

## RESEARCH REPORT: CENSORSHIP IN YUGOSLAV PHILOSOPHY, 1972-1989

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### **Research Abstract:**

My dissertation traces the development of a particular strand of Structuralism in Ljubljana that has had outsized implications both for regional political discourse during the break-up of Yugoslavia, and also for international philosophical discourse, manifested in the rise of Slavoj Žižek. The first section (1968-1975) examines the historical conditions of intellectual production in Yugoslavia and identifies how Yugoslavia's 'non-aligned' status allowed it to serve as an unexpected center of philosophical and political discourse, and facilitated an exchange of ideas from the Soviet Union, Western Europe, and the U.S.A. Part two (1975-1982) provides an account of how these diverse philosophical influences served as key source texts for a generation of thinkers in Ljubljana, including burgeoning Ljubljana School. The final section (1982-1989) chronicles the distillation of the Ljubljana School's theoretical platform, and the School's subsequent split with former collaborators due to political, philosophical and psychoanalytic disputes. An epilogue frames the material success and failures of this movement, juxtaposing Slavoj Žižek's catapult to theoretical stardom with the splintering of the Yugoslav intelligentsia, as well as Yugoslavia itself, in the 1990s. Ultimately, by accounting for the intellectual history of the Ljubljana School, my dissertation will yield insights regarding the perplexing nature of intellectual life in Yugoslavia; how and why did a nation very much on the geopolitical periphery become a center of international discourse? As a crucial part of this broader inquiry, my participation in the American Councils Title VIII Research Scholar Program

allowed me to do archival research and conduct interviews pertaining to the contentious issues of ideological persecution in Yugoslavia from 1972-1989. This research lends critical focus to the role of censorship in shaping intellectual production in Yugoslavia, and helps us understand how the ideas produced—and the ideas censored—in this liminal, ‘non-aligned’ country have proven central to debates that defined the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and live on in the present, in both the East and the West.

**Research Goals:** For this grant, my central point of inquiry was historical research into the issue of censorship of intellectual production in Yugoslavia. Censorship was a recurring but inconsistent feature of Yugoslav cultural life. Several recent studies by scholars from the region have focused on censorship of literature and film in Yugoslavia, but scholars are just beginning to look at the censorship of philosophy, of which there were many instances. For example, in 1975, the Praxis group experienced several forms of censorship. In Zagreb, publication of the Praxis group’s eponymous journal was shut down, while in Belgrade eight professors were removed from their posts.<sup>1</sup> That same year in Ljubljana, Slavoj Žižek was forced to add a chapter to his MA thesis to make it ‘sufficiently Marxist’ before it was allowed to pass. Later, Mladen Dolar was interrogated for his theoretical analysis of fascism, and by the early 1980s, members of the Ljubljana School began publishing works under the anonymous collective name “Sigmund Freud School.” All of these instances represent some kind of censorship, whether pre-emptive self-censorship or reactionary censorship by the authorities, and comprehensive research into the particularities of these incidents of censorship are critical not only to the intellectual development of these various philosophical movements, but also to the political reality of the Yugoslav successor states.

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<sup>1</sup> The “Belgrade 8” were removed from their posts temporarily in 1975, and permanently in 1980.

My goals for this research trip were to examine archival materials in the Croatian State Archive in Zagreb, Croatia, as well as the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, Serbia. In addition, I interviewed several prominent intellectuals who provided me with oral histories of their experiences in the 1970s and 1980s. In all of these documents and materials, my research focused on the finding answers to the following questions:

1. How were the conditions of intellectual production influenced by censorship in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s? In what ways did political factors (broadly conceived) influence intellectual production in this time period?
2. What were particular incidences of censorship—either pre-publication or post-publication—in the 1970s and 80s?
  - 2.1. How was this censorship enacted or enforced?
  - 2.2. Which aspects of philosophical work did this censorship target?
  - 2.3. To what extent did it change the overall impact of the piece of work in question?
3. To what extent was philosophical work self-censored? Why?
  - 3.1. Is it possible to identify particular strategies that authors employed for handling potentially sensitive political themes?
4. Were any other forms of political pressure or control exerted on the production of these texts? How were these forms of control exercised?
  - 4.1. How much influence did state funding have on intellectual production in this period?

