

## INTERVIEW



Rada Iveković (Photo from private collection)

## **We Grew Wings from Critique, Challenge, and Reactivity**

*An interview with Rada Iveković conducted by Merima Omeragić*

The biography of Rada Iveković, one of the thoughtful female philosophers, as she is publicly and professionally considered, says that she is a writer, a researcher, and a university professor. She was educated in Belgrade, attended university in Zagreb, received her doctorate in New Delhi, and completed her habilitation in Paris. She began her academic career at the University of Zagreb and continued at the French universities of Paris-7 (Jussieu) and Paris-8 (Vincennes à St. Denis). She was also one of the program directors at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris (2004 – 2010). She was visiting professor at universities such as Università La Sapienza (Rome), Karl-Franzens Universität (Graz), The University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore), Jadavpur University (India), Asia Research Institute at The National University of Singapore, the International Institute for Cultural Studies at Chiao Tung University (Hsinchu, Taiwan) and so on. Her fields of research are comparative, Asian, political, Western philosophy and feminist theory, postcolonial and decolonial themes, translation and language, the problem of nation and nationalism, phenomena of identity, state, violence, citizenship, borders, democracy, and migration. Rada Iveković is the author and co-author of numerous books, articles, essays, chapters, and studies, and is the editor of a series of publications. Some of her books are *Druga Indija* (“Another India”; 1982), *Sporost-oporost* (“Slow-Caustic”, 1988), *Indija - Fragmenti osamdesetih. Filozofija i srodne discipline* (“India. Fragments of the eighties. Philosophy and other disciplines”, 1989), *Orients: Critique de la raison postmoderne* (1992), *Esej iz Indije* (“An essay from India”, 1993), *La balcanizzazione della ragione* (“The balkanisation of reason”, 1995), *Le sexe de la philosophie. Jean-François Lyotard et le féminin* (1997), *Le sexe de la nation* (2003), *Captive Gender: Ethnic Stereotypes & Cultural Boundaries* (2005), *Réfugié-es. Les jetables* (“Refugies. The disposable”, 2016), “Migrations and the populist closure of Europe” (2020), *Politike prevođenja (Politiques de la traduction* 2019, 2022) and *Migration, New Nationalisms and Populism* (2022). In the biography attached at the end of *Politike prevođenja*, she is stated to believe that “gender inequality and

other exclusions, as well as subordinate inclusions (for example, discrimination based on gender, nationality, ethnicity, colonization), are politically and historically constitutive of society, and supported by the partitioning of reason (*partage de la raison*), which must and can be overcome when there is exclusion.”

*Thoroughly approaching your oeuvre, I concluded that you played an important role in the social movements that marked the beginnings and articulation of the feminist movement in SFR Yugoslavia. Given that women’s history was regularly erased from official history, at best pushed to the margins and only surviving in women’s narratives, working with Dubravka Ugrešić and through conversations with my Ph.D. mentor Biljana Dojčinović, I concluded how incredibly powerful the form of a recorded conversation between women actually is. Today, we know much less about the significance of the work of our direct female predecessors. It is a complex issue that was produced by the simultaneous operation of the passage of time and events that influenced the “confiscation of memory”, as coined by Dubravka Ugrešić, and above all, through a significant lack of trans-generational dialogue. Therefore, bearing in mind my first statement, it will be a pleasure to discuss these topics with you. My first question is related to how, in the last decade of our socialism, a door towards “negotiation” and the possibility to actively participate in feminist issues in society has been unlocked.*

In our involvement at that time, there were a lot of discoveries on our part, in a spontaneous anthropology that we nourished with gradual feminist education through reading, translating, discussion, and resistance to systemic misogyny, as well as familial and social patriarchy. In that spontaneity, there were necessarily a lot of reactions to daily events, challenges, vulgar behaviour, practical politics, and political principles, to society, to the press, to gross attacks and violence against women, as well as to the general blindness to such phenomena, and the silence surrounding them. Suddenly, in the crisis of socialism, as a new political horizon and an opportunity for change, the door to a feminist reading of the Yugoslav patriarchal society and politics was revealed. We didn’t know it at the time, it was happening at the end of the socialist period, and it was a time of a new, short-term chaotic opening of new, unimagined possibilities, not only in feminism. At that time, everything seemed possible (both good and bad!

– what happened is the latter, and war) and it was the moment for action, the state Konstantinović had long ago described as parochialism.

