

CONSTITUTION OF AN OBJECT OF STUDY SLOVENIA BETWEEN GLOBAL AND LOCAL

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This paper is an effort to think reflexively about the positions that the social sciences offer in the constitution of an object of study like post-socialist Slovenia. It encourages us to feel a heightened degree of sensitivity about the relationship between social science disciplines like history and anthropology and the ongoing construction of national cultures, and describes the dilemma that confronts states like Slovenia concerning the nature of cultural autonomy in a world of free flowing cultural commodities.

Keywords: *disciplinarity, self-reflexivity, social science, globalization, Slovenia.*

Razprava je poskus reflektirati položaj družboslovnih znanosti pri konstituiranju predmeta raziskave, konkretno postsocialistične Slovenije. Spodbuja nas, da se bolj zavemo občutljivosti razmerja med družbenimi znanostmi, npr. zgodovino in antropologijo, in nenebnim konstruiranjem nacionalnih kultur. Opisuje dilemo, ki zadeva naravno kulturne avtonomije v svetu prostega pretoka kulturnih dobrin in s katero se spoprijemajo države, kakršna je Slovenija.

Ključne besede: *disciplinarnost, samorefleksivnost, družbene znanosti, globalizacija, Slovenija.*

First, let me say that I am delighted to be here raising with you certain questions and issues concerning the forces that are defining and shaping Slovenia in this complicated, perhaps postmodern, moment. Before digging into those issues I should probably say a few words about where I come from intellectually. The interests that I bring to the table lie in the transformations of formerly socialist societies and in particular in the place of communications, broadly construed, in the political, social, and cultural transitions of Eastern Europe in the last several decades. The big issue I am concerned with is the way that specific spheres of communication, like the press, mass televisual entertainment, academic scholarship, etc., evolve as vectors and vehicles of power. I have written about communications, journalism, and socialism in the context of the Soviet Union and Russia, where for at least a century projects of transformation have followed each other with dizzying rapidity. In Russia, as you recall, a vast, backward empire was destroyed in the course of a world war and then a civil war; it was transformed in two decades into an industrialized nation, only to be bombed back to a pre-industrial state during World War II, from which it reconstructed itself into a shell of a modern, urban, nation; then in 1991 it underwent another significant metamorphosis to some kind of authoritarian capitalism. Of course, unspeakable atrocities occurred in this century, but at the same time, fascinating and unprecedented innovations in how people related to each other also occurred, innovations that I do not dismiss as aberrations or fantasies. My book [Wolfe 2005] was about one such innovation that flickered in and out during the Soviet Union's existence, namely of a mass journalism that posed

to its readers fascinating questions about personal conduct, and that in its best form was a kind of thinking out-loud about what a good society was and how to achieve it. Of course, Soviet journalism was afflicted with all the problems of the Soviet system – bureaucratic control, nepotism, dogmatism, and opportunism – but I thought it was worth figuring out how some people worked within it and produced striking records of intellectual and personal growth.

I am now thinking about the consequences of the disappearance of these socialist worlds, and about how we can adequately describe what happened as these dozen or so idiosyncratically socialist societies gave up, ignored, and eventually overthrew those institutions of control that had existed for the previous forty-five years. A mass society without any forms of control is both unthinkable and impossible, and so my main question is, what system or mechanism or practice of control comes into being after the central, visible form of control of a single mass party and an officially proclaimed ideological discourse disappears? Following Michel Foucault's analysis of liberalism [Burchell et. al. 1991; Foucault 2008], I tend to see power wherever I see the word freedom. This means that I am very interested in things like freedom of worship, freedom of speech, mass consumption, and competitive party politics. These practices demand that people assemble themselves and treat others in new ways, according to the logics of the specific assumptions of particular spheres. The assemblage that Foucauldians call "advanced liberal" puts those feelings of autonomy, independence, and freedom, at the heart of a reorganized social order. These new centers of power are as it were hiding in plain sight, that is, in the very institutions whose autonomy from the party-state was one of the causes of the historical upheaval in the first place. I am talking about religious organizations, political parties, newspapers, intellectual journals, and TV networks, for example, institutions whose main role is to communicate, to transport and transmit ideas, thoughts, impressions, feelings, etc. Modern Europe is an amazing place to observe "freedom in action," to play on the title of a book by the sociologist of science, Bruno Latour [1988].