Can the withdrawal of state funding of certain intellectual activities in Yugoslavia be described as a kind of censorship?
5. How can we describe the effect of censorship for Yugoslav philosophy in general? What were the political consequences of censorship during this period?

## Research Activities:

To find answers to these questions, I first examined the archival collections that documented philosophical activities during this time period. Here is a chart of the collections (and box numbers) I visited:

<i>Archive</i>	<i>Name of Archival Collection</i>	<i>Boxes</i>
Croatian State Archives	Media/Newspaper Archive	ZNA 4, ZNA 5, ZNA 13, ZNA 20, OBR 59, OBR 60, OBR 61; Individual newspaper archives of Rudi Supek, Gajo Petrović, Nadežda Čačinovič, Rastko Močnik, Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar.
Croatian State Archives	Personal Archive of Rudi Supek (founder of Praxis)	18, 86, 87, 90, 91, 93, 99,
Archive of Yugoslavia	Archive of the Central Committee for Science and Culture	320-1-1, 320-46-69, 320-47-70,
Archive of Yugoslavia	Archive of the Student Advisory Committee	145-27-79 to 145-27-97, 145-69-271 to 145-70-289, 145-72-301 to 145-72-305, 145-117-446, 145-118-447. (Rather than list every box, I have chosen to list the sequences to save space.)

On average, each box contained around 300 documents and took about 5 hours to thoroughly analyze. While analyzing these documents, I searched for any mention of particular instances of censorship, and also attended to general descriptions of the conditions of intellectual production. I was interested in the networks through which information passed, and how individual philosophers experienced those networks.

While in the archives, I took a total of 2,577 photographs of documents, which I categorized by topic and source, thereby creating a digital archive that I will continue to use throughout my research. For future researchers, I should note that I was extremely surprised by some of the practical policies of the “Archive of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije),” many of which were not disclosed on their website. For example, for the use of a personal photographic device, the archive charges what the website describes as a “nominal fee”, which is actually 2,000 Serbian Dinar per day, which would have amounted to \$600 (more than half of my monthly living stipend) for my time in the archives. Fortunately, I became acquainted with (and perhaps earned the pity of) one of the archivists, who ultimately gave me a huge discount on this cost. Still I was very surprised by this rather extortionate fee, and I would caution future researchers to be aware of this unfortunate and limiting policy.

I also conducted several oral history interviews. In Zagreb, I interviewed Peter Milat and Zeljka Matijašević; in Belgrade, I interviewed Branimir Stojanović. In each case, I met with the subject multiple times, and was therefore able to focus on a variety of topics in Yugoslav philosophy. All of my interview subjects had very interesting perspectives on the conditions of intellectual production in Yugoslavia, and I was grateful for their generosity and enthusiasm for my project. All interviews were conducted either in Croatian or Serbian.

### **Important Research Findings:**

#### **1) *The “unsigned article”***

I was intrigued to find an entire discourse about “unsigned articles,” which appeared in many different documents. These ‘unsigned articles’ evidently began during the dawn of the Socialist Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia after WWII, and represented the official

position of the Communist Party on a variety of political and philosophical topics. The absence of the authorship evidently attempted to imbue these positions with an air of objectivity, although this attempt was largely unconvincing to many Yugoslav philosophers. For instance, in the newspaper photographed below, Gajo Petrović discusses how he was the first person to respond to an ‘unsigned article’ with a signed one. This critique of the party leadership by an individual (who would go on to become a leading philosopher) provides a very important example of how the Yugoslav government attempted to disseminate certain philosophical perspectives, and how the party line was questioned by individuals. Therefore, this record allows us to begin to sketch a history of dissent and tolerance in post-war Yugoslavia.



It is also interesting to note that the format of the “unsigned article” was later taken up somewhat provocatively and ironically by several intellectual movements in Yugoslavia. For instance, in the 1980s the burgeoning Ljubljana School began to publish unsigned articles in order to establish the “dogma” of their theoretical positions. Therefore, a form that began as an instrument of governmental control was soon co-opted by philosophers and put towards furthering their own theoretical agendas.

