

THE NARRATIVE OF SOCIAL (IN)JUSTICE, FEMINISM, AND MIGRATION IN SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ'S SELECTED WORKS

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ABSTRACT

The Narrative of Social (In)Justice, Feminism, and Migration in Slavenka Drakulić's Selected Works

Slavenka Drakulić (1949) is a renowned Croatian journalist and writer who started her professional career in Croatia but later gained popularity in other European countries and the United States, where many of her books were published. Her writing has been marked by social criticism and feminist traits. The article focuses on her works that point to questions of social (in)equality and the marginalization of certain social groups or even nations. Moreover, her works expose the position of women in society and shed light on migrations, whether through the images of refugees from crisis zones or migrations from Eastern Europe to the West for political and economic reasons.

KEYWORDS: Slavenka Drakulić, feminism, social (in)equality, migrations, marginalization

IZVLEČEK

Pripovedi o socialni (ne)enakosti, feminizmu in migracijah v izbranih delih Slavenke Drakulić

Slavenka Drakulić (1949) je priznana hrvaška novinarka in pisateljica, ki je svojo kariero začela na Hrvaškem, kasneje pa se je s pisanjem uveljavila tudi širše v Evropi in v ZDA, kjer je izšlo več njenih del. Njeni zapisi so družbenokritični in pogosto vsebujejo tudi feministične ideje. Avtorica se v članku osredotoča na njena dela, ki izpostavljajo vprašanja družbene (ne)enakosti, marginalizacije določenih družbenih skupin ali celotnih narodov, položaja žensk v družbi ter migracij – tako migracij beguncev iz kriznih con kot tudi izseljevanja iz Vzhodne Evrope na Zahod iz političnih in ekonomskih razlogov.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Slavenka Drakulić, feminizem, družbena (ne)enakost, migracije, marginalizacija

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INTRODUCTION

Through her writing and her unrelenting life stance as a feminist, social activist, and social commentator, her focus on social and political injustices, especially those pertaining to women, immigrants, as well as different marginalized groups, Slavenka Drakulić soon attracted the attention of the Croatian media, and, not long after that, also of foreign presses and other media outlets. Her commentaries and columns have appeared in prominent European and American papers, for example, *The Guardian*, *The New Republic*, *La Stampa*, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *The Nation*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Internazionale*, and online platforms, such as *Eurozine* cultural journal. It is not surprising that such topics have attracted Drakulić's attention. Drakulić is herself an expatriate, just like Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz, or Gertrude Stein, to list a few well-known names, and just like in their cases, her nonconformity (albeit less radical) has colored her life. In a way, it has become her trademark and a guiding theme for her journalistic pieces, her nonfiction books, and to a degree, her novels.

In the 1990s, she persistently criticized the Croatian political regime, calling it authoritarian and exploitive, among other things. Consequently, she (along with four other Croatian writers—Rada Iveković, Vesna Kesić, Jelena Lovrić, and Dubravka Ugrešić) became a *persona non grata*.¹ Her life as a political dissident began. This “witch trial” was probably one of the loudest confrontations between the feminists and the nationalists in Croatia to date, and it reverberated beyond Croatian borders.² Drakulić could not publish in the Croatian press for almost a decade. However, she continued publishing abroad. Mirna Solić, in her article “Textuality of Maps, Photographs, and Images: Visual Identity in Slavenka Drakulić’s *Frida’s Bed*,” observes that contemporary Croatian women’s prose, “which could be generally characterised as a literature of displacement” has, in the last decades, by shifting the focus “on individual suffering, [...] challenged and subverted the official interpretations of recent history, in particular the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of the 1990s” (Solić, 2014, p. 6). This focus is undoubtedly true of Drakulić’s writing. She frequently discusses the issues of personal suffering and displacement of women related to politics, economy, or some other, usually quite intimate reasons.

Displacement is unequivocally related to migration, and migrations from the former Eastern Bloc to the West have increased dramatically since the late 1990s.