But what I would like to talk about today is something both smaller and larger than this important subject of transition. I would like to reflect on something that has been agitating me for quite a while now, namely the practices of the social sciences. This agitation stems from the tension I feel between what could be called a desire for authentic inquiry, and the actual cultural work that we do as social scientists. The existence of this gap is I think one of the lessons of a study of the history of social science. On the one hand there is inquiry, which involves our interaction with "material," "sources," "informants," "realities," and "archives," but then there are the disciplinary practices that transform this stuff into cultural products. For after all, that is what a scholarly book or journal is, a product of a culture and of a specific social milieu within that culture that supports the production of these artifacts. Or put another way, there is the strange work people do of traveling to distant places to talk to very different kinds of people and to sit in often cold buildings looking at old, dusty

manuscripts, and then there is the turning of that experience into meaningful knowledge by putting it through the disciplinary machine.

This topic interests me for many reasons, but especially because I have watched with such interest the viral spread of the term “interdisciplinarity” in the American academy. If a grant proposal does not say “interdisciplinary” in it, then you might as well forget it. Yet what is almost never asked is what it means to be interdisciplinary or to do interdisciplinary work. At its worst it appears an amplification of pretension: if you have two disciplines under your belt, you are twice as good as someone with only one.

My sense of what interdisciplinary means comes from very different sources. My training was of a very different kind from most social scientists. I did not receive skills and knowledge from my teachers and mentors; rather I was trained to cultivate a kind of Nietzschean suspicion of the kinds of knowledge that both disciplines of history and anthropology had produced. This was the perspective of a number of anthropologists, historians, and literary scholars in the US and UK who came of age in the 1970s and 80s, and who saw both dogmatic state socialism and crusading American capitalism as the debilitating effect of a particular epistemological orientation to the world. They questioned the assumptions at the heart of both disciplines concerning objectivity, truth, and fact. They were assisted in this work by a great deal of other writing about the emergence of science that argued that the rise of science in the West was not the outcome of an inevitable progress of the mind and its powers of knowing, but rather the contingent outcome of political, social, economic, and cultural changes. And yet today we view science almost as a religion, as an arcane, highly technological, and largely hidden terrain of expertise far beyond the powers of the everyday person to comprehend. And the social sciences have certainly retained to this day a connection to the empirical, positivist method of detached observer investigating the messy material out there. Social science departments have modeled themselves on the hard sciences for many decades; they operate with theories and hypotheses that are then tested out in the real world. They operate according to a hierarchy of quantitative, numerical data over qualitative, discursive data by using the words “hard” and “soft” to denote these two types of results. Hard data is valued because it refers to real things out there in the world, while soft data is also usually fuzzy data, uncertain, and often ambiguous. These terms reveal how the hierarchy is clearly gendered as well.

And when one looks back to the history of the social sciences in America and western Europe (no doubt Eastern Europe as well, I am not familiar with the founding fathers of the disciplines there) during the 20th century, one finds an ambiguous record of achievement, to say the least. On the positive side, we note a breathtaking series of brilliant individuals struggling with their lives and with their societies: Durkheim obsessed with suicide and solidarity [Durkheim 1997]; Franz Boas and his student Margaret Mead arguing tirelessly for the relativity of cultures in an era in which western dominance of the globe made civilizational hierarchies commonsensical; the American historian Carl Becker in the 1930s cutting against the scientific, positivist grain in historiography by insisting that history has

no particular method, that, as he said in the title of a well-known essay, "Everyman [is] his own historian." [Becker 1931]

But behind these inspiring individuals is a backdrop that is less than reassuring, for one can argue that the rise of the social sciences at the end of the 19th century, was one segment of a broad development in which social scientific knowledge was used to create vast hierarchies of difference based upon race, religion, ethnicity, language, education, and gender. We are familiar with these as being the strategies of rule that Foucault grouped under the term "biopolitics." Common to all biopolitical strategies was their emergence from scientific institutions that supplied an image of prestige, power, and validity to projects of colonial, imperial, and national control.

And we could likewise examine the discipline of history for the way that historical knowledge became one of the key zones of knowledge required by elites in the state building projects of the nineteenth century. After all, as many scholars have argued, it was hard to recruit soldiers and ask them to die in horrendous warfare if they didn't somehow feel that they were dying for an immortal Nation. History books therefore take on great importance as that repertory of stories about the nation (and about the West, and any other transcendent collectivity) that will generate an automatic emotional response whenever the nation is criticized, threatened, or in the worst case, invaded.

