007, Jansen 2006, Gilbert 2006), the media discourse on corruption does depict politicians as those who enter politics for private enrichment. As a portrayal of negative use of one's position and public resources, 'corruption' is discoursed as something that is happening 'on higher level', i.e. among politicians, major enterprise owners, and not among ordinary people. Broadening the scope of my analysis, however, to files on employment, notes from self-management (Workers' Alliance) meetings and meetings of the Central Committee, brings in unique material that shows that within administration and party structures, 'cadres' were struggling and attempting to regulate favoritism and nepotism, which they frame as one of the major evils that disrupts socialist order.

² Roots and fruits of corruption, VUS, Wednesday, September 9, 1970, p. 20, c.1, HU OSA 300-10-2, Container 91.

4. Conclusion

While large part of the material so far collected yet remains to be analyzed, it can be said that my research in the archives brought more than satisfactory results that will enhance my doctoral dissertation with unique historical material, and that will hopefully contribute to their publication in a monograph. This would not have been possible without the excellent, friendly research environment, insights and guidance provided by the OSA staff members, Katalin Gadoros, Robert Parnica and Ors Lehel Tari, and the stimulating, motivating and intellectually challenging 'informal' time I have spent with other Visegrad Fellows, among whom, the insights of Dr. Monika Metykova and Dr. Viktoria Schmidt have been most supportive and valuable. I am very grateful for the opportunity provided by the International Visegrad Fund to carry out the archival research at the OSA.