The press and the public freed themselves for a brief moment (until the beginning of the Yugoslav war), encouraged and unravelled a considerable “pluralism of interests” (an expression from that time – “pluralism of self-governing interests”) and new topics. Among feminists there were also excellent, well-educated young journalists, which was very important for us. Our topics were available to the public in the slightly more advanced press in capitals and larger cities but at the same time as a scientific interest of sociologists (and other social sciences) closer to universities. This allowed us to constitute ourselves as a subject or subjects, in the special circumstances of the society at that time. But we were not yet a social movement: we nourished intellectually emerging women’s and other democratic movements, and that was not a small thing either.

*You were part of the organization, but also a participant with a paper at the international conference “Drug-ca-žena: The Woman Question – A New approach” which was held in Belgrade from October 27 To November 11, 1978. I would say that this meeting is considered a reference point of our feminist heritage. It was created as a logical response to the social changes you describe, as well as a part of second-wave feminist, and Marxist ideas, and the comparison of values in general. “Drug-ca” is a topos of memory of the activist and intellectual shift in the work of European and Yugoslav feminists. Additionally, the importance of “Drug-ca” grows through the themes of the sections and a collection of papers, that followed the meeting. In addition to articulating the problem of women’s position in society, you discussed patriarchy, Marxism, psychoanalysis, identity and sexuality, democracy and socialism, language, censorship, the erasure of women in culture and science, and the burdens of violence, discrimination, and everyday life. We can read about all this and analyse it in more depth, but what I want to focus on is the reception of the meeting. More specifically, how did “Drug-ca” position itself concerning the attacks you experienced in your home environment (by the dominant system and official organizers of women’s activities), as well as according to the agendas of feminists coming from some European countries?*

Yugoslavia itself wasn’t a completely undemocratic society either, and in any case achieved and perfect democracies are still to be seen. At the meeting “Drugca-žena”, we were between the hammer of domestic official

“popular Marxism”, combined with widespread domestic macho vulgarity (which is another category; there were even women participating in this) and, on the other hand, the anvil of Italian or French feminists who wanted to teach us “real” feminism, considering us not revolutionary enough. They did not understand that we did not have to fight for the right to have a bank account in our name without the approval of the husband or father, for the right to divorce, and for the right to abortion, like them. For the government, we were dissidents (of a smaller calibre, because we are “only” women), and for foreign feminists, we were too obedient. On the other hand, we did not have an instant response at the universities, although there were discussions about these topics that we organized, which eventually bore fruit. Through debates and writing, we contributed to the democratic opening of the country and its horizons.

For me, the one in SCC (Students’ Cultural Centre in Belgrade) in 1978 was the first feminist gathering and the first confrontation with that topic, but others, even younger than me, had already participated in feminist debates organized by the Conference for social activity of women for several years. They learned a lot. We were reading a great magazine “Žena”, published by that Conference for the Social Activity of Women in Zagreb, and edited by one of our women from the section of the Sociological Society. The gathering in 1978 in the SCC in Belgrade, however, was completely autonomous and was not organized by the Women’s Conference, which tried to discredit it by claiming that we do not recognize the class issue, which is not entirely true: it was not our focus, but it was also not a finished or closed question. I encountered similar discussions about the relationship between women’s and class issues in Italy by several authors, and it immediately became clear that the matter is more complex than the Women’s Conference wanted to admit, but also than we could have imagined at the time. But Italy was behind us in many things that Yugoslav women had achieved. Because of the church, Italian women did not have the right to divorce, and they certainly did not have the right to abortion (until 1978). Since the victory over fascism, but also earlier, many people in the Italian Communist Party (PCI) believed that women should not be given the right to vote because they are conservative and will vote as the church tells them. Italian women did get the right to vote in 1946, and the controversy of *separate* party cells for women (under surveillance) remained for some time. It was a double-edged sword for women. Women

managed to articulate, at separate meetings, their specific problems that they could not always express in front of men because they were constantly interrupted or belittled. Later, from the seventies on, when the new feminists closed some of their meetings to men, the PCI again disapproved in principle, although men had no interest in going to such meetings, except for individuals who wanted to disturb them. I wouldn't say that the revolution in our country "ate" only women, it tended to eat all the heads that stood out. In a way, the peasants were also eaten and certainly were the Roma too. Fortunately, the Party never fully succeeded in this. Of course, everywhere, not only in our country, the political subject was built according to the male pattern, and it was difficult for women to identify with it, just as it was difficult for them to identify with the male model of the ruling Father or supreme principle (built again according to the male model) anywhere. In identifying with the male model, women have always turned out and still turn out to be imperfect. This scheme is similar to that of monotheism. This is being corrected and can be gradually, albeit rather slowly, repaired, but unfortunately today we are regressing considerably.