This helps explain the deadly seriousness of the seemingly minor issue of textbooks. All over the world, elites view textbooks as a direct channel to the hearts and minds of citizens, and therefore they need to say just the right thing. In Japan, they cannot impugn the image of the armed forces for their conduct in Korea and China; in Turkey they cannot so much as hint that the leaders who founded Turkey's modern state tried to exterminate the Armenians; in the US many textbooks gloss over the glaring and disturbing contradictions of the life of so great an American as Thomas Jefferson, not to mention all the other founding fathers.

This need for historians to be in the service of a larger political project is today taking on new and interesting forms. I would only point out how the national project in the US has been greatly assisted by the appearance in the last two decades of the History Channel, the vast majority of whose programming is dedicated to the series of wars that the US has been involved in, going back to before there even was a United States. Thus the educational system is augmented by the entertainment system so that every day, at pretty much any time, experts, Historians, tell us the history of our nation. Needless to say, the point of this history is not to inspire critical reflection on our past, but to make us grateful for the heroes who made possible the dramatic pageant of America. Why does all this history get produced? One is tempted to trot out here an old Marxist argument about ideology: for those in control of modern states, citizens as individuals are always potentially dangerous: they may refuse to do what is demanded of them because they might not see the world in the way elites want them to. Thus they have to be educated into their proper functions.

Now what is wrong with this? On the one hand, nothing at all. As long as you accept

the structure of modernity, with individuals being a part of nations that supervise and facilitate their well-being, then you will find history perfectly normal, and you will only be worried about the intentions of elites, for the ways they might use a compliant citizenry for their own selfish ends. But on the other hand, it raises the question of how, today, in Slovenia and in the US, educated elites *should* educate their citizens. Should they be taught from a young age to identify with national heroes? Should they be taught to identify with a dominant cultural image of the nation, using all means available, including stereotypes, clichés, and myths? What kind of stories should they be taught?

All this suggests that the histories of both anthropology and history should make us pause and consider the ways that contemporary social science disciplines and their institutions and practices might still be connected to those whose pernicious effects were plain to see. We could perhaps discuss how disciplines can be restructured or reorganized so that they serve a different, less politically conserving role.

This seems particularly important given the dominant thrust of the historiography about nations that has appeared in the last two decades. The basic theoretical question this material poses is, how do historians and anthropologists write after the discovery that a nation is an imagined community? For at the heart of this discovery (but maybe this is too strong a word) is the realization that the politics of modernity is driven by discourses that have no purchase on any reality, but that rather construct realities and set them in contrast to other realities. From this perspective, the Slovenian nation, like the American nation, is an invention of the 19th century. This object, the Slovenian nation, took shape as anthropologists constructed ancient particularities, as economists discovered comparative advantage, as politicians discovered the power and pleasure of mass politics, and as historians described in the local tongue a set of events that conditioned the lives of many generations. The challenging thing to understand is that these discourses became hard, solid, and real, to the extent that it appeared that Slovenia designated something “out there,” and not the product of different inquiries, each with their own particular method.

Now we should recognize what appears an irony or appropriateness of history, that the same decade that saw the appearance of Benedict Anderson’s book [1983 or 1991] also saw the idea of the nation as the main vector for the dismantling of state socialism. To me, far from this confirming the reality of nations, this confirms the reality of discourse and of the communicational systems that support and sustain these discourses. For discourses are not simply ideas or mental constructions, they are also simultaneously media. Arguments do not exist apart from the means of their transport, as Regis Debray [1996] argues, and we have ignored for too long the independent power of the media to shape events previously assumed to be solely the product of ideas. So, for example, the awakening of Slovenian identity that occurred through rock music and a band like Laibach that had such consequences for political life was indelibly marked by the sociality of Fender guitars, and the dark basements and warehouses where they were used, and the scratchy cassettes that transported these sounds. Perhaps we could say more provocatively that different technologies of communications gave

birth in the late 1980s to a different kinds of nations. So that instead of imagining that a single Polish or a single Slovenian nation took shape after state socialism, perhaps it would be more accurate to imagine different layers of national discourses piling up, corresponding to the evolving interests of different segments of society, and the technologies that enabled them to enact the nation in their own way.

