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Getting away? How state-run media in late-socialist Czechoslovakia helped to subtly control potentially dangerous everyday practices among cottage owners[1]

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This paper explores the interweaving of socialist ideology and the everyday in late socialist Czechoslovakia by analyzing the content of a popular hobby magazine and of a television series between 1968 and 1989. The magazine and the series relate to the phenomenon of weekend cottage ownership, which became especially popular among Czechs and Slovaks from the late 1960s to 80s. While not overtly oppositional to the socialist state, cottage ownership was perceived as potentially dangerous by state authorities because the values it promoted — self-reliance, acquisition of personal property, recreation for private pleasure — ran counter to the state ideology. Based on the analysis of the magazine and the series, this article argues that the subtle use of language in state-controlled media helped to subsume the practice of cottage ownership and to create a distinct public that was incorporated into socialist discourse, stripping the practice of undesirable connotations such as materialism and individualism.

Keywords
late socialism, Czechoslovakia, public, private, publics, popular media, everyday practices

The phenomenon of weekend cottage ownership during late socialism in the Eastern Bloc has been commonly viewed as a means of escape from state-dominated everyday life. Cottage ownership was often perceived as oppositional to the state because it espoused values that contradicted socialist ideology, namely, self-reliance, acquisition of personal property, and recreation for private pleasure. This paper explores the interweaving of socialist ideology and the everyday in late socialist Czechoslovakia by analyzing texts and images in a popular hobby magazine and a television series, both widely consumed by the general public. I argue that the subtle use of language in state-controlled media helped to subsume the practices of cottage ownership and to create a distinct public that was incorporated into socialist discourse. In the process, those aspects of cottage ownership that were undesirable to the socialist state, namely, materialism and individualism, were stripped away. Magazine editorials, meanwhile, helped to reconceptualize the private pursuit of recreation as a public activity. The state thus indirectly tried to domesticate some of the potentially dangerous

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ideas associated with cottage ownership. The hobby magazine and the television series helped to (re)define what it meant to be a cottage owner and, by extension, a good socialist Czech. Following Jürgen Habermas (1989), Benedict Anderson (1991), Michael Warner (2002), and Michael Herzfeld (2005), I suggest that the magazine and the series helped to create a distinct type of a public, which helped to maintain the illusion that the sphere of cottage ownership was somehow existing apart from the state. This way, popular media were helping to produce and maintain socialist hegemony at a time when more direct propaganda was no longer taken seriously by the majority of the population.

In the 30 years since the collapse of socialist systems in Europe, academic narratives of post-socialism have been about breaking down Cold War binaries — between East and West, socialism and capitalism, public and private — (see for example, Buck-Morss, 2002; Verdery, 1996; Berdahl, 2000; Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Gal and Kligman, 2000); about rupture and continuity (Fehérváry, 2013; Berdahl, 2000; Humphrey, 2002); about the plurality of socialist and post-socialist experiences (Berdahl, 2000; Burawoy and Verdery, 1999); about the failure of neoliberal regimes installed post-1989 (Ghodsee, 2011); and about using these failures as a platform from which to critique neoliberal systems in the West (Verdery, 1996; Rogers, 2010). This vast body of work has allowed for a re-evaluation of the different stages of socialism throughout the Soviet Bloc, a more nuanced understanding of socialist processes, as well as a look into the many contradictions inherent within late-socialist systems. Less work has been done, however — with the notable exception of Alexei Yurchak (2006) and Paulina Bren (2002; 2010) — on how certain forms of life and spaces of apparent autonomy resulted from efforts on the part of socialist regimes to contain or resolve contradictions, particularly those that could undermine the basis of their legitimacy and claims to authority.

NORMALIZATION

Following the Soviet invasion on August 21, 1968 that quashed Prague Spring and its efforts to transform the country's socialist regime into a more humane one, Czechoslovakia was transformed into one of the most politically and culturally repressive regimes east of the Iron Curtain. The term "Normalization" first appeared in the Moscow Protocol, dating to August 28, 1968, as a prerequisite for the departure of the Soviet Army from Czech lands (Mechýř, 2003, p. 93). In practice, this meant fulfilling five key conditions: the Communist Party was to expel those members deemed not loyal to Party ideology; the Party was to ensure that all media worked to "best serve socialism"; any anti-socialist activities and organizations were to be stopped immediately; the Party leaders would make personnel changes to centralize and consolidate power; and, finally, the Party was to work to promote friendship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union" (Mechýř, 2003, p. 93–94). Spanning from 1969 to the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, the Normalization era was above all about "preserving the status quo" and keeping Czech society docile (Kohut, 1989, p. 67). Installed by the Soviets and administered by Czech politicians who had promised loy-

alty to the USSR, Normalization saw a resealing of the state borders, making emigration nearly impossible. The Party and all top administrative positions in the country were purged of any individuals that had been sympathetic to the Prague Spring project (Tůma, 2009, p. 571).