*With the blasphemous "feminism" there was a shaking of structures and norms in the spheres of ideologized elements of society. Moreover, your joint activist momentum pointed to the patriarchy of Yugoslav society. Identifying imperceptible social mechanisms and concrete ones such as attacks on gatherings, Drug-ca began to examine the position of women in society, but also to expose the essential relationship towards women. And the initial reaction as an announcement of the meeting was subversive?*

The international meeting "Drug-ca žena" in SCC woke us up and made us aware that it was possible to work on changing knowledge, society and gender relations, and that it was necessary to *work together* (this is how subjects are built), and that the time had come for that. That gathering attracted attention mostly because the official structures came down on us through the press. We were declared quasi traitors, certainly non-Marxists (which some of us, but not all, were, and later their number grew) and non-socialists, as well as importers of "ideologies foreign to us" from the hateful West, who poison the misguided youth. Soon we were declared "witches", centuries-old misogyny was hidden behind the supposed irony and humour of the label. In a time of the system's crisis, they got the opportunity to backlash against women through feminists. At that time, "feminism" and "feminist" were curse words and a disgrace.

Condescension was the prevailing attitude to feminists (and it still is to a large extent in the Balkans), but we converted it into humour, sometimes into hilarity, as in the quip “proletarians of all countries, who washes your socks?”, which worked because it was on a Marxist ground (“proletarians”). That quip explains that neither the working class nor the countries of the world had even raised, let alone solved, the woman question. And that a proletarian still had someone below him to oppress, namely those who washed his socks (who are not even paid for that). From the same sentence, it can be concluded that parallel to the proletarian international, there was, and is springing up again and again, a solidary women’s international.

*In addition to the activist spirit, “Drug-ca” proved to be a good starting point for joint and individual transformative aspirations at different social levels. This is proven by the biographies, as well as numerous texts and books of the participants (and organizers) of the meeting. At the same time, the issues of women’s position in society were also investigated by our Marxists such as Blaženka Despot, Nada Ler-Sofronić, Gordana Bosanac, and others about whom you wrote to me in our exchange of letters and materials, as well as in the book Politike prevođenja (The Politics of Translation, 2022), saying that they could deal with official policies and systems using their claims. Your remark is important to me as it confirms my assumptions about the polyphony of the women’s movement of that time. On the other hand, the crucial work of activists, professors, journalists, artists, and certainly women from the widest range of social and public activities is undeniable. To what extent were you able to apply your knowledge and experience in your profession? Also, I believe that with the feminist movement, there were also some changes in the social sciences.*

Some of us, after the “Drug-ca” meeting, were able to introduce some feminist knowledge to the universities, because we had, like all university professors, the freedom to propose our courses. It was certainly more difficult for some women to win such freedoms, but some succeeded. I remember that at the Department of Philosophy in Zagreb, I held a class on the significant contemporary French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray. I also taught other French, Indian, and broader Asian philosophers and topics.

The “Drug-ca žena” meeting encouraged us to individually, within the framework of our work on various topics, illuminate the female and



feminist perspective, which students could never hear from others, i.e., male teachers – except for exceptions such as was, in my time, sociologist and colleague Vjieran Katunarić in Zagreb, and some others. This does not mean that our departments particularly supported us, because most of the time people did not have an opinion, but they mostly believed that we were dealing with meaningless topics. Still, they put up with us, to a greater or lesser extent, and often with scorn. At the Department of Philosophy, Gajo Petrović, among the senior teachers, supported me unconditionally, but most men of my generation were either indifferent, mocking, or contemptuous, and some sneered or even beat their wives, while their jobs and their reputation did not suffer the consequences (which is unthinkable today in France, for example, and elsewhere). Swimming against the current and working without any institutional support was, and remains, difficult, especially when you are at the beginning of your career and simultaneously discovering new topics and methodologies.

