ETHNICITY AMONG URBAN SLOVENE VILLAGERS IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

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It is my intention in this article to discuss briefly the inception, background, and plan, of a study I have begun of migrants and their descendents from Slovene villages who have settled in the United States, primarily in Cleveland and its environs. Relatives and friends of the inhabitants of Žerovnica, which I studied, and which is a relatively typical traditional Slovene village, are to be treated as a core unit, the extensions of which lead to a study of social networks and informal groups that interrelate Slovenes in the Cleveland area. Alliances based on kin, friendship and other criteria, between migrants from Žerovnica and similar peasant villages, with other Slovene Americans, are to be defined both in terms of their internal relationships and their relations to the nation of origin, Slovenia.

The goal is to distinguish boundaries within the larger society through the analysis of communication networks which reveal cross cutting interpersonal bonds and also, and most importantly, through the analysis of symbolic cultural behavior of all kinds which serves to promote self-evaluation and identification and communicates this to outsiders. (See Hofer, in Winner, 1973: 4, for a discussion of this approach as applied to Hungarian peasant culture.)* This study is conceived as a sequel to my earlier work, *A Slovenian Village: Žerovnica*, based on field research in that village in 1964-5 and 1969. In addition, I have revisited Žerovnica in 1973 and 1974.

Minimally, the projected study has two interrelated foci: 1) historical depth and spatial breadth, since the context of the *Slovene* past and present must be analyzed, and 2) the American context, requiring the analysis of the structuration and functioning of an ethnic group and its culture in a complex society in an urban setting.

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*Specific citations contained within parentheses in this paper refer to the works listed in the "References Cited" section at the conclusion of the text.

The diachronic and synchronic aspects of these problems are to be shown as dynamically related.

Basic to this study is the finding that the migrant group from the village of Žerovnica (including individuals who came to the United States both for temporary and permanent periods) maintained significant contact with the country of origin. This fact is of interest for several reasons, among which are the following three:

1. It pertains to the question of the survival of the village through history;
2. It bears upon an interesting comparative problem concerning corporate and noncorporate kin groups, their inheritance rules and their varying relations and nonrelations to those who depart, that has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate;
3. It is relevant to recent theoretical departures in anthropology. In understanding the phenomenon of the continued interaction of Slovene migrants with kin at home, we turn to such concepts as ethnicity and pluralism when we ask such questions as: How do we define ethnic groups, their social boundaries, their ethos, values, and general culture? How do such groups function within a complex society like the United States?

I wish to discuss each of these points in further detail, beginning with the first, namely the relation of emigration to the survival of villages like Žerovnica.

Migration abroad, or to great distances, is an old tradition among the national groups now comprising Yugoslavia, has existed in fact since the days of the Greek colonies, when migrations were within the Mediterranean area. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries migrations, both temporary and permanent, to North America (as well as to Western Europe) became common, particularly to the mining towns and steel mills of Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Ohio, and migration to foreign lands continues to the present. As of 1940, there were 147,000 Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the United States, of which 76,000 were Slovenes (Govorchin 1961: 335). In the postwar period a significant migration continued, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Unfortunately, however, there are few studies of Yugoslav or Slovene immigrants in the United States.

Turning to the specific question of migration from the village of Žerovnica, it is necessary to bear in mind that this very ancient village in northwestern Slovenia, composed of approximately 250 inhabitants, or 60 families, has survived over time without severe disruption. A relatively traditional peasant economy is still practiced on village lands inherited from the medieval period, and land is still distributed in the traditional tenure patterns. As I have shown (Winner 1971: 71-72), emigration to near and distant areas was one significant factor contributing to the survival of this village and its traditional way of life from the earliest times through the contemporary period. Particularly in the depression years of the 1890s and 1930s, both temporary and permanent emigration to the United States was an essential solution not only to overpopulation, but also to village poverty, since ties and obligations to kin and village retained their strength over decades and across oceans. A family head might travel to the United States several times in his lifetime to work in the mines, forests, or later in the factories, and noninheriting sons (the system being primogeniture) might permanently move to America, while the inheriting son returned.