A number of historians argue, that during the late 1960s, leading up to the Prague Spring, attempts to reform Czech society were coming from two different poles: top-down from more progressive party leaders, such as then prime minister, Alexander Dubček, and bottom up from nascent civic initiatives, independent of the Communist Party (Prečan, 2003, p. 157). Indeed, if we were to follow Habermas we could speak of an emerging public sphere that stood apart from public state authorities and could potentially serve as a regulating mechanism (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). This public sphere quickly disintegrated with the rise of Normalization; Czech society entered what some historians characterize as a "static stage" (Rychlík, 2003, p. 72), due to the lack of any significant changes to the social hierarchy installed after the Soviet invasion. Prague Spring showed just how opposed ordinary Czechs were to the socialist regime (Kryštůfek, 1981, p. vi). By the early 1970s, the Communist Party contained very few true idealists, party membership was regarded by most as little more than a strategic career move, and direct state propaganda was dismissed by the majority of the population (Tůma, 2009, p. 571).

THE RISE OF COTTAGE OWNERSHIP

It was in this atmosphere of repression that cottage ownership soared and many aspects of cottage-owning culture became solidified. Although the popularity of weekend cottages predates socialism in Czechoslovakia, with its earliest roots in the late 19th century (Schindler-Wisten, 2010), during Normalization it became a mass phenomenon that had wide-reaching cultural impact. Unlike in much of the East Bloc, the Czech economy did reasonably well throughout the 1970s and the standard of living continued to rise until the 1980s (Fawn, 2000, p. 24). This meant that ordinary Czechs were able to afford a *chata* (a newly-built cottage) or a *chalupa* (an old farmhouse, converted into a recreational cottage), de facto a second home, which was an unthinkable luxury, not just for much of East, but also the West (Schindler-Wisten, 2010, p. 133).

By the early 1980s, in Prague 31% of families owned cottages, 25% had access to the *chatas* of friends, and another 5–10% had *chata* access through their work (Bren, 2002, p. 124). Scholars have argued that the late socialist regime tolerated the cottage ownership phenomenon and its apparent embracing of private ownership in an effort to keep the people content and docile in the wake of the failed Prague Spring. Indeed, Vilímek speaks about a "silent contract" between the regime and the people (2009, p. 177), with relative material comfort exchanged for passive tolerance of the state's policies. The relatively liberal period of the late 1960s, moreover, meant that more Czechs had been able to travel out and experience at least glimpses of a higher standard of living in the West. State authorities were thus keen to keep the material needs of the Czech people satisfied (Vilímek, 2009, p. 177), hence a more relaxed

attitude toward the materialism that often accompanied the cottage ownership phenomenon.

By the late 1960s old farmhouses became a highly sought-after commodity, as Czechs — most often urban dwellers — bought up rural dwellings and converted them into weekend houses. Still others built their own small cottages in the countryside, creating cottage ownership communities around lakes, rivers or on the edges of forests. The regime did not discourage cottage ownership, seeing it as a way of placating Czech society, at least in the material sense (Bren, 2002, p. 125). Bren argues that *chata* culture became "a means of escape into pastoral Bohemia and Moravia for those who sought solace from the trauma of 'normalization'" (Bren, 2002, p. 126). I think, however, it is important to stress that cottage ownership itself was not directly oppositional to the regime. Rather it stood in quiet contrast to socialist values and to the state-sanctioned rationalization of nature that sought to modernize the countryside. In paying homage to traditional rural life, *chata* owners were reviving a culture the socialist regime had sought to eradicate. They were, moreover, becoming property owners. Thus, although cottage ownership was not seen as directly threatening to the regime, those involved in this practice saw themselves as standing apart from the publicness of the state. As Bren argues, the practice of cottage ownership had the potential to be dangerous because it blurred some of the boundaries enforced by state discourse, threatening to reveal the inconsistencies in the ideology (Bren, 2002, p. 124). Cottage ownership contradicted communism's rejection of private property. It also encouraged materialism, with many Czechs pouring all of their savings into creating small pockets of luxury in their weekend houses. What is more, cottage activities, which effectively reduced the work week to just three full days, since many Czechs left for their cottages on early Friday afternoons and returned late Monday mornings (Bren, 2002, p. 134), inevitably reduced the productivity of the country's work force.