1 However, as Drakulić notes in her book *Café Europa Revisited: How to Survive Post-Communism*, when she moved to Sweden, she was not “a war refugee, or an economic migrant, but rather a ‘love migrant’” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 122). She married a Swedish journalist whom she met while reporting on the wars in Yugoslavia.

2 It was discussed, for example, at the PEN International Congress in Rio de Janeiro in December 1992 (see History of the PEN Congress: <https://www.pen100archive.org/explore-the-exhibition/congress/history-of-the-pen-congress>).

Compared to male-dominated pre-socialist migration, post-1990s immigration has included more women.

Migration during the communist times was quite uneven, as reported in Cezara Crisan's article "Transnational Experiences of Eastern European Women and Feminist Practices After 1989" (Crisan, 2012). The ratio between men and women also varied a bit from one country to another. Crisan's study mainly focuses on the former USSR (including Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine), Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and former Yugoslavia. After the fall of communism, more women began to emigrate "as a strategy for survival because of increased unemployment in the new economy" (Bonifacio, 2012, p. 172). Differences in migration ratios were also related to wage discrimination against women; in post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe, this discrimination intensified after the fall of the Communist regime. Tatjana Bijelić (2019), in her essay "Between Homeland and Hostland: Women Migrants' Agency in the US Post-Yugoslav Novels," also discusses the migration of women from the former Eastern Bloc to the West after the 1990s. Many of them lost their jobs (for different reasons, not solely due to political disagreements) and moved to the West. Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, who edited the book *Feminism and Migration: Cross-Cultural Engagements*, writes in the Introduction that "feminism and migration are, in fact, two of the most dynamic social movements since the nineteenth century" (Bonifacio, 2012, p. 1). She explains that both have historically changed social relationships, communities, and nation-states. These "feminized flows of 'human migration'" (Bonifacio, 2012, p. 2) and immense changes in the economic, social, and political landscape of post-socialist nations have also contributed to the surge of cultural productions by post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav women. Moreover, as Mirjam Hladnik Milharčič notes in her article "Researching Slovenian Emigration from the Perspective of Gendered Migration," "women for a long time existed merely as passive companions of migrants or as the ones that stayed at home. In discussing migrant labour and the migrant economy, women and children were presented exclusively as dependent family members separated from the sphere of wage labour" (Hladnik Milharčič, 2018, p. 72). The turning point, Milharčič Hladnik observes, was "'Women in Migration' a 1984 special issue of *International Migration Review*, which was devoted to female migration, and the global appeal to researchers in various disciplines to begin studying migration as a gendered phenomenon" (Hladnik Milharčič, 2018, p. 72). As a result, "the feminisation of migration has become a concept without which we cannot discuss global migration. It refers to the high proportion of women among all migrants and also the greater visibility of female migrants, who, like women in general, have been a historically overlooked, ignored and invisible category" (Hladnik Milharčič, 2018, p. 72).

Migrations can undoubtedly also go hand in hand with the expansion of human creativity in terms of possibilities for the display of one's work, as well as ideas and perspectives as such. Entering the global, multicultural space can thus enhance the productivity of various kinds, including artistic, if the conditions allow it, namely, if one does not have to worry about mere survival. Drakulić was part of the surge

that Bonifacio talks about, and she has not stopped creating since. She has never perceived herself as a victim. Still, she has often written about the impossible conditions in which some people who migrate have to live. Recently, for example, she has written about the war in Ukraine, illuminating the burdens refugees face; her message is transferable to any crisis zone situation and the consequences of fleeing such conditions. In the article “Emotional Baggage,” she notes: “Once you are safe and taken care of in a new country, you will experience a strange feeling; a confusing mixture of gratitude to your benefactors and a kind of a shame at the same time. That is because it is not easy to receive charity. You are in need, and to be needy is humiliating. Charity is perhaps the heaviest of burdens” (Drakulić, 2022). Drakulić sympathizes with those who have been exploited, marginalized, or unjustly exiled, placing intimate stories into a wider social-political, historical, and cultural context.