As a cultural center for Slovene emigrants, Cleveland, Ohio is known to all Žerovnica villagers. In fact, every household has relatives in the United States, and frequently in Cleveland or its environs, with whom contact is characteristically maintained. Presents, souvenirs and other mementos and photographs from the United States, are displayed in all houses. The concept "America" is part of the ethos and self-identification of every village family, as well it might be, for without this supportive relationship Žerovnica most probably would not have continued to exist in the form we know it today.

The following are typical stories of recollections of such relationships. A widow of an average peasant recalled:

> My husband went to America at seventeen (in 1906) and stayed until the first world war. He worked with a relative in the mines of Minnesota. He went because his father's farm was terribly in

> debt. There were six children and my husband's father had to send his son to America. My husband said to his mother before he left, "If I earn 1000 forints can I come home?" She said, "You earn that much and you will be master of this house."
>
> If it had not been for earnings in America this farm would have disappeared. My husband came home and fixed up the house with the money he made from America.

The son of a village specialist, who owned little land, also resorted to emigration:

> My father was a shoemaker and had five children. He had only one field of potatoes. In the 1880's he went to Pennsylvania. Then he went to Brazil. I went to America also but my father got sick in Brazil and returned to the village, so I came back to help him. Then my father died, so I went back to America and sent money to my mother and brothers and sisters. I worked in the mines in Minnesota. In 1914 I came back to the village but the rest of my brothers remained in America. Then I was able to buy a little more land. But I should have stayed in Minnesota for another ten years. I came back because my mother needed me, and then I had to go to war.

The son of an average peasant, who lost some land in the late nineteenth century, emigrated to France, but came home:

> My father called me home in 1931. The house was deeply in debt. I said, "*Kaj bo, bo* (What will be, will be). Either it will be sold or it will stay." When I came back it was very bad here. It was a lucky house that had one hundred dinars in cash. I sold wood for seventy-five dinars a cubic meter. There was no trade, nothing. No one could pay taxes. The government just waited for years and years, but did not take anything. (Winner 1971: 88)

I turn now to my second point, that of the relation of corporate kin groups and their inheritance rules to the problem of contact with departing members. The social organization of Žerovnica is an excellent example

of a system based on one type of corporate kin group which exhibits what Eric Wolf has called shallow, landed descent groups, usually associated with primogeniture. In such organizations the successful conduct of the enterprise requires control, within one economic unit, of a number of such ecological resources as cultivable land, meadow, pasture, and forest. Wolf suggests that single inheritance has an ecological basis in such systems. The division of property would tend to splinter the economic unit and therefore it is disallowed (1966a: 3). According to Wolf, corporate kinship groups such as this one, as well as corporate village communities of the kind found in Middle and South America, and in Java and elsewhere, characteristically do not maintain contact with migrants, since the corporate mechanisms rule against such relations. This conclusion is upheld by Wolf's own study of the German village of St. Felix in the South Tyrol (where, as it happens, the kin structure parallels that of Žerovnica, i.e., stem family and primogeniture). In St. Felix, then, characterized by corporate kin structure, "migration breaks the ties between the family of origin and the migrant, and the migrant becomes socially irrelevant to the remaining members...the uncles who have gone to America are never heard of again" (Wolf, 1962: 9. See also subsequent works: Cole and Wolf 1974, and Cole 1969, 1971, 1972, 1973).

Findings in Middle American corporate villages also support this generalization, namely that corporate groups do not maintain contact with migrants (Wolf 1966a: 14). As I have pointed out, however, this conclusion is not supported by data from Žerovnica, creating the dilemma faced by the noninheriting sons and daughters. Their alternatives have been described by Arensberg and Kimball: "Each generation knew new waves of brothers and sisters, non-inheriting children who had to go out into the world to 'make their fortunes' elsewhere—on new farms, in marriages outside, in apprenticeships leading to artisan or other work in the cities" (1965: 235). Yet I have also shown it to be true that in Žerovnica memories of a different system, that of joint or equal inheritance expressed in a myth relating early village history, forms a part of the consciousness of all villagers (Winner 1971: 57-8 and 1973).