The converted farmhouses, and to a degree even the newly built *chatas,* were decorated with a strong emphasis on the rural, and often the interiors of these dwellings came to resemble museums. Old farm tools, wagon wheels and even wooden crosses and religiously-themed paintings (once ubiquitous in the pre-communist Czech countryside) were dragged down from attics or bought from rural neighbors and mounted on walls and facades. And although urban dwellers using their cottages as weekend getaways could not hope to truly adopt a traditional way of rural life, for the weekend, at least, they could pretend. *Chata* owners took great pride in these dwellings and usually did all the reconstruction work and decorating themselves. The focus was on privacy, *pohoda* — a Czech word that denotes a mixture of comfort and coziness — and a strong sense of nostalgia for the pre-communist past. The remote location of *chatas* aided in separating weekend cottage ownership activities from a city life that was associated with the politicized public sphere.

THEORIZING LATE SOCIALISM

While Western depictions of a grim socialist reality filled international media during the Cold War, most ordinary Czechs were living relatively comfortable lives, their

daily activities neither entirely supportive of, nor quite resistant to the socialist regime. Katherine Verdery's work explores this contradiction and critiques the common understanding of socialist states as totalitarian by bringing to attention how weak many of the socialist states were, particularly in the late stages of socialism, with elements of capitalism seeping into what had been perceived as rigid, closed systems (1996, p. 20). In *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next* (1996), Verdery rejects the notion of socialist states as monolithic and impenetrable, arguing that many capitalist elements were transplanted into the systems, particularly at the economic level. It was the "internal resistance and hidden forms of sabotage at all system levels" that eventually brought down the system, Verdery argues (1996, p. 20). Daphne Berdahl (2000) and Michael Burawoy with Verdery (1999) engage in a similar critique, calling for greater emphasis on micro-level processes of post-socialist transformation. This refocusing, they argue, reveals the coexistence of elements of rupture and continuity in the transition and challenges the linear narrative of progress from socialism to capitalism.

More recently, Alexei Yurchak has focused on destabilizing some of the Cold War binary oppositions as a way to explore new socialities that were created during late socialism, through practices that were neither simply opposed nor supportive of state ideology (2006, p. 5). Yurchak suggests that under late Soviet socialism publics developed spontaneously, creatively, "through the performative shift of authoritative discourse" (2006, p. 117). He compares the role of late Soviet urban café culture to Habermas's concept of the public sphere, as it emerged in early capitalism, noting some of the parallels (the Soviet cafés became spaces of social interaction where public discourse was produced outside of state ideology). But Yurchak also points out the inherent binary categories in the concept of the public sphere — notions of protest and opposition to the state — which did not apply in the case of the Soviet cafés. The cafés created specific publics, but they were not part of any political opposition. In these publics, Yurchak argues, "Soviet reality was not resisted but deterritorialized" (2006, p. 145), as in the case of youth clubs and various other state-sanctioned organizations.

In thinking about the role of hobby magazines and television shows in late socialist Czechoslovakia, it is also helpful to draw on literature on publics, namely, the works of Warner (2002), Habermas (1989) and Anderson (1991). Habermas defines the modern public sphere as "the sphere of private people come together as a public" (1989, p. 27). Embedded in this concept is a sort of regulating mechanism, central to modern democracy: the public sphere stands apart from state public authorities; it is critical and engages in debate with state authorities (1989, p. 27), constituting public opinion. Benedict Anderson's discussion of the rise of nation states and nationalism develops further some of the concepts discussed by Habermas. Anderson's key argument is that the shift from Latin publishing to vernacular publishing played a key role in the emergence of nation states as a new type of imagined community (1991, p. 39) and that this shift eventually led to the rise of print capitalism (which, of course, Habermas sees as a key moment in the formation of the modern public sphere). According to Anderson, the bourgeoisie was "the first class to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis" (1991, p. 77). This was largely done through print: by

consuming common print, new publics were created. But what about publics created under a socialist regime? The readers consuming a popular hobby magazine and a television show about cottage owners would constitute "a public" rather than "the public" if we follow Warner and his essay *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002). The key distinction, according to Warner, is that a public is a specific audience, being addressed by a specific discourse, whereas the public is a sort of undifferentiated totality, the people in general (2002, p. 50) and its apparent unity is ideological (2002, p. 84). Every discourse always has a public, Warner argues — even state-controlled leisure magazines.

Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy (2005) is useful in trying to address some of the apparent contradictions within the pages of the cottage ownership magazine and in the TV series. Herzfeld argues that every nation has hidden, secret and sometimes embarrassing cultural practices and identities, which are often reactions against official, state-sanctioned culture. This intimate shared cultural identity is guarded from outsiders but is nevertheless a source of pride and common sociality. Self-stereotyping is one example of this. Herzfeld argues that such stereotypes help to maintain a common ground among the members of a nation. And such embarrassing shared cultural identity is co-constitutive of official state culture because it happens in relation to it; in other words, it accepts the official state-sanctioned culture and reaffirms it. This can happen through what Herzfeld calls "creative irreverence" (2005, p. 2) that reinterprets or acts against state-sanctioned culture. But even creative dissent makes use of state-discourse and thus serves to validate this discourse. He notes that "even citizens who claim to oppose the state invoke it" (2005, p. 2) simply by virtue of reifying the state. They may blame the state for their personal problems or for national-level problems, but this reification only serves to essentialize the state, to make it into a seemingly stable, entity that is always there.

Yurchak and Dominic Boyer take this blurring of opposition and validation even further in their discussion of Soviet *stiob*, an ironic, absurdist form of popular aesthetic that effectively dissolved the distinction between parody of the Soviet system and its affirmation, due in large part, as Yurchak and Boyer argue, to the authors' overidentification with the subject (2010). Stiob discourse remained well within the framework of socialist ideology. It made use of established Soviet symbols, but often decontextualized these symbols to the point that they were gutted of their original meaning. *Stiob* thus appeared to mock and support socialist values simultaneously. Like Herzfeld, then, Yurchak and Boyer, complicate the distinction between the state and the people. In speaking the language of socialist discourse — whether being irreverent or simply just living their everyday lives — ordinary people helped to prop up the creaky late-socialist state, whilst simultaneously hollowing it out from the inside by rendering many socialist symbols meaningless. As I argue in the following pages, this process could also work in reverse, with the state making use of popular symbols and categories, such as ones associated with cottage ownership, to seemingly at once validate potentially oppositional practices and to change their meaning, in this case, through their recontextualization into socialist discourse. As in the case of *stiob*, the blurring between socialist validation and opposition could be so extreme that inherently paradoxical concepts started to seem normal. The once bourgeois

practice of owning a weekend house for recreational activities became a typically socialist practice, reframed — in magazine editorials and lifestyle columns, for instance — as something that benefits the whole society rather than just the individual.

MEDIA CENSORSHIP

Censorship, temporarily relaxed in the years leading up to 1968, was reinforced and became stricter than ever during Czechoslovak Normalization. This applied to many aspects of culture but above all to the country's media. All major newspapers and magazines experienced extensive personnel changes, whereby top editorial positions were given to those affiliated with the communist party (Doskočil, 2003). Further, systematic pressure was exerted on journalists to "publicly present themselves as being responsible for the current political situation" (Doskočil, 2003, p. 48). This meant taking the politically appropriate stance not only in editorials, but also in most news stories and, as examples form *Chatař* magazine will show, even in seemingly apolitical lifestyle columns and articles aimed at hobbyists. To officially cement the loyalty of journalists in top positions, the party published a statement called "Slovo do vlastních řad" (A word within our own ranks), which was signed by 350 journalists, promising to promote the party's ideology within the newsroom (Doskočil, 2003).

In a collection of interviews conducted by the Czech Oral History Centre with former members of the socialist-era political elite, Jaroslav Čejka, who was the editor in chief for two prominent culture magazines (*Kmen* and *Tvorba*) and a member of the Communist Party Central Committee in the 1980s, recalls the ways in which magazine content was discussed and largely determined at cultural committee meetings of the Communist Party:

> Every Friday the Central Committee of the Communist Party would have a meeting. On Thursday, I think, was a meeting of the Party secretariat, followed by a meeting… for mid-level Party cadres — deputy editors and such… [The deputy editor of the general director of Czechoslovak television] raised his hand and said, "Comrade deputy, I must raise a complaint against *Tvorba* because *Tvorba* has accused us of not showing the films of certain directors… but all these directors have been banned" (Vaněk, Urbášek (eds.), 2005, p. 35).

Čejka's recollection is just one example of the intertwined nature of media and politics in during Normalization; it also suggests, however, that the process of screening editorial content was not always centrally organized, nor were the rules always strictly enforced. In a later part of the interview Čejka notes that he, as *Tvorba*'s editor-in-chief, was not, in fact, reprimanded for printing articles that recommended the films of banned directors, such as Miloš Forman. The distinction between what was banned and what was allowed could be thus porous at times.