All this implies that any national identity is continually in the process of construction by discourses whose effect is the impression that the nation is as real as one's family. So that today we take for granted the idea of national governments, of national histories, of national economies, of national identities and characters, but if we trace these out historically and anthropologically, we note moments of emergence, of splicing and splitting, of fixing and hardening, of disappearance and sheer invention. For example, as Timothy Mitchell reminds us in his book *Rule of Experts* [2002], there was no such *thing* as a national economy until the 1950s, when methods of national accounting were agreed up on by professional economists.

In other words, it seems to me that the appearance of the nation as an imagined community poses a tremendous challenge to social science in forcing us to remember that when we refer to a nation, we are referring not to something self-evident, but rather to a *problem*. The implications of this are quite profound because it means we can no longer view social science as a window on the life of the nation but as one of the dimensions within which this life is constructed.

This contemporary moment is complicated, not least because of the heterogeneity and variety of practices of knowledge production; there are many disciplines that write in very different ways about the nation. Some disciplines do not see the complexity of their own histories as anything to grapple with, and thus do not demand a level of self-reflexivity in their inquiries. Some speak or write about the nation as if it were an easily accounted for unit of reality. Take for example, the book about Slovenia, *Uncertain Path*, by the Harvard trained political scientist Rudolf Martin Rizman [2006]. It is a work that surveys the transition in Slovenia from the perspective of that sub-discipline of political science informally known as 'transitology,' which seeks to understand the prospects for a stable transition from state socialism to democracy. It is like the dozens and dozens of books that analyze the recent past of a nation in Eastern Europe by assessing the state of civil society, examining the contributions of intellectuals, and gauging the state of the threat from the radical Right. Like many books of this genre, and despite the apparently disinterested, scientific framing of the material, its main task seems to me to be one of reassurance: to make a judgment about the future, to leave the reader with the feeling that either Slovenia is OK, or things are not OK. Either there is democracy and civil society and the rule of law, or there is the likelihood of a slide back into totalitarianism. I'm sure you all be happy to hear that Slovenia, like a number of other Eastern European countries, has "reached the early stage of consolidated democracies... Reversal to some sort of rightwing or populist authoritarianism or an economic collapse is, hopefully, unlikely. Despite...

zones of uncertainty,” these countries have demonstrated consistent progress that will eventually improve their still-deficient democratic institutions and historically inherited political cleavages. The preceding chapters offer strong grounds for optimism for Slovenia’s trajectory toward full and viable democracy.” [Rizman 2006: 156]

Now I don’t know Rizman and my comments here about the book are not intended as a criticism of him personally, but rather a set of observations about the discipline that both shaped the book and that approved it. The core assumption is that nations are units that slide along a scale with authoritarianism at the bad end of the scale and something called full democracy at the good end. The scale also has a time dimension because the democratic end is about the future and the bad, authoritarian end is about the past. Good countries are moving into the future and democracy, while bad countries are still “stuck” in the past. To figure out where a country is on the scale, the scholar adopts a metrics that assigns numbers to things like “religiosity,” “values,” and “commitment to democracy.” At any given moment countries are located on a spectrum of democracticness, a spectrum which purports to be descriptive, but is also clearly normative, in that the countries higher up on the list are clearly better than the ones lower down on the list. As we come across such a chart, we think, *Boy, I’d much rather live somewhere high up on the list than somewhere down on the bottom. Perhaps it would be interesting to visit one of those non- or not yet-democratic places, but I sure wouldn’t want to live there.* These lists are particularly valuable in the case of Slovenia, because it usually does pretty well in the rankings. Among other things, this is an objective way for Slovenes to feel good about themselves, in comparison to other post-socialist spaces, places like, say, Uzbekistan and Armenia.

These tables of rankings are a classic instance of what Foucauldians have come to call technologies of inscription, which refers to the banal, everyday way that completely subjective things are made into objective, scientific facts. My favorite example is the table of religiosity from Rizman’s book. My observation in response to it is that “religion” is so complicated that it means very little to abstract it into quantifiable categories that would enable judgments as to the relative “importance” of religion in a place. But having this table then facilitates a judgment about democracy, since religion is assumed to be the “opposite” of democracy. This is a hydraulic model of civil society: pump in democracy, pump out religion. Religion, here stands in for the idea of “dogmatic ideology,” and the idea that people could take “religion” and make it into something valuable, wholesome, and socially vital, does not seem thinkable.