In terms of the genre which Drakulić uses for expressing her activist stance and her social criticism, literary journalism³ seems to prevail. However, her stories often interweave traits of literary journalism with (personal) essay writing, travelogues, and memoirs. In her collection of stories/reports titled *The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War*, she notes that “the book fits somewhere between hard facts and analysis and personal stories because the war is happening not only at the front, but everywhere and to us all. I am speaking about the other, less visible side of war, how it changes us slowly from within” (Drakulić, 1993, pp. 3–4). She has successfully adopted and used this writing style over the years and, with it, continues to address the issues at hand.

FEMINISM AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS AMONG WOMEN FROM THE EAST (AND THE WEST)

In several of her articles and books, Drakulić observes that Yugoslav women were not well prepared for the feminist movement. They were simply afraid to call themselves feminists, mostly because of Eastern European patriarchal and almost aggressive reaction to the label of feminism, originating from “misconceptions about feminism as a man-hating and state-threatening ideology imported from the West,” as Bijelić (2019) states. In her book *Café Europa: Life After Communism* (1996), Drakulić talks about how the animosity toward feminists, especially those also voicing anti-nationalist views (specifically in Croatia), took an extreme form in an attack directed at women intellectuals in the previously mentioned notorious “witch trial,” which materialized firstly in the form of a newspaper article, published in December 1992

3 Literary journalism is understood as a genre that utilizes journalistic principles of investigation, interview, fieldwork, and fact-checking and combines that, particularly in terms of style and language, with literary approaches (the use of distinct stylistic features, character formation, clear narrative arch, and the like). These are stories that read like fiction but are essentially true and verifiable (see, for example, Sims, 2007; Flis, 2010, and Bak & Reynolds, 2011).

in the Croatian nationalist weekly *Globus*.⁴ Drakulić is well aware of the fact, though, that feminism in the East does not have the same connotations as it does in the West. In *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, edited by Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (Funk & Mueller, 2019), there is an essay by Slavenka Drakulić (2019), "Women and New Democracy in the Former Yugoslavia." In it, Drakulić addresses cultural and historical differences between feminism in the East and the West, stressing the often conservative representation of women in the media in Eastern Europe, the strong impact of the Catholic Church (especially in Croatia) on the government's decisions concerning women, lack of political visibility of women, gender wage gaps, and feminists being reduced to the stereotype of women who hate men.⁵

In their "Introduction," Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller chart the path of feminism in Eastern European and the former Soviet Union. Their description is, to a large extent, in line with Drakulić's view.⁶ They explain:

Post-communist women are responding to their own, very distinct conditions, both material and cultural. Such conditions include the fact that these societies hailed the equality of women as a *fait accompli* which served to legitimate socialism. Post-communist women's writing and activities arise in the context of, and in response to, Western feminism. Their writing is often stimulated and based on knowledge of Western feminist literature and direct contact with Western feminists, whose concerns and discourse they appropriate, reject, or transform. (Funk & Mueller, 2019, pp.1–2)

In *Café Europa Revisited: How to Survive Post-Communism*, she extensively compares feminism in the East with feminism in the West. In communist countries, as she explains, "women's emancipation was part of the political system, where there was not considered to be any need for feminism of a Western type" (Drakulić, 2021, p. 40). She further states that in communist times feminism (as we understand it today and as it was/is seen in the West) was considered bourgeois in the East, and it was not discussed much in the media. Feminism was perceived as a "suspicious activity" (Drakulić, 2021, p. 88). She goes on:

4 See the article by Slaven Letica (1992, pp. 41–42), "Hrvatske feministice siluju Hrvatsku" (Croatia's Feminists Rape Croatia).

5 See Drakulić, 2019, pp. 123–131. See also her book *Smrtni grijesi feminizma* (Drakulić, 1984) (in translation *Deadly Sins of Feminism*). This was the first collection of essays on feminism in ex-Yugoslavia, as Drakulić's website suggests (<https://slavenkadrakulic.com/bibliography/deadly-sins-of-feminism>). In 2020, a reprint was published; it contains additional essays on women's issues, incorporating the time period between 1985 and 2019. The book has not been translated into English.