Direct opposition to the regime existed as well, of course, with political dissidents using illegal samizdat publications as their platform and ultimately formalizing their demands for political change in Charta 77, a document that brought no immediate

change, save for the political persecution of many of its 1,883 signees. Most ordinary people, however, were only marginally aware of the dissidents. As historian Tomáš Vilímek writes, people were "so deeply embedded in the crushing machinery of everyday worries that they took no interest in the activities of those opposing the regime" (2009, p. 177). And, indeed, oral history interviews conducted by the COH with ordinary people confirm this, with the vast majority of interlocutors perceiving dissidents as just another elite group, disconnected from the concerns of the majority of Czechoslovak citizens.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, I chose to analyze the style and content of the hobby magazine *Chatař* and the television series *Chalupáři* in order to examine some of the ways in which the socialist state approached potentially threatening cultural practices. I selected *Chatař* because it was mainstream, easily accessible and with a relatively large circulation, which reached 90 000 by 1985 (Červená, 2016). It was launched in 1969, just as the period of Normalization began. Other similar hobby magazines that would have appealed to cottage owners existed, for instance *Zahrádkář,* aimed at hobby gardeners, but *Chatař* was during this time the only magazine devoted solely to cottage culture. I limited my analysis to issues published between 1969 and 1989, in order to span the period of Normalization although the magazine continued to be published for another four years after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The television series was produced and aired from 1974 to 1975, at the height of Normalization and could thus be considered representative of late socialist mainstream television. Cottage ownership propelled the plot and provided much of the comedy, rather than just being a backdrop.

In analyzing the style and content of the magazine, I focused especially on editorials and lifestyle columns, where readers were often addressed directly by writers and editors who would have been vetted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In addition to the content, I paid attention to tone and voice, and to any apparent contradictions among them. I analyzed the text in the broader context of the magazine layout, as here again it was possible to encounter contradictions or discrepancies when juxtaposing images or advertisements with the advice being presented to readers in lifestyle columns. Focusing on contradictions helped to provide some insight into how the regime tried to reconcile, often quite awkwardly, the many bourgeois elements of cottage culture with socialist ideology. In analyzing the television series *Chalupáři*, I focused primarily on the two main characters, who were essentially stock characters — the villager and the new cottage owner from the city — as it was through the treatment of these characters that the screenwriters were able to comment on cottage culture during this period. It became apparent that the relationship between state-controlled popular media and popular culture was complex and not merely unidirectional. As I will illustrate in the following sections, socialist media not only appropriated the language of cottage ownership culture, but also reconstituted it to make cottage culture fit within a socialist framework.

OPEN ACCESS

CHATAŘ MAGAZINE

Even seemingly apolitical hobby or lifestyle magazines were censored and carefully edited to present content within a socialist framework; the cottage owner magazine *Chatař* ("Cottage Owner") was no exception. The tone of the magazine was informal, with some, but not all articles, using the familiar second person singular "ty" instead of the formal second person singular "vy", as would have been the standard in most magazines. It thus offered a friendly platform where the state (indirectly, through Party-affiliated editors) could communicate with the people in an informal way. The communication was not-entirely one-way: the magazine published letters from readers and also released annual surveys, asking readers to answer questions about their lives as cottage owners. Although, since editorial content was censored, one could also argue that the two-way communication channel was merely illusory.

Much of the content of the magazine consisted of how-to articles, advising, for instance, on proper ways to build fireplaces, how to build foundations, the latest in *chata* or *chalupa* décor, gardening tips, and similar practical advice. Printed in black and white, the magazine also featured photographs of the exteriors and interiors of Czech cottages. A regular feature that ran in the first half of the 1970s was a monthly visit to the cottage of a famous Czech, complete with pictures of his or her family's cottage and a short interview about cottage life. Alongside the articles, the magazines contained advertisements for items such as furniture or even cottage assembly pieces (in some case made by foreign companies — usually Swiss or Austrian). Another regular feature was a legal advice column, responding to readers' requests for advice on how to navigate the bureaucracy of acquiring property in a socialist state. At least a page was usually devoted to readers offering to sell or buy different cottage ownership equipment, where readers could communicate with one another through the magazine. Following Anderson (1991), I would argue that this last item especially helped produce a distinct cottage ownership public. And following Warner, we can further understand this group as being "a public" as opposed to "the public" (2002, p. 50), that is a specific rather than a general audience being addressed by a specific, often ideological discourse. Nor was it only a top-down creation of publics, something that Herzfeld (2005) has criticized. The buy-sell page enabled lateral communication among the cottage owners themselves. Cottage owners would moreover often lend one another copies of the magazine and exchange cottage improvement tips, engaging in the sort of circulation that creates publics. In its focus on practical tips, even its inclusion of ads for items that cottage owners might covet, the magazine helped create the sense that those producing it — that is, the editorial staff, as well as the cultural committees of the Communist Party — were on the side of the cottage owners and understood their needs and desires. Further, it is helpful to recall that, according to Warner, participation alone creates a public (2002, p. 60). Simply by showing up at their cottage and engaging in the usual cottage ownership activities helped create the public of cottage owners. It was thus very much a self-organized public (2002, p. 50). (The cottage ownership boom, after all, happened spontaneously, as an indirect reaction to the economic and political climate during the late socialist period.)