The fact remains that the Slovene migrant is not lost to the community as were those from St. Felix or

Middle America. Rather, the behavior of Slovene migrants has much in common with that of migrants from Mediterranean groups where, as it happens, equal division of property is the ideal. For example the Italian community of St. Trent (reported by Wolf and Cole) and Greek villagers described by Friedl (1959: 31) maintain close contact with villagers who depart. There are also parallels from Puerto Rican communities noted by Wolf (1956, 1966a: 14), as well as other national groups in Yugoslavia, notably Serbia, where the close relation between Serbian urban and village kin has been described by Denich (1970), Halpern (1973), Hammel (1969), Šinšić (1973), and others. Finally, it is useful to compare the relations of Slovene migrants to their home villages to those of Polish peasants, where again there are similarities. According to my own research in northeastern Poland (in Ciechanowiec, Bialystok district), land was not divided, but those sons not compensated with land were awarded grants of money whenever possible. Polish research also seems to bear out the importance of contact between Polish migrants and native villagers. Studies on Polish emigrant groups and their ties with the homeland have been important ever since the classic study by Thomas and Znaniecki, which laid the basis for an entire school of Polish sociology relying upon the collection and editing of personal documents. Particularly interesting is a recent Polish publication (Kula 1973), composed of letters from rural emigrants written in 1890-91, sent from America to Congress Poland and intercepted by the Tsarist censors. These letters never reached their destination and were discovered by Kula only in 1941.

The primary historical impetus behind the letters was the agrarian crisis of the later nineteenth century, a crisis which prompted many Polish and other east European peasants to depart for the New World. The typical pattern was for fathers and husbands to come to the United States as advance parties. They settled in industrial cities where relatives and friends, earlier arrivals from the emigration wave of the 1840s, received them. Their goal was to work and save in order to earn the fare necessary for the rest of the family to join them. Kula notes that while in the eighteenth century the departing peasant was lost to the village, perhaps forever, by the latter nineteenth century the "letter" was known and attempted, whether the separated individuals were literate or not. This introduced a whole new variable into the

question of the maintenance of contact with departed villagers: the importance and prestige of literacy and letter writing. One common function of the Polish letters was to maintain ties and preserve the social roles, authority and prestige within the family and village, of the absent individuals. Frequently exact directions were given about the upkeep of the farm, what was to be planted, reaped and sold, etc. Since the letters all were intercepted by the Russian authorities and never were delivered, they reflect disappointments and frustrations, such as in the following remarks: "I wrote you eleven weeks ago and have no reply from you. I don't know what this means...or whether you received the fifteen rubles I sent you.... I was going to send you a boat ticket, but will not send it until you write me a letter...greetings, etc." (273)

In contrast, the memoirs quoted above of villagers from Žerovnica stress the goal of returning home on the part of the emigrant with the money which, it was hoped, would sustain the homestead, in fulfillment of the obligation to maintain the farm. Many other families from Žerovnica did not return home, of course. Landless or noninheriting brothers followed in the pattern just described for Polish peasants.

Thus, while the social structure of Žerovnica is similar to that of St. Felix in the South Tyrol, and to other peasant communities where the stem family and single inheritance have evolved, the relations maintained between migrants from Žerovnica and the village itself and the whole kinship ethos are similar to communities with quite varied inheritance patterns and social structures, some of which exhibit more open and less corporate features than others. When viewing the relations between migrants from Žerovnica and their homeland, for example, we find parallels to Serbia, where the *zadruga* and joint inheritance was at least historically an important aspect of the structure, to Mediterranean communities, where family structure is based on equal inheritance, as well as to the Polish peasant family, which has varied forms, and to the Puerto Ricans of San José.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that explanations for the phenomenon of the continued relationship between migrants and village of origin are complex and cannot be reduced to simple economic support, ecolog-

ical factors, nor to direct correlations with kin types and inheritance patterns. These factors all are important, but they must be seen within the context of the whole cultural system, including historical traditions, relations of the village to the larger society and to other structures, the importance and prestige of literacy and, finally, kinship loyalties and obligations which are embedded in the most varied values and perceptions of ethnic identities.

With respect to the third point raised above, I consider briefly the bearing of this study upon recent theoretical departures in anthropology which react against the traditional concern with cultural isolates.