6 In the book, post-communism is defined as an ongoing process that includes the writing of new constitutions and laws and creating of new economic policies; it is not a fixed social form (Funk & Mueller, 2019, p. 12).

Since women were emancipated, there was no need to discuss women's rights, so the official argument went. It was as if women lived in an ideal world but were not fully aware of it, or failed to appreciate the fact. And those who tried to enlighten women about the real situation became suspicious elements. Women who attempted to mention the word "feminism" or try to publicly discuss it in the 1980s were accused by the authorities of "importing foreign, bourgeois ideas." (Drakulić, 2021, p. 88)

It should be noted, however, that Drakulić herself has always had a pretty privileged life and was able to travel extensively already as a young person, thus coming in contact with Western influences quickly and firsthand, which made it easier for her to form a critical stance also toward the inception and development of, and reactions to the idea of feminism in the East. She has become more a citizen of the world than a member of one culture, even though she has dedicated much of her writing to Croatia, her motherland. Drakulić perceives culture, it seems, neither as a state nor as something absolute. The idea that Marina Lukšič-Hacin and Mirjam Hladnik Milharčič present in their essay "Kulture, civilizacije, nacionalne kulture" goes hand in hand with Drakulić's stance: "Cultures are processes, they change, they meet, interweave or they go their separate ways" (Lukšič-Hacin & Hladnik Milharčič, 2011, p. 29).⁷ This is how Drakulić understands her global citizenship, as it were. Since childhood, privilege was inherent in her life, as her father was an army officer in WWII and later a member of the Communist Party, so she was protected up to a point. That aspect of her life certainly helped her build her career, even though she was never a member of the Communist Party herself. She has never discussed the impact of her father's "affiliation" and his beliefs on her career, even though she has, naturally, been aware of her advantaged position in life. However, she expressed some criticism of her father's life choices. Namely, in her book *Café Europa: Life After Communism*, there is a story dedicated to her father ("My Father's Guilt"), in which she describes him as "one of the poor devils who fought with Tito's partisan army during Second World War and later on joined the Communist Party" (Drakulić, 1996, p. 143). "In my eyes," Drakulić goes on, "he was guilty of opportunism, of a tacit collaboration with a repressive regime, and above all of silence" (Drakulić, 1996, p. 143). Fortunately, she has never, despite privilege, succumbed to complacency. Instead, her writing and civic activism have brought her in contact with people of various political, geographical, educational, and social backgrounds.

In *Café Europa Revisited: How to Survive Post-Communism* (Drakulić, 2021)—which, all in all, successfully revises and updates the themes that were exposed in the first *Café Europa* book—Drakulić, congruent with some of the most topical issues of the times, namely sexual harassment, mobbing, bullying, and the #MeToo movement, dedicates one chapter to women specifically (even though questions

7 In translation, this could read "Cultures, civilizations, national cultures." The book has not been translated into English. The quote was translated by the author of this article.

of women's rights appear in other essays in the book as well), titling it "Women, Harassment, East, West: Are some women more resistant to violence?". She points out that the #MeToo campaign is perhaps one of the most important things to have happened lately to both women and feminism. She sees progress regarding feminist ideas being reinforced in today's Eastern Europe, especially compared to the communist times. Nevertheless, she notices that the campaign in the United States is quite different from that in Europe. Moreover, some parts of Europe have remained almost untouched by it. She explains: "When traveling from north to south, and from west to east, it becomes apparent that women's voices are heard less and less. When we reach the Balkans, they turn into a mere whisper" (Drakulić, 2021, p. 79). She already alludes to that in the first *Café Europa*, stating that regardless of the world gradually becoming increasingly globalized, women in post-communist states still have more in common with each other than with women in Western Europe. Sadly, also when it comes to harassment or reporting harassment. In *Café Europa Revisited*, she further observes:

The differences between countries about what is perceived as sexual harassment were demonstrated years before #MeToo, in a major 2014 study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights involving 42,000 women from all twenty-eight EU member states. The results are striking. In Scandinavian countries, 81 percent of women had been harassed, while in Poland and Romania the figure was 32 percent. Although Romania has one of the highest rates of violence against women in Europe. (Drakulić, 2021, p. 81)

Here again, trying to answer the question of why women in Eastern Europe tolerate more and do not report, we are directed back to the legacy of communism, which, in theory, was an ideology and political practice that included the emancipation of women. However, Drakulić discerns, emancipation came from the top down and was only formal in most cases. This is, as Drakulić sees it, one of the more obvious paradoxes of life under communism, as well as under post-communism. "On the one hand, women's rights were built into the communist state and its legal system, guaranteeing women all the basic rights—from voting to property ownership, from education to divorce, from equal pay for equal work to the right to have control over their own bodies" (Drakulić, 2021, pp. 86–87). But "women experienced an obvious gap between proclaimed principles, laws, and institutions on the one hand and reality, which was ruled by patriarchal customs, on the other" (Drakulić, 2021, p. 89). Communist governments made clear that there was no reason for women to demand more and that their "question" was solved. Drakulić shows her disappointment (but not surprise) in today's situation in the East, stating:

Emancipation from above left generations of women with no knowledge of how to demand their rights, believing perhaps that someone else would take up and fight for their cause on their behalf. Even now, three decades after the collapse of

communism, women in Eastern Europe still are reluctant to voice their concerns—about sexual harassment, among other topics. (Drakulić, 2021, pp. 89–90)

Drakulić misses and thus tries to ignite, through her writing, the activism of young women in the East. In her opinion, these women simply did not—and do not—react properly or soon enough. There have been no mass protests (with the exception of Poland) when women's rights are being questioned, she laments. She identifies the (re)rise of totalitarian regimes as one of the key reasons for such a situation, as these regimes render women speechless. "The lives of women are even more tough now than before, at least in terms of preserving rights and privileges, employment prospects and equal pay for the same job. Many cannot afford to have a child. Many migrate to the West in search of a better life" (Drakulić, 2021, p. 92). "Here we are again," Drakulić says, "back to square one, to the same old arguments that apply all too often to harassment or domestic violence, to the toned-down perception of the problem and the lack of experience of confronting and dealing with it, a condition that is perpetuated by women habitually acting on their own" (Drakulić, 2021, pp. 90–91).

It ought to be said that Drakulić's argument is somewhat one-sided if not nearly inaccurate (albeit true when it comes to the re-rise of authoritarian regimes in Europe and broader); there have been many active women (whether acting as individuals or as members of various associations) who have clearly shown awareness of the importance of being coparticipants in democratic institutions and the new kind of public sphere over the last decades. Nanette Funk (2019), in her essay "Feminism East and West," refers to Drakulić and criticizes her (yet Funk included Drakulić's essay "Women and the New Democracy in Former Yugoslavia" in the volume, which she co-edited) for being too stereotypical when it comes to her view of the women in the West. Funk writes: "Drakulić presumed Western women's ignorance of Eastern Europe or a certain style of dress for American feminists" (Funk, 2019, p. 320). Of course, as Funk also observes, there are, in fact, tremendous differences in culture, socialization, and personality between Eastern and Western women and Eastern and Western (Western being hegemonic) discourse. "All these differences create tensions and hostility and harden into prejudices, which have provoked confrontations and fractured meetings between Western and Eastern women" (Funk, 2019, p. 320). She continues: "Post-communist women do not want to be dominated by the priorities of Western women, or be swamped by debates among Western feminists that do not resonate from them" (Funk, 2019, p. 321).