But the magazine also reinterpreted what cottage ownership meant (or was supposed to mean) in the socialist context. Alongside the how-to articles, ads touting what many at the time would have considered luxury goods, and practical advice columns, *Chatař* also included ideologically laden editorials and lifestyle columns that, at times quite awkwardly, tried to reconcile the tension between the distinctly bourgeois practice of owning weekend cottages and socialist values. This was done explicitly in the editorials.

Regular lifestyle columns took a more subtle approach, implicitly making the argument that cottage ownership fits well within socialist ideology. Often the magazine's columns took on a moralizing tone, reprimanding cottage owners guilty of overt materialism. An article from 1979 about cottage décor, for instance, criticized competition among cottage owners over who has a better equipped weekend house (*Chatař,* 1979, p. 145–146). A column from 1984 criticized the "kitsch décor" of many cottages and warned that "when an object loses its function the proper relationship between a person and an object is reversed, and, rather than the object serving its owner, the owner ends up being a slave to the object" (*Chatař,* 1984, p. 74). The same column went on to state that "the accumulation of too many things ends up destroying relationships between people" (*Chatař,* 1984, p. 74). Another article warned against neglecting work responsibilities, in favor of spending time at the cottage:

> [Working on one's own cottage] can also have a negative effect on one's ability to be productive at work. This then reduces the social function of recreation, whose main result should be to increase the productivity of those practicing it (*Chatař,* 1976, p. 169).

Here the time spent at the cottage was posited as necessary recreation that would lead to a more productive work force. As Bren (2002, p. 134) notes, however, the results were often the opposite, with many cottage-owning Czechs using parts of the work-week to extend their cottage stays, and state authorities, of course, were well aware of this.

Another article discussed how the private ownership of *chalupas* and their conversion into recreational houses actually benefited the common good because it helped to preserve the state's rural heritage. In a special issue of *Chatař* celebrating the month of Czech-Soviet friendship, a guest editorial by a member of the Communist Party's Central Committee talked about the need to protect the country's architectural heritage in rural areas, noting, "The preservation of heritage buildings is an important ideological task in the Soviet Union. Already in the first days following the victory of the October Revolution in Russia, the government called on the workers to protect and care for its architectural heritage" (*Chatař,* 1979, p. 218). On other occasions the ideology behind arguments favoring *chalupas* over *chatas* was less explicit. The very first issue of *Chatař*, for instance, presented *chalupa* ownership as more practical (and, implicitly, more in line with socialist values) that *chata* ownership.

> Simple mathematical calculations show that for every one of our citizens there is about 50 ares [5,000 m^2] of farmland… That's not much, is it? This plot needs to support at least some of the wheat grown to make flour for your dumplings, for

> your bread, as well as grass to feed cows to give you milk and butter. And your cottage, along with your small garden, should theoretically also fit on this plot of land... What would you say to trying to find an empty old farmhouse in a village instead of building a new cottage? (*Chatař,* 1969, p. 18–19).

The above passage makes use of a moralizing tone and adopts the informal "ty", which here arguably serves to patronize as much as to create a sense of camaraderie, with what is presented as a pragmatic, rational calculation to argue that building more *chatas* is not beneficial for the state, while fixing up old farm houses is. It also emphasizes equality: each citizen is entitled to 5,000 m^2. Building a new cottage could thus jeopardize this equality if it took up too much arable land. The rest of the article goes on to extol the benefits of converting old farmhouses into cottages. Along a similar vein, another article, published in 1979, criticizes the cottage owners' practice of "fencing off of nature that should belong and be accessible to everyone" (*Chatař,* 1979, p. 146).