In the study of culture and society anthropologists increasingly are employing such concepts as pluralism, multiethnicity, and heterogeneity. Earlier approaches based on assumptions of homogeneity, integration, equilibrium, and closed systems, have been abandoned. Among the first imperatives requiring this new approach were studies of peasantries, which by definition were part-societies and part-cultures, part of a larger entity, the state, and which were in close relation to cities (Kroeber 1948: 284).

Already in 1941 Redfield's *The Folk Culture of Yucatan* recognized the new departure. The study of colonial societies, struggling against their traditional rulers, especially after World War II, also demanded it (see Balandier 1973). There was only a short step further to the anthropological interest in complex societies. The folk-urban dichotomy or continuum has been a part of anthropology ever since investigations larger than the isolated tribe have been undertaken, but this concept has undergone continued change, moving from the perception of polar opposites to that of interdependent variables and, finally, to the present approach of interpenetrating fields neither of which can be studied in isolation. Thus urban anthropology, for example, is a new direction but not really a new field.

Pluralism and ethnicity are particularly useful concepts which are applicable to many of the world's societies where there is segmentation into functionally similar groups or institutions, generally distinguishable by cultural or subcultural variations (van den Berghe 1973: 966). Thus in the majority of cases fundamental lines of

cleavage are based on ethnicity. Yet ethnicity suggests a complex phenomenon which has been described by van den Berghe as "an extraordinarily fluid composite of objectively identifiable cultural characteristics and subjectively perceived differences" (967).

Related to a dynamic approach, which unites synchronic and diachronic areas, is the increasingly important interest in anthropology of going beyond, or beneath, formal institutions and frameworks to an investigation of what Wolf has called "various kinds of informal structures which are interstitial, supplementary, and parallel" to the formal framework (1966a: 2). This approach expands upon a-temporal concepts which limit culture to a fixed system of unchanging rules that serve to restrict and restrain the individual. Rather, as Barnes has stated, every individual in society is seen "as linked to several others by social bonds that partly reinforce and partly conflict with one another" (1972: 26-2). The basic idea behind the analytical uses of social networks is that the configuration of cross-cutting interpersonal bonds is "causally connected with the action of these persons and with the social institutions of their society" (1972: 26-2).

Finally, an increasingly important interest in anthropological studies involves a rapprochement of anthropology with history. As Evans-Pritchard stated, anthropology is closer to certain kinds of history than to the natural sciences. Among other cogent reasons, a people's traditional history forms a part of the thought of living man, and hence part of its observable social life (1961: 6).

These complementary approaches, encompassing change and conflicts as well as structure and rules, lead to defining communication networks and their boundaries by various interacting criteria. In addition to—and inseparable from—defining the formal attributes of such dynamic structures is the consideration, already suggested in the statement of Evans-Pritchard, of how symbolic behavior identifies these relatively fluid groups as they persist and change over time. Here it is necessary to think of implicit aspects of culture as well as explicit ones, encompassing such areas as nonverbal behavior, aesthetic behavior, and underlying values. The fact is that rituals, emblems, myths, and symbols of all kinds condense much information waiting to be digested. As

Munn has indicated, there is a broad category of generalized symbolic media of social interaction that convert complex socio-cultural meanings into communications currency. She calls these "iconic symbols" (1973: 579).

The foregoing indicates the need to consider the contribution and interrelation of quite varied factors in the attempt to understand and identify the society and culture of ethnic groups such as the Slovenes of Cleveland. This is so in relation both to the persistence and change of such systems within the contexts of the larger societies and cultures of which they are a part.

In conclusion, then, the preceding comments point to some focal problems relating to general background, theory and methodology, and goals, in the study of ethnicity I am undertaking, aided by a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies. It can be only one attempt in an area where there appears to be a great dearth of knowledge. As the editor of the planned encyclopedia on American ethnic groups and ethnicity at Harvard stated in connection with that project, such a venture requires considerable research in view of the fact that at present there is nowhere to go in search of answers to such questions as: Are there many representatives of a particular group in the United States? Where are they distributed? What are they doing? and, What is the role of their own cultural heritage? (*Boston Globe*, April 6, 1975). And, it may be added, how does their behavior affect villages and nations whence they came?

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