And especially because our pursuit of social sciences also implied political activism, which in a way it just was, while our long-term project (at the time still unwritten and still in the making) was actually to depatriarchalise and decolonize social sciences and the humanities. This practically revealed epistemology to us, obliged us to criticize our disciplines and educational system, and made us undisciplined. And it meant a turn and intervention in methodologies, which was blasphemous to the authority and our colleagues. *Interdisciplinarity* appeared early in the social sciences, and not only among feminists. Together with *internationalism*, which is necessary in research, but which the political “structures” absurdly and conservatively reproached us, we later faced the need for *transdisciplinarity* too, and even “indiscipline”, as well as, today, also *intersectionality*. Namely, as soon as the disciplines and their contestation are taken into consideration, the question of (their disciplinary) boundaries arises, and the inevitability of overcoming them is shown. The need for transdisciplinarity was born from the inadequacy of our disciplines (for me, in my youth, it was “indology”, an unconsciously colonial discipline within the very anti-colonial project of our country’s non-aligned policy). In a very emancipatory project of socialist education, old forms, perspectives, and ways of acting, originating from the misunderstood colonial-capitalist historical reality, which we were not aware of at the time, remained, as did the ingrained patriarchy and machismo. After all, these two

are connected features of the old system (in both socialism and capitalism), and they cannot exist without each other. The transdisciplinarity that we have gradually discovered, which is wider than dichotomous interdisciplinarity, and which some of us will later develop theoretically, can contribute to the decolonization of disciplines and their depatriarchalization, precisely because it has faced the *boundaries of thought*. These exist both in the world of ideas and between states. Borders exist not only as territorial-geographic obstacles, but also as limitations in minds and thought, they are an embedded heritage of thought and culture, each “culture” has its own, and they are all *mutually incomplete* (Boaventura De Sousa Santos).

Early on, we realized we needed to cross the boundaries and borders that were set for us (in patriarchy, they are much tougher and more numerous when it comes to women than to men). But knowledge necessarily crosses borders. There is also *borderline thinking*, that appears when we approach the *invisible line*. Feminism is one of those, but not the only one. From this follows what I learned from my teacher of Asian philosophies, Čedomil Veljačić, even beyond his intention, and which on his part has nothing to do with feminism (that he had never even heard of): the *ethos of cognition* (Veljačić, *Ethos spoznaje u evropskoj i indijskoj filozofiji*, “The Ethos of cognition in European and Indian philosophy”, Belgrade, BIGZ 1982). This means that we are individually as well as collectively *both* responsible *and* diversely interested, so that it depends on the politics and ethos of our cognition how we shall face borders (and which borders?). This ethos of knowledge that he taught could be translated, using my vocabulary, as the *politics of knowledge or cognition*, and their intention. This concept is significant not only because of the multiplicity it refers to, but also because it does not take over readymade ethics from given knowledge, but places it in the future as a dynamic goal. This is why we retain the concept of utopia, although known historical utopias (“great” or “master narratives”) have mostly failed since the time of postmodernist awakening (Jean-François Lyotard, and others). But that is not their end.

*I will make a trip into the field of philosophy. I am aware of the fact that women are exposed to misogynistic perceptions in literature, namely art, and culture, within the content of the work itself, as well as by the author, and especially in the systems of science and in professional circles.*

*In Western philosophy, which is also our heritage, the attitude towards women is mostly determined by Aristotle's attitude (which, after all, I also read in your article "Problem ženskog kod Aristotela") towards woman as a partial man, and even further by the exclusion and concealment of gender differences under dominance relations and binary matrices. In this way, in the system of differences, a woman's place is produced, she is forcibly made passive and pushed into the private sphere of the home. I suppose that female philosophers are on a slippery slope if I understand philosophy in the broadest sense as a way of thinking about the world. Can you explain to me the backbone of the relationship between female philosophers and philosophy?*

It should also be said that no one is more interested in philosophy than women, because it is a historically misogynistic discipline that traditionally and intrinsically challenges our ability to study it, as if that went without saying: and it does so only in a patriarchal culture. That was both our motivation and a challenge. Perhaps it is even more legitimate to ask whether there is women's philosophy than whether there is women's literature or women's letters. In the patriarchal gender division of characteristics, women are assigned (excessive) sensitivity, which "means" weakness, and men rationality and courage. Of course, this division is not shown in life and practice, but these are the features that are offered as models of male or female in the patriarchal division. Because of the exaggerated sensibility and the supposed absence of rationality, women were denied many things, including philosophy, the "universal" right to vote, or the ability to judge or serve on juries. And above all, at the expense of the characteristics attributed to them, since ancient Greece, they have been prevented from engaging in politics and accessing public spaces (this much is documented, while probably the ban is even older) (Nicole Loraux). Only when women enter philosophy and other "male" professions in greater numbers, will the discipline be freed from the prejudices and stereotypes that affect it. Today it is ongoing, so we have world-renowned philosophers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt, Athena Athanasiou, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Silvia Federici, Verónica Gago, Donna Haraway, Luce Irigaray, Chantal Maillard, Marie-José Mondzain, Chantal Mouffe, and many others (unfortunately, I have listed here only a few of the most famous, and western ones), whose ability