During the economic crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, several editorials and articles, once again appealed to the pragmatism of cottage owners, calling on them to grow fruits and vegetables to help support the Czechoslovak economy, which would periodically experience fruit and vegetable shortages:

> Providing fruits and vegetables for our citizens through state farms can be significantly augmented through the production of private produce growers... Many cottage owners also belong among such produce growers... It is important for our society that a certain segment of the urban population can provide its own fresh produce, grown in their cottage gardens (*Chatař,* 1981, p. 244).

There are distinct parallels here with Verdery's (1996, p. 44) discussion of state-sanctioned private farming in Romania during shortage periods. The difference is that in Romania, where the shortages were more severe, farmers were assigned quotas of produce to give away to the state; in the Czechoslovak case, cottage owners who owned gardens were merely encouraged to grow produce to help offset fruit and vegetable shortages in shops. Verdery has argued that, alongside the pragmatic aspect of helping provide food for Romanian citizens, the state was also using the enforced quota system to control the citizens' use of time. I would argue that the Czechoslovak example, although much more implicit and not strictly enforced, was also an effort of the state to encroach on citizens' private time. It could also be seen as an attempt to subtly reshape the cottage-owning public as one focused toward common state interests rather than merely private interests, and as one acting pragmatically rather than solely in the name of private pursuit of pleasure through recreation.

Although there was not a great deal of caricaturing of the cottage owner category in the pages of the magazine, there was a palpable tone of mockery and condescension in several instances, most notably in a comic strip which ran in 1969 that featured a character called "psycholog Suda" (Mr. Suda, the psychologist), who was a cottage owner and frequently got into mishaps by being stingy and self-interested; for instance, his trying to save money by buying poor-quality locks led to his cottage being

broken into. In a different episode, Suda tried to con his neighbor into lending him his car (to save on gas and to save his own new car some wear and tear) for a trip to his cottage to move some of his newly-purchased furniture there by pretending that his own car broke down. In the end it is actually that neighbor's car that really ends up breaking down. Suda is left stranded, hitchhiking on a highway, surrounded by his new furniture. The heavy-handed symbolism was perhaps clearer in this episode than in any other: greed and materialism will backfire, leaving one isolated and poorer than before. The lifestyle columns chastising materialistic cottage owners, discussed earlier, also contributed to this caricature of a selfish, individualist, materialistic cottage owner, who cares only for his or her own comfort and pleasure. There was, therefore, a distinct sense that there were acceptable cottage owners (those who purchased old farmhouses, helped restore them and wedded their cottage ownership with activities that helped serve the community, such as volunteering on collective farms, or at the very least growing produce on their own garden to help feed their own families and offset produce shortages on state farms), whom the socialist state embraced, as well as bad ones (indulging in private, pleasure-seeking activities and investing too much money on their recreational houses), whose behavior was incompatible with state ideology. Thus, if the magazine created a specific public, it was a different public from the one created by the practice of cottage ownership itself, through face-to-face cottage neighbor encounters and mutual use of common spaces in cottage ownership communities and villages. It is difficult to say to what degree these publics overlapped, but perhaps one could argue that they helped to shape one another.

THE TELEVISION SERIES *CHALUPÁŘI*

Chalupáři was a Normalization-era comedy series that followed the story of a Evžen Huml a retired supervisor, residing in Prague, who decides to buy a cottage after receiving advice from his doctors to live in a more peaceful setting. He ends up buying an old farmhouse — a *chalupa* — in a small Czech village. At the time of purchase, he is unaware that the *chalupa*'s original owner, a local villager and also a retiree, has stipulated that he be allowed to continue living in the dwelling as a tenant. Needless to say, the two elderly men don't get along at first, and much of the humor rests on the encounters between the city dweller and the villager. Somehow, however, the villager always comes out on top, and the city dweller is usually depicted as a bumbling, incompetent fool.

From the first episode, where the viewers are introduced to Huml, who has just received bad news regarding his health from his doctor, the cottage is presented as beneficial for one's health, in other, words, not as an unnecessary luxury, but as something practical — a similar attitude to that encountered in some of the editorials on the pages of *Chatař* magazine discussed earlier. In this same episode we also see the envious Huml coveting his doctor's cottage and lamenting that he doesn't have enough money to buy one of his own. After his doctor advises him to spend more time in the countryside Huml says, “Easy for him to give advice. He gets in his car and heads to his cottage” (Borovička, Vlček, 1975). To this Huml's friend adds, “Is there anyone who doesn't have a cottage these days?” (Borovička, Vlček, 1975). The series

thus accurately depicted the popularity of cottage ownership among Czechs in the 1970s, whilst also adopting a moralizing stance to this trend.