## 2) *International Prestige and Censorship*

I found many documents that described a quandary that Yugoslavia government had to face in the mid 1970s. On the one hand, the government highly valued the international prestige that accompanied renown philosophical movements such as Praxis, and the fact that international luminaries annually flocked to its shores for the famous Korčula Summer School. The global press coverage of these events provided Yugoslavia with precious cultural capital that helped bolster its international reputation. However, the government was also threatened by the political engagement of these philosophers, who were very often quite radical and critical of the government's policies. It seems, however, that the government found a very calculated resolution to this predicament: in 1975, the government defunded the Praxis journal, and removed eight philosophy professors from their positions. This action did create an international scandal, but the government seems to have timed a new policy to coincide with these measures, in an apparent attempt to mitigate the nation's public image and recast the image of Yugoslavia's intellectual engagement. Instead of inviting famous philosophers from Western Europe, the Soviet Union and the USA to heady philosophical debates on a Dalmatian island, the government now focused on bringing underprivileged students from the developing world to study in Yugoslavia. These students typically enrolled in professional or vocational schools, and were (with a few exceptions) generally uninvolved in political debates. They were frequently profiled in (party controlled) newspapers, where their stories were presented as evidence of the success of Yugoslav socialism. For example, the two newspaper clippings below tell the story of a group of Nigerian students who came to study in Yugoslavia in 1978. The first title reads, "I chose Tito's country" while

the second says “We became Montenegrins.”



These representations make it clear that the Yugoslav government actively managed its international intellectual reputation, and that when one former source of pride (the philosophical Praxis school) became politically threatening, the authorities sought out another avenue of positive publicity in the academic arena. However, this new strategy was not foolproof: when the foreign students returned home after completing their degrees, many found that their Yugoslav diplomas were not recognized by or valid in their home countries, which caused great embarrassment to the Yugoslav authorities. Furthermore, tensions soon began to arise between foreign students and Yugoslav students, who complained that the foreign students were given better funding than Yugoslav citizens. Although initially suppressed by the media, reports eventually surfaced that foreign students faced many kinds of (often racial) discrimination, and that many of them were a great deal less enamored of Yugoslavia than the newspapers titles above would imply.

### 3) *Periodization of Censorship*

One of the central questions of this research was how to conceptualize periods of censorship in Yugoslavia. Although certain events (such as the removal of the “Belgrade

Eight” and the shutting down of the Korčula Summer School) were clear instances of censorship, it was unclear to what extent censorship was a constant or fluctuating force on intellectual production in Yugoslavia. However, one set of materials I found in the archives provided critical historical perspective on this question. I learned that in 1989, a group of individuals had actually proposed to start the Korčula Summer School up again. There was a vociferous public debate in several newspapers dedicated to the topic, which gave excellent insight into the status of censorship at that time. One viewpoint argued that since the death of Tito had created a power vacuum that weakened the authority of the state, philosophers would most likely be able to start up their activities again without interference from the government. Some members of the government even voiced their approval of the idea, apparently attempting to regain some of the international prestige that the Korčula Summer School had brought to Yugoslavia. However, the most telling viewpoint came from one of the founders of the Korčula School, Rudi Supek. He wrote (with a distinctive tinge of irony): “As we all know, the Korčula Summer School is classified as a part of the special war against Yugoslavia on behalf of the agents of American imperialism. This is publicly proclaimed, and it is written in textbooks—even today. As such, the renewal of the Korčula Summer School can only have two dimensions: either it is a continuation of the special war against Yugoslavia or it is an attempt to discredit our intelligence service!” Supek’s tongue-in-cheek response was clearly an attempt to force the government’s hand. By feigning a strict (and outdated) “party line,” Supek was attempting to force the government to acknowledge that the charges against the Praxis movement in the 1970s were completely groundless and purely ones of political expedience. He insisted upon the official exoneration of the Korčula

Summer School and withheld his support of the renewal initiative (which the government was clamoring for in the late 1980s, as one of several desperate efforts to restore Yugoslavia's international reputation) until that condition was met. Thus, this episode reveals a critical incident in how censorship functioned over time, how the stigma and resentment of an earlier era of censorship endured, and how Yugoslav intellectuals reacted to the changing political landscape of the 1980s.