to philosophize does not need to be proven in front of male philosophers. In France, where i live, as in many other countries, the evolution and decolonization of philosophy have already advanced in this sense, including male philosophers.

*This may sound too utopian to you, but I see the eighties of the twentieth century as very emancipatory in the sphere of knowledge production about women. When I make that statement, I mean the rich periodicals, magazine production, translations, texts, and books of our female authors. Did this process of creating a knowledge base at least partially give birth to awareness after “Drug-ca”?*

Of course. When we held the “Drug-ca žena” meeting, we did not immediately know that we were at the source of new knowledge and that the knowledge and experiences would continue to teach us, as unofficial, non-hegemonic, and continuous, as long as *cognitive inequality* and injustice reign. We worked on magazines (all these important magazines that you mentioned and that you researched), anthologies, translation, research and writing, and soon the first books, not knowing that we were discovering the inevitability of *epistemological issues* in the direction of a necessary epistemological revolution. And the latter is both social and political, as well as epistemological. The method of transmitting knowledge (and which knowledge? dominant or not?) directly dissolves before us the problem of inequality of classes, genders, racism (“race”), colonial relations, and relations of any kind of dependence.

*From the women suppressed in the poster that skilfully describes the ideological dependence on women’s work (I am referring to the conceptual solution or pictorial contribution to the meeting by the author Mirko Ilić, and the text by Salvenka Drakulić), and in spite of the strong pressure and limiting to the class issue – you all bravely managed to expand and concretize the woman question over the next decade, by looking at it not only through the prism of practice but also of theory.*

At the time of the “Drug-ca žena” conference at SCC, we did not know the extent or the scope of women’s studies, nor of our eventual and timid activism. Women’s studies which, after all, grew over time and are still growing (because they are “minority” studies – *manjinsko pitanje*), we did not know about their map. We only knew that the position of women needed to be improved in several ways to improve society. We also selected corpora of texts by domestic and foreign women writers, both in social

sciences, literature, and other fields. We discovered a few things unexpectedly, as it was a time before the Internet, it was neither easy nor cheap to get books, and we sometimes discovered the names of feminist authors by accident or *de bouche à oreille*. Yes, you noticed right, we immediately realized that our problem was called “the woman question” by the leftist authors at that time (i think it is a common, but more of a “man’s question”) – both in theory and in practice, and it has remained so. Feminism has taught us that the *woman question* is a question of “becoming a minority”, to use Deleuze’s and Guattari’s words. For them, “minorities” are in the process of becoming, and “majorities” are in a closed static state and stagnation (for them, minority or majority are not a matter of numbers). According to this formula, to simplify a bit, one becomes a woman (the term dates back to Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, 1-2, from 1949; *Capitalism and schizophrenia 2. A thousand plateaux*, Zagreb, Sandorf, 2013) developed this further, because women are in the process of becoming and transforming (*devenir*) and, according to their terminology, are a “minority”, unlike men (or any dominant group) who unquestionably *are* (*être*), thus cast in concrete. The future is on the side of those who are in the process of becoming, not those who have sealed themselves.

*Allow me to return to the position expressed a moment ago that I would like to clarify. When I think about the composition of the periodical, I notice that it is made up of meaningful translation policies and the enthusiasm of female authors in writing texts based on our needs, experiences, and interests. I didn’t miss the fact that you had the role of the author of the article or the editor in more important thematic issues dedicated to feminism. To be precise, I will mention the magazines “Marksizam u svetu” (No. 8/9, 1981), “Delo” (No. 4, 1981) and “Izraz” (No. 2/3, 1990) which are the product of your editorship, and two other important topics to which you contributed discussion and texts - in “Republika” (No. 11/12, 1983), and “Književnost” (8/9, 1986). Of course, what I am not mentioning here is that in almost all important magazines of that time, you managed to publish topics and essays related to the intersection of feminism, more specifically, feminist issues in the fields of Indian philosophy, ancient philosophy, Marxism, language, and so on. Since I carefully read your texts and books from that time and noted my thoughts in the margins – I would have countless questions about the mentioned topics and phenomena – which go beyond the norm of an interview. We will*

