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2004 Scott Kloeck-Jenson Travel Award Report

I traveled to Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia in August and September 2004. My research focuses on the way in which international norms of transitional justice have been adopted domestically in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The main purpose of my summer trip was to assess the feasibility of my dissertation topic and figure out if there are other questions that are important to the local community that I am missing in my current research design.

I spent most of my time in Serbia in August 2004, with additional short trips to Montenegro and Croatia in September 2004 for document collection and newspaper clippings. My trip also serendipitously coincided with the start of the defense portion of the Slobodan Milosevic trial in The Hague, which was broadcast live on Serbian television, so I could observe the coverage of the trial and analyze the framing of the trial in local media. It was interesting to see that some of the media argued that Milosevic was in fact quite effective in his defense and this sentiment was shared by a majority of viewers who called in the post-trial coverage TV show. This estimate was in stark contrast to the analysis of human rights organizations which claimed that the type of defense Milosevic was offering proved his lack of a grip on the seriousness of the charges he is facing.

While in Serbia, I met with a number of lawyers, human rights activists, journalists, academics and researchers. I conducted in-depth interviews with directors of the Yugoslav Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, with the ranking member of the Serbian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, two professors of political science and a professor of history at the University of Belgrade, one researcher at the Institute for European Studies and a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology, two journalists with the leading independent weekly magazine *Vreme*, web editor for independent Radio B92, and a co-director of the Center for Cultural Decontamination.

I mostly wanted to get a feeling of how debates about facing the past are framed domestically, and what different takes on the debate different segments of society have. Since I did not conduct my own survey research to get to the level of mass politics (“everyday citizens”) attitudes about transitional justice, I collected available survey data conducted by reliable local polling agencies.

From talking to lawyers and human rights activists, I learned more about the precise structure and mechanisms of the newly established local Special Court for War Crimes. Unfortunately, since this court meets in closed sessions, I was unable to acquire any documentation from these trials, either visual or textual. However, my contacts at the Yugoslav Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights are allowed to attend the trials and have agreed to share their notes with me.

I have tried to select a varied group of people to talk to, the main difference being their attitude to transitional justice projects in the former Yugoslavia. Why do they think Serbia had to cooperate with international justice institutions, how has this cooperation unraveled, what are the challenges ahead and what is the appropriate role of international organizations in pressuring Serbia to come to terms with its violent past. I did a lot of preliminary research prior to my trip so I mostly knew who my respondents were and how they viewed the issue of justice.

However, there were some surprises, probably the biggest being that members of the Serbian Truth and Reconciliation Commission were very critical of the international justice projects as well as of domestic nongovernmental scene. They, in fact, in many ways sided with the academic observers who denied the objectivity and impartiality of the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague, and in fact advocated a very localized type of justice that would avoid what, in their opinion, was an anti-Serb bias present in the Hague. This finding was of great consequence for my research as it significantly enforces my hypothesis that international norms and institutions become filtered through domestic politics in ways that are quite different from the original intent of the international community. This finding was very encouraging for me in pursuing further this line of argumentation in my research. I plan to follow up on this aspect of my research in much more detail when I do longer fieldwork in the region next year.

In addition to interviewing and media analysis, I collected a lot of documents that cover domestic debates about transitional justice. I also obtained a collection of books that deal directly with domestic responses to international justice interventions in Serbia.

On my short trips to Montenegro and Croatia I did document collection and press clipping as well as some brief analysis of local media coverage of justice initiatives.

The Scott Kloeck-Jenson travel award was incredibly useful for my research. It came at a critical time when I was refocusing parts of my dissertation proposal and needed some local, practical reassurance that my topic in fact makes theoretical sense, but also that it is relevant at both the level of theory but even more so at the level of practice for the local contexts which I study. I feel fortunate my SKJ funded summer trip has contributed to the alleviation of both of these concerns. I made many local contacts and was very encouraged by the interest local researches have shown for my study. I look very much forward to continuing the work on my dissertation in the coming months.