The rankings are therefore judgments about progress and backwardness, that have come to have the force of fact. And if you think these kinds of rankings are benign or unimportant or sometimes silly, then I would argue that precisely these kinds of rankings have great authority in places like the State Department, the IMF, and commercial banks where numerical information provides a shortcut for avoiding, as well as a means for grasping complex, ethically charged issues. Investors looking for a place to plow down eight or

eighty or eight hundred million dollars might consult a list like the one on page 145 of Rizman's book that divides the formerly socialist countries into five categories: consolidated democracies, democracies (some consolidation), transitional governments or hybrid regimes, autocracies, and consolidated autocracies.

A second fascinating aspect of these assessments of national fitness that I can't help pointing out concerns the use of history. We note in reading a book like Rizman's that it is full of history, of historical events, historical judgments, historical material, and historical narratives. But the past is never confronted *as a past*, as a set of vanished events that leave an abundance of often confusing, contradictory, and confounding traces. There is never the recognition that it is difficult to interpret the past and even trickier to judge it. It is as if these events did not take place in the past, but in much less murky realm, like the archives of a television station. Here history appears not as something to be interpreted, but rather to be catalogued, and sure enough in the back of Rizman's book is an Appendix called "Chronology, 1974-2005," [2006: 157-169] that simply lists events, much as a medieval chronicle would, by year and month. Why is this here? Oh yes. We recall that the formation of political scientists rarely includes a moment when they are confronted with the argument that the past only becomes meaningful when constructed, and that there is a world of difference between a chronicle and a history. What is certainly not at issue is either the historicity of one's own terms, or the fact that the situation judged in the past was itself the product of a complex set of contingent developments. Put differently, the absence or presence of something like civil society or democracy is itself the outcome of complex forces shaping the nature of government in any given place at any given time. An authentic inquiry into history would seek to explain why government looks the way it does, taking into account the deeply cultural nature of government. History cannot be the activity of rummaging around in the past as if it were an old trunk. You cannot then slam the lid shut after you have found what you are looking for. Teaching people that this is indeed possible is itself a form of power. Today, the most powerful and prestigious institutions of western education indoctrinate aspiring social scientists from "not-yet-very-democratic" countries into this way of seeing the world. One might suspect that treating one's native country and culture as an object of political science research might cause a certain psychological tension in the practitioners themselves. (I am reminded of the scene in one of Milan Kundera's novels in which the Czech scholar on his first visit to the west forgets to give his scholarly talk, overwhelmed as he is by being the object of the self-congratulatory gaze of western audience).

The point of this digression about Rizman is to remind ourselves of the power of disciplines that remain focused on the nation and to note the emotional core of ostensibly objective scientific practices.

But things are perhaps even more complicated. For if the historical experience of our disciplines is something that needs to be confronted, then equally important is to recognize how the nation shifts around in debates about cultural freedom and political autonomy. Here the culprit is "globalization." Put crudely, the question is, how should we deploy the

analytic unit of the nation when forces, processes, and actors from outside or beyond the nation's borders operate at the heart of those institutions that have been the crucial sites for the nation's invention? How should we deal with both the category and its effects when many kinds of transnational expertise have come into being that, in an epistemological sleight of hand, give the gift of reality to nations, particularly nations who experienced the "unreality" of socialism?

It might help here to refer to an article by Frederic Jameson, entitled "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," from a volume entitled *The Cultures of Globalization [Jameson 1998]*. Jameson's starting point is recognizing that any national life is shot through with global forces. He asks how *any* explanatory framework of *any* social phenomenon these days not attend explicitly to the multiple presences of things like transnational capital that fuels the world economy; a global tourism infrastructure that makes encountering otherness a part of the vast majority of people's everyday experiences; a global popular imaginary populated by a fluid cast of princesses, politicians, billionaires, and actors; a global surveillance net that looks for "bad guys" on the vastly different scales of molecules and DNA on the one hand, and satellites and GIS on the other; a system of mass consumption that stitches together the "buying" of the global north with the "selling" of the global south; and an ever more intricate network of global government, in which "non-national" actors play an ever great role in national lives. It is not that the nation is going away or is not important. It will always have its constituencies. It is just that writing about the nation as if it were a container of indigenous processes is to put all one's analytic marbles in a rather small social scientific basket.