### **Policy Implications and Recommendations:**

My research into censorship in Yugoslav philosophy has two immediate points of policy relevance for US analysts and decision makers. The first point concerns the way in which the censorship of philosophy in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s (the topic of my research in this grant proposal) tangibly contributed to the Yugoslav conflict of the 1990s, which is arguably the most important touchstone for US policy in the region. The second point concerns a current matter of domestic policy; more specifically, my study of censorship in Yugoslav philosophy provides an important historical precedent for the study of censorship in University settings, a topic which, as of autumn 2016, has emerged as one of the most urgent questions of higher education in the United States.

In short, I found that there were profound political ramifications of philosophical censorship in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav Government's censorship initiatives in the 1970s

resulted in a stifled and splintered Yugoslav intelligentsia that then failed to rally public support in the tumultuous late 1980s as the civic fabric of Yugoslavia was disintegrating. Yugoslav censorship policy of the 1970s damaged the intelligentsia to such an extent that when, a decade later, in the face of emerging nationalisms and ethnic tensions, the government specifically called upon the same (previously censored) philosophical leaders to restore public discourse, these philosophers were unable (and unwilling) to intervene on the government's behalf. Thus, it is clear that the Yugoslav government's decision to censor intellectuals in the 1970s had a direct relationship to the birth of a violent populism that would, in the 1990s, result in the disintegration of the state.

Closer to home, the topic of censorship of intellectual expression has emerged as a defining issue on college campuses across the country. Almost every major US newspaper has featured a story related to this crisis in American higher education, which hinges on a tradeoff between ensuring students' safety (and protecting students from harassment) on the one hand, and ensuring freedom of speech (and protecting students from censorship) on the other. A recent controversy at Yale University<sup>2</sup> is only one example of this wide-spread phenomenon, yet it reveals the urgency and volatility of this divisive issue. While I do not claim that my research directly impacts this polemic, I do think that my case study of censorship in Yugoslavia can provide US policy makers with an important historical precedent to take into consideration when tackling these complex challenges currently facing the nation. My research suggests that censorship of intellectual and philosophical positions is damaging not only because it limits the right to free expression of particular ideas, but because it undermines the institution of public

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<sup>2</sup> Liam Stack, "Yale's Halloween Advice Stokes a Racially Charged Debate," *New York Times*, November 8, 2015, accessed December 11, 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/09/nyregion/yale-culturally-insensitive-halloween-costumes-free-speech.html>

discourse, which, in the Yugoslav context, cleared a path for violent populisms to replace qualified philosophical debate. In this way, I hope that my research into censorship in Yugoslavia can contribute to this important debate by providing policy makers with one of the tools necessary to make historically informed policies that, in orienting towards the challenges of the future, avoid the mistakes of the past.

### **Co-Curricular Activity:**

In addition to conducting my research, I also held a workshop at the American Councils office in Belgrade for alumni of American Council's high school FLEX US-exchange program on the topic of applying to US Universities and Colleges. Because I teach writing composition to undergraduates at the University of Chicago, I specifically focused on crafting the personal statement portion of college applications, and exposed the FLEX alumni to some of the explicit and implicit expectations of that genre. We discussed various aspects of the American college application process, as well as the American college experience more generally. I really enjoyed hearing about these students' experience with the FLEX high school exchange program in the US and I was impressed by their ongoing motivation to study in the US at the college level. It seemed that the workshop was helpful to them as well, as provided them with an opportunity to ask about questions about the rather daunting process of US college admissions. Since I have returned to the US, I have been in touch with some of the students who attended the workshop about drafts of personal statements, and I look forward to staying in contact with them as they consider attending a US college or university.

**Conclusions:** My research has recovered critical archival documents and testimony for contextualizing the history of philosophical censorship in Yugoslavia. This evidence sheds light

on the conditions of intellectual production in Yugoslavia from 1970-1990, and also allows us to understand how those conditions shaped the role that intellectuals played during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. However, these findings have implications not only for our historical understanding of Yugoslavia, but also for the dynamics of censorship and public discourse more broadly.

**Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:**

I plan to distill my findings into a dissertation chapter that I will present at the national ASEES (Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies) conference in 2017 and then develop into a journal article. Of course, I will inform American Councils of these events as they occur so that American Councils is able to track the outcomes of their research programs. In closing, I'd just like to say that I am enormously grateful to the American Councils Title VIII Research Scholar Program (funded by the US Department of State), and that I am eager to actively support the program in any way I can in the future!

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