*continue to record our conversations. However, through the multiplicity of your involvement, I would like to examine (my) position and assumptions in the reconstruction and revaluation of Yugoslav women in the emancipatory phase of common feminist history. I am noting another meaning in the definition of "common". Based on your editorial policies, I conclude that you have tried to include as many diverse voices as possible, but also a large number of texts and works of our female intellectuals. In general, my impression concerns the fact that I notice practices of community and solidarity of women in such magazine politics. With joint efforts, you have achieved a complex task not only in presenting feminist and artistic values in our country and the world but also in crossing the discursive worlds of social, artistic, and activist knowledge. The production of knowledge on the woman question is inseparable from the tasks of dissemination. What led you to write? And in what atmosphere did the conquest of the space for the publication of the author's works take place?*

It is great and important that you should have noticed the exceptional importance of periodicals and translation in Yugoslav culture.

I would add here that apart from periodicals and translation, writing itself was constitutive, both for us and for the whole culture, and above all (due to its faster impact on a wider audience) essay writing and journalism. We wrote and wrote. I, like others, wrote essays for magazines, and among them, I systematically published critical reviews of books, which is extremely important for culture. At that time, I tried to present books that had not yet been translated in our country (although people translated a lot and quickly), but also to present books by local women authors. I especially thought it was crucial to write reviews of women's books, both literary and scientific because they received fewer of them.

We published, including collections in magazines across the country. We published texts where we could, but a lot of it was on the spur of the moment, whenever we had an opportunity, unplanned, in the general late-socialist cultural effervescence that we didn't yet know was leading us downhill. We dreamed of our own publishing house, magazine, bookstore, and library, about more shelters for battered women who survived the attack, but we still didn't know how to establish them. We only published through existing channels that we had access to as academics, not because we are feminists. Everything else would seem impossible because the roads had not yet been paved. In other magazines where they would publish our

texts, we acted with the help of constant negotiations and agreements with the editors, but i wouldn't call that direct censorship either, because these are normal procedures in publishing. There could have been "censorship" or attempts to thwart us on an individual level, with certain editors (we didn't even go to such editors anyway), but i don't think there was an order from the government not to publish us, among other things because we were invisible to the authorities and the Party, since they didn't even know what our work was all was about. Many conservatives were certainly against it just in case, but more by their hunch than by order. Many people liked our criticism. And we also worked by our own intuition. After all, in the transition period and towards the end of socialism, when norms were lost and rearranged, we all read a lot between the lines, tried the impossible, and acted according to the method of trial and error. It was a glorious socialist "finding out" in conditions where new norms have not yet been found or defined. Thanks to that *kairos*, feminist publishing was possible. But the general tendency to censor women was present then, as it is today, although its modes are changing. In research, it is well described and quantified as to how much men interrupt women at public meetings or on television, and how much longer they speak than us, although the stereotype claims the opposite.

*It seems to me that the context in which the anthologies and topics of the magazine were created with a feminist subtext is crucial, but also the networking of intellectuals, today we would say activists, from different fields such as sociology, philosophy, art, literature etc.*

You are asking about the context in which the thematic issues of the magazines in which we published were created and how we invited and represented not only foreign but also, much more importantly, domestic authors. The context was the end of socialism before the collapse of the country, which suddenly opened up the mental and public space for all kinds of questioning. We grew wings from critique, challenge, and reactivity that propelled our thinking and writing far beyond the constant locking of internal and external borders. I think that things happened simultaneously and that some of us were only aware of some streams of feminist research, demands, and engagement. I was in the circle of philosophers and social scientists, but there were women in natural sciences too who had and expressed their experiences similar to ours, who came to the "Woman and Society" section. On one hand, there were excellent journalists, and on the