His main concern, here, however, is not with globalization writ large, but with the interaction between globalization and national cultures. This is particularly useful in encouraging those of us interested in media and communications to ask ourselves how should we approach contemporary cultural production anywhere, including in Slovenia, where the owner of the most popular commercial network, Central European Media Enterprises, Ltd., is an American company based in Bermuda, and when both private and public TV are pipelines for a nonstop flow of American shows? Here he points a fundamental paradox with consequences for the social sciences.

On the one hand, there is the fact that today culture is no longer subordinated to politics. With the consolidation of a global human rights discourse, and the liberal or better, neo-liberal international order, there is now widespread consensus that cultures represent whole, autonomous, vital units of human belonging. The "job" of a culture, after all, is to express itself, and finally we have a world in which the creative genius of peoples makes possible a breathtaking mosaic of human creativity. Instead of modernism's antipathy to the marginal, the particular, the "minor," globalization seizes these and celebrates them. In these circumstances people finally need not fear expressing themselves. To the contrary, self-expression becomes the most fulfilling task of any group. No one blinks an eye anymore when a group speaks of its linguistic, cultural, and ethnic identity, or when it speaks of the need to preserve

its culture and way of life. Of course, this understanding is still uneven; a place like Tibet still struggles with Chinese imperial rule, but the Dalai Lama's recent position is revealing, in that it is all about culture: if the Chinese will allow the Tibetans to express themselves via their culture and religion, they will accept Chinese political governance.

This development has been especially important for smaller peoples and cultures such as that of Slovenia. Slovenia has withstood numerous projects of assimilation (first under the imperial projects of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, then under the federal projects of the Yugoslav republic, the Yugoslav kingdom, and the nearly half-century of socialist Yugoslavia.) Despite the presence of these outside agents over the centuries, it is evident that something called Slovenian culture has survived, and today we can be pretty certain that no state will ever again try to force Slovenians to give up their language or culture.

But on the other hand, there is a different way to read the effects of globalization on culture. And on these metaphoric maps we do not see a huge number of small brightly colored splotches of identity, protected and encouraged by international organizations and laws, but rather just a few vast colorful washes of market share. These represent the power of culture-nations whose production flows out beyond the borders of their state. These cultures reflect not depth or creativity but rather sheer economic power. There are only a few European states visible here. Japan stands out, certainly, as do India and China given the vast size of their populations and their extensive diasporas, and Brazil and Mexico somewhat, but above all and unmistakably there is the US, with its century long domination of mass culture.

So again, over here a map showing the thousands of autonomous cultures, and over there broad, borderless spaces that represent the homogenizing force of things like the Hollywood system, the American techno-imaginary (visible in things like Pixar films like "Toy Story") and the American commodity of gladiatorial sport. But Jameson is calling our attention to more than simply a handful of blockbuster films and TV shows. He points out that the contemporary concern in many countries goes beyond a fear of the kind of "Americanization" of European culture that agitated people during the Cold War, especially in France and Latin America. At stake here is the global trade in cultural products dominated by the US that is perhaps the only economic sphere the US leads the world in. Many scholars and intellectuals have for decades articulated the fear that what the US dominance is leading to is the inexorable detachment of young people from the roots of their own cultures. It is not simply that they are watching American film heroes like Rambo and American TV serials, it is that they are absorbing a relationship to the material world, one defined above all by mass consumption. To put it harshly, this seems to be America's main cultural export: materialism and a kind of narcissism. It is ironic, then, or at the very least paradoxical, that the world historical moment that has finally seen universal recognition of the central value of cultural autonomy and integrity, has also seen the global dominance of a particular culture's expression and way of life.

Now I realize that these observations are debatable. Maybe scholars critical of US cultural production overstate their case. Maybe the messages that derive from American

popular culture, while ubiquitous, do not really affect the core values of a society. Maybe it is possible for Slovenian or French or Argentinean culture to retain their identities even as they adapt and absorb the marketing techniques, production values, and advertising tricks developed in the states. But one thing Jameson finds very naïve is any faith in the progressive political potential of mass culture:

Suppose that consumerism were inconsistent with democracy, that the habits and addictions of postmodern consumption block or repress possibilities of political and collective action as such... It becomes ironic, then, when mass culture is offered as a space of democratization, let alone resistance, as many participants in the globalization debate have tended to do. [Jameson 1998: 69]

Here the confusion derives from thinking that powerful media institutions, in operating on the self images of consumers, does not also affect how people understand themselves as political actors. But then there is also the problem of not recognizing how mass market commodities are charged with the symbolic and the libidinal. Strategies for the selling of commodities have long since ceased to appeal to reason or argument; today the task of advertisers is how to turn them into libidinal images, cultural signs.