There were, however, also moments when the series was mildly critical of some of the less favorable aspects of life under communism: for instance, the ubiquitous queues for everything. A scene set in Prague shows a long queue in front of a shop. Huml sees an acquaintance at the end of the line and asks, "What's the line-up for?" To which the other responds, "I don't even know, but they just delivered something" (Borovička, Vlček, 1975). The joke ends up being that there were actually no new goods delivered, but passers-by, used to lining up everywhere, mistakenly took a random person waiting for someone in front of a shop to be the start of a queue. One might wonder that such critique, albeit very mild, would pass censorship. (Later episodes also show Huml's son in law offering a bribe to a state official, and at one point a character on the show comments on how the wealthiest members of Czech society are butchers and green-grocers — common knowledge among Czechs at the time — since people working in these professions had direct access to hard-to-procure goods, for which they were often bribed.) But if we were to follow Herzfeld's (2005) argument that every nation has hidden, embarrassing cultural practices and that this shared cultural identity, while guarded from outsiders, is a source of common sociality, the inclusion of such critique in the series makes sense. Not only does including this particular joke make the show more realistic, but it also lets viewers know that the show's creators are in on the some of the embarrassing, unsavory aspects of life under socialism. In essence it creates a sense of cultural intimacy between the people and the state. Perhaps it would not be stretch to argue that, with the tone thus set, the viewers are more likely to be receptive of the more moralizing aspects of the show.

Much of the show takes place in the village where Huml has his new cottage, and most of the jokes are made at his expense. As I had suggested earlier in this paper, state-sanctioned media caricatured the cottage owner. My argument was that this made the practice of cottage ownership, which was potentially threatening to the regime because of its inherent incompatibility with socialist ideology, seem harmless. Like some of the columns in *Chatař,* many of the episodes of *Chalupáři* made fun of the cottage owners' materialist tendencies, mocking excessive spending on kitsch objects, for instance, in a scene where Huml is seen fawning over wallpaper acquired at Tuzex, a store that specialized in luxury goods imported from the West. The bumbling Huml is contrasted against the down-to-earth, pragmatic villagers. The series mocks Huml's romanticization of the countryside, as he wanders about his new property, singing praises to fields of wheat, but ultimately shows Huml coming to the realization that the village is not some romantic idyll, but rather a place inhabited by hardworking people, and that owning a cottage requires work and discipline.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia was able to subtly domesticate potentially dangerous practices, such as the cottage ownership phenomenon, whilst allowing the cottage owners to maintain a sense that these spaces were auton-

omous, existing apart from the politicized everyday life under socialism. The state was able to prevent the practice from indirectly undermining the socialist ideology and to maintain a sense of its own legitimacy by reshaping the potentially subversive cottage ownership public into a distinctly socialist one, shifting the focus away from materialism and the individual pursuit of pleasure through recreation to the more practical aspects of cottage ownership (helping restore one's health, allowing one to spend time with family and neighbors) that benefited the larger community (by growing produce in cottage gardens, for instance, to help offset food shortages). The ways in which the state was able to reshape this public was through hobby magazines (whose content was in large part dictated by the Communist Party's cultural committees), which created a specific, less threatening public. The state also created caricatures of the stereotypical (undesirable cottage owner) in a popular television series that was broadcast when the cottage ownership phenomenon was at its peak.

My analysis of the hobby magazine *Chatař* aimed at cottage owners suggests that there was, indeed, a distinct public created. It also offers evidence of some of the potentially threatening aspects of cottage ownership. I demonstrate the ways in which the magazine was able to domesticate these potentially dangerous aspects of cottage ownership though a mix of practical advice columns, ideological editorials, and essays that criticized materialism and individualism. The analysis of *Chalupáři* reveals how the television series created a caricature of the cottage owner, who was made to exemplify some of the negative aspects of cottage ownership (again, mainly materialism and individualism). The undesirable type of cottage owner was made to be a fool, but it was done in what Herzfeld (2005) would describe as a culturally intimate way. The undesirable cottage owner was still perceived as "one of us", in that it was a culturally recognizable stereotype of the typical bumbling Czechoslovak fool, making it appear as though the state-sanctioned television was in on the cottage ownership trend and in some ways sympathetic to it. The language used in state-controlled popular culture, then, helped to maintain socialist hegemony by redefining what it meant to be a good cottage owner — and a good Czechoslovak citizen — in a socialist system.

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