other, all kinds of artists and writers, who covered all spheres of literature from poetry to novels, and who published and had their activities. There were also female artists and sportswomen (Željka Jelavić, ethnologist). I knew way less about female writers than about female philosophers. Today, reading Dubravka Ugrešić and other local writers (although i do not have a complete insight into the entire literary field in our language, especially after the disintegration of the country), i see the similarity in our aspirations and situations. With some of them, as with all of us for sure, you can see the evolution in feminist attitudes and knowledge. With Dubravka, *Brnjica za veštice* (“A Muzzle for Witches”; Zagreb, Multimedia Institute 2021), the book you were the godmother of in your conversation with her, is the culmination. She thought highly you, and this was recorded during Dubravka’s lifetime. In our community of social scientists, there was a lot of harmony and a desire to create and build together. The solidarity of our first feminist groups of intellectuals and artists was very important and constitutive of that work, but also, i believe, for each of us individually. I have fond memories of that time of our ”začinjavke” (founders, pioneers, as Lydija Sklevicki used to say) and of our joint discoveries and progressive engagement.

*After organizing “Drug-ca-žena”, you founded your own section of the Sociology Association in Zagreb in 1979. Celebrating the work of the Section “Women and Society” (and the collection of papers of the same name with the subtitle Cultivating dialogue from 1987), Lydia Sklevicky wrote that the section “Women and society” was founded by a generation without its own tradition of organized activism by women, but with the aim of winning a new, different scientific discourse about women. Such a position is derived from historical knowledge related partially to the Society of University-Educated Women of Croatia (1928-1955), and more significantly through the organization and transformation and forced dismantlement of the Anti-Fascist Women’s Front (AFŽ, 1942-1953). The anthology I mentioned “Woman and Society – Cultivating Dialogue” (1987) (in addition to a number of excellent texts) prompted me to focus on the activist work of women in that period. I notice that you aspired to conquer the space of the political gap created by the emancipation of Yugoslav women. How did the “Women and Society” Section work?*

You mention the “Women and Society” section of the Sociological Society of Croatia, which we founded in Zagreb after returning from the



Belgrade international conference “Drug-ca žena” in 1978, where we gained wings and the conviction that we should continue with feminist education, awareness development and public action. In parallel, the Belgrade group established a similar section at SCC. A few of us (not including me) were sociologists, so it was easy to establish such a section, which then could convene university meetings in the pleasant and elegant, albeit old-fashioned and at that time quite neglected Club of University Teachers in Zagreb. We were not officially a working group of researchers and we did not have a university status or funding for anything in that section, but we liked to emphasize that we are still a group and that we work together, including when we did not conduct our activities, not even the editing of our journals, together. It was a modest beginning of becoming a subject for university feminists. The fact that we were “a part of a university” is not a stain on our history, which is also part of the history of Yugoslavia: many progressive movements were initiated by the “elite”. When one of us collected texts for the magazine, she naturally engaged everyone else who could contribute a text. The possibility of meeting in the Club of University Teachers, which was known to both teachers and students and was visited by them at various gatherings (i went there, for example, also to philosophical or political meetings, to those of the “Orientalist Section”; the name makes Edward Said turn in his grave), and it was important to all of us. Before that, we held meetings in apartments, often at my mother’s and mine, but with the Section, the circle expanded to include individuals who approached us, even though we were always a small group. Yet we all worked outside of that group, teaching, publishing, as well as establishing an “SOS-telephone” for women and children victims of violence, which was a necessary and important job. We also learned a lot from the SOS telephone. The “Women and Society” section was also open to men, some of whom would sometimes come, although there were fewer of them than us. We invited people to gatherings on a certain topic, where usually someone (or even several people) would give an introductory talk, and the discussion would continue. We did not have special functions in the section and we convened discussion meetings on various topics we would agree upon, and usually one of us would take it upon herself to technically organize the matter for a while. It was a time before the Internet, so everything had to be done in person, manually, and by phone, from planning a meeting, reserving a room, arranging for speakers, and ordering coffee.

Since we mostly worked at the university, nobody had much time, and we didn't have our own publishers yet (women's centres have them today). Sometimes we just had a circle of feminist education, discussions of specific books and research, sometimes including literature and journals.

In retrospect, the search for a different scientific discourse in the research on women, which you mention and in relation to which you rightly quote Lydia Sklevicky, was only a circle of our wider or narrower professional interests, but it is obvious that in our *activism* - although without political experience and continuity in women's gathering, we unlocked a new continuity, that lasts until today, and which can only be seen now. I keep coming back to this moment in time, its importance and the continuity of *transnational women's engagement* in a world that is facing the threat of its end in the conservative revolution associated with nationalisms.

Translated by **Jovana Jovac**