Jameson's conclusion is that the conceptual confusion caused by globalization is clarified when we realize that our analyses often posit a "malign and standardizing or despotic identity," the nation, that animates our constructions of reality. This is often done because when we posit the nation-state or the state apparatus as the demonic source of problems, we can identify a solution: the proliferation of "micro-political forms of difference" that will whittle away the unitary and powers of the state. The cultural must do battle with the political, as it did in Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 90s. But when we shift our focus and identify Americanization and the creation of a flat transnational economic realm controlled from just a handful of centers as the culprit, then the most effective agents of opposition are likely to be nation-states, with their authoritative national cultural voices and their powers of regulation. Here culture is political in its ability to rally the national population against the forces of transnational capital.

This question of levels is quite relevant to the contemporary situation concerning the EU and its member states, since the EU appears simultaneously as a nation wanting or hoping to protect its citizens from the oppressive homogenizing tendencies of the American controlled global market, and as a homogenizing force of its own that must be resisted by member-states. On the one hand Brussels appears as a delegated authority leading the fight on behalf of the multiple cultures and identities in Europe, promoting regional cuisines, slow food, and the breathtaking variety of European landscapes, but on the other hand it appears as a coherent, oppressive center in its own right, manipulating national cultures with a wide range of carrots and sticks, including subsidies and grants and scholarships and stipends. The ambiguity over the location of despotic power mirrors the ambiguity of resistance. To the degree that they perceive European integration as a positive process, some people will

see nation states as units that together can indeed constitute a viable, single political whole. For nationalists, on the other hand, there can be no distinction between the cultural and the political, since what is always under threat is the creative unity of national culture.

We could add that the situation in Europe is that much more complicated because of the presence of two types of states: the large, culturally, ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous states like France, Britain, Italy, Germany and Spain, and the smaller, largely homogeneous states, many of them in Eastern Europe. In the East, governments are in the habit of assuming a sponsorship over the national culture, while in the West, it is no longer self-evident what the national culture consists of, as the pathetic discussion in the Presidential elections in France over which candidate was more “French” attests. In other words, homogeneity can present historians and anthropologists with a dilemma. What to do with being a pocket of homogeneity within a larger entity that unlike previous larger entities, does not intend on overt colonization or assimilation?

But how does this paradox appear in the context of someplace like Slovenia? On the one hand it would tell a history about Slovenia’s recent achievement of cultural independence from the empires and federations that sought to control Slovenes in the past; it might then celebrate the durability of Slovene culture in all its diasporic vitality. But another kind of analysis would show Slovenia’s rapid absorption into the vast symbolic and ideological homogenized mass culture organized from the US. This kind of cultural history, then, would analyze just how Slovenia managed to emerge as a node on the global network of mass culture. This would require first historical narratives about the degree and nature of Yugoslavia’s penetration by western mass culture between 1945 and 1990, as well as an account of how western and Yugoslav/socialist mass culture complemented and clashed with each other. It would involve, for example, a history of consumer desire under socialism (Slavenka Drakulić) and how this desire was analyzed and criticized by certain autonomous cultural voices from Laibach to Slavoj Žižek and beyond. And then this might be complemented by an anthropology that seeks to understand how western mass culture actually takes form in a place like Slovenia *today*. Here we can imagine any number of ethnographic projects that would, like Elizabeth Dunn does in her book *Privatizing Poland [2004]*, describe how forms of thought and life made possible by the global market come to shape, grind against, and sometimes usurp ways of thought and life that then appear as “local” or “cultural” or “traditional.”

In conclusion, recognizing this condition of globalization means, I would argue, that disciplines should no longer operate as they have been. For historians, the big question is an obvious one: what is the place of the nation in one’s history? Does one’s history assume the nation as an autonomous and unitary entity, or does it promote a vision of the nation as always embedded in complex transnational and transcultural connections? Or better, not simply embedded in connections, but rather constituted by them? Does one’s history develop and explore the idea that the nation emerged out of mundane tasks, like compiling statistical tables, surveying farmland, and writing stories about “great men”? And for

anthropologists: we might ask about one's relation to the anthropology as a nationalizing discourse. How do we go about recognizing one's fellow nationals as citizens at the same time that they are informants? And thus that one's relationship to them is constituted not only historically, through the past, but politically, in the present? And how do we recognize that in many ways the objects of anthropological analysis, people living ways of life seen to be more coherent, authentic, traditional, than our own, are also living fully and completely in the 21st century? What happens to anthropology when both ethnographer and informant see each other as struggling to make sense of the complexity of globalization? Does the ethnographer, for example, contribute to the construction of a place and people as picturesque and folkloric by siding with them in their struggle to market themselves as tourist attractions? Or does one study the tourists, just as much as one studies the object of their touristic gaze? Difficult questions, to be sure.

But we can be sure of one thing: globalization not only provides the opportunity for social scientists to write and think in new ways. One can argue that we have no choice. Only by giving up, letting go, and distancing ourselves from some of our most cherished concepts, methods, and plot-lines, can we see things afresh.

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H KONSTITUCIJI PREDMETA RAZISKAVE. SLOVENIJA MED GLOBALNIM IN LOKALNIM

*Razprava je poskus reflektirati položaj družboslovnih znanosti pri konstituiranju predmeta raziskave, npr. postsocialistične Slovenije. Samorefleksivnost je neogibna sestavina etičnega odnosa do znanja in prevpraševanja vloge družboslovja, da servisira politične organizacije, ki zastopajo partikularne interese. Poudarjen je pomen resnega jemanja kompleksnosti tega vprašanja: kako naj povemo zgodovino naroda, posebej v kontekstu vzhodne Evrope, kjer je zgodovina tako očitno predmet spora. In podobno, kako naj antropologi raziskujejo »kulturo«, če je kultura prvi pripomoček v nacionalistovem kovčku orodij. Problematična narava znanja družbenih znanosti je ponazorjena z delom o Sloveniji, s knjigo *Uncertain Path* politologa Rudolfa Martina Rizmana [2006]. Podobno kot v številnih knjigah tega žanra in kljub navidez nezainteresiranemu znanstvenem okvirjenju gradiva, avtor svojo glavno vlogo vidi v zagotovitvi: presoditi prihodnost in pustiti bralca z občutkom, da je v Sloveniji vse v redu ali stvari niso v redu. Ali so demokracija in civilna družba in vladavina prava ali pa je velika verjetnost vrnitve nazaj k totalitarizmu. Najpomembnejša je kvantifikacija fenomenov, npr. religije ali ekonomije. Preglednice, ki jih ponuja, so klasične ponazoritve tega, kar so po Foucaultu tehnologije vpisov, ki se nanašajo na banalno, na vsakdanji način, ko so popolnoma subjektivne reči vzete kot objektivna, znanstvena dejstva. Drugo vprašanje zadeva mesto zgodovine v knjigi: preteklost ni nikoli reflektirana kot preteklost, kot niz izginulih dogodkov, za katerimi ostaja preobilje pogosto zmedenih, protislovnih in zamešanih sledi. Nikoli ne sledi priznanje, da je interpretirati preteklost težavno in še kočljiveje presoјati jo.*

Esej nas spodbuja, da se bolj zavemo občutljivosti razmerja med družbenimi znanostmi, npr. zgodovino in antropologijo, in nenehnim konstruiranjem nacionalnih kultur. Opisuje dilemo, ki zadeva naravo kulturne avtonomije v svetu prostega pretoka kulturnih dobrin in s katero se spoprijemajo države, kakršna je Slovenija. To nas privede še k enemu partikularnemu in dvoumnemu vidiku Evropske zveze kot moderne vladavine: hkrati promovira nacionalne kulture kot integralne fasete ene same evropske identitete in podpira režime globalizacije in pretok ameriških kulturnih dobrin, kar postane vir trenj za vse, ki so občutljivi za negotovo stanje nacionalnih

kultur. Na eni strani je navsezadnje »delo« kulture, da se izraža; končno imamo svet, v katerem ustvarjalni genij ljudstev omogoča mozaik človeške ustvarjalnosti, ki jemlje dih. Namesto modernistične antipatije do obrobnega, partikularnega, »minornega«, globalizacija vse to zaobseže in slavi. Na drugi strani pa imajo »kulturni narodi« moč, da se njihova produkcija pretaka čez njihove državne meje. Te kulture ne reflektirajo globine ustvarjalnosti, temveč bolj kažejo na njihovo ekonomsko moč. Kako krmariti med obema procesoma je izzivalno vprašanje.

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