I agree with Funk's observation that one cannot enter a dialogue between Eastern and Western women without misunderstandings and disagreements. However, we can still see the desire to work together, minimize prejudices and mutual suspicion, and engage in significant causes for both sides. Despite political, historical, and social differences, women's movement in the East and the West share many common concerns and goals. I also concur with Funk's observation that "the differences should be seen as an opportunity for mutual and collective self-reflection" (Funk, 2019, p.

321). The book *Gender Politics and Post-Communism* was first published in 1993, and most of its essays are from the early 1990s, which one should remember when analyzing and evaluating them.⁸ Nevertheless, Drakulić's views have not changed much since then, it seems, as she still (for example, in *Café Europa Revisited* when discussing the lack of response to the #MeToo movement in Eastern Europe) misses women's civic engagement and concrete expressions of women's power. Drakulić concludes her article "Women and the New Democracy in the Former Yugoslavia" in this way: "Women must begin to see themselves as political actors. They need to define emancipation in their own terms, defend their already existing rights, prevent the manipulation of women's bodies. Otherwise, democracy will retain its male face, and men will not be the only ones to blame" (Drakulić, 2019, p. 130).

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Drakulić has published several novels that engage women as their main protagonists and problematize their societal position, very often in the context of the dominating, patriarchal rule. Depicting the war in Bosnia, Drakulić shed light on the lives of women who suffered unimaginable horrors during the war in her work *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* (Drakulić, 1999), also known as *As If I Am Not There* (in the original edition *Kao, da me nema*).⁹ Later, moving on from the topic of war, she created portraits of three remarkable women in what is frequently called a trilogy, consisting of the novels *Frida's Bed* (Drakulić, 2008) (the original, *Frida ili o boli*, came out in 2007; it illuminates the life of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera), *Dora i Minotaur: Moj život s Picassom* (Drakulić, 2015)¹⁰ (describing the life of Dora Maar), and *Mileva Einstein, teorija tuge* (Drakulić, 2016; the book talks about Mileva Marić-Einstein, Einstein's first wife, a brilliant physicist and mathematician).¹¹ In all of the novels, Drakulić focuses on the woman who is under the strong influence of a powerful man; in most cases, the woman gets destroyed (mental illness, depression, and the like). Frida Kahlo from the novel *Frida ili o boli* is the exception; she manages, despite hardships, to build a career and a life that has, in the end, left a more memorable trace than that of Diego Rivera. Drakulić also published the book *Nevidljiva žena i druge priče* (Drakulić, 2018; in 2022, it was published in English—*Invisible Woman and Other Stories*), where she deals with the questions of aging, loss, illness, missed opportunities, from a feminine perspective, bringing forth a reckoning, a reevaluation and an acceptance of the gradual slipping away of the self. This semi-fictional account addresses universal topics and surpasses the geopolitical aspects and issues otherwise frequently exposed in Drakulić's narratives.

8 The 2019 edition does not contain any updated essays that would bring fresher, more relevant data.

9 The book was published in Croatian and in English in 1999.

10 The book has not been translated into English. The title could read *Dora and the Minotaur: My Life with Picasso*, but it has appeared in Slovenian, Lithuanian, French, Dutch, Italian, Romanian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, and German.

11 The novel has not been translated into English; there are, however, Slovenian, German, and Italian translations available.

MIGRATION AND SOCIAL (IN)JUSTICE—THE WEST MEETS THE EAST

Drakulić dedicates quite a lot of space to the issues of social justice or injustice (many times in light of migrations) in her book *Café Europe Revisited*¹² and several articles before it, among which “Who’s Afraid of Europe?” (Drakulić, 2001) stands out. In it, she mentions that she lives interchangeably in Sweden, Croatia, and Austria and is constantly crossing real and imagined European borders. Furthermore, the more she moves across borders, the more she notices the rise of nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. Anxiety is being instilled into people, which is a strong control mechanism. Indeed, we must agree with this observation, as totalitarian political and systemic tendencies create migrations and feed off them, using them as justifiable causes for their existence. Immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and anyone seen as different, as unfamiliar, as foreign, as the Other, quickly becomes a potential threat. Furthermore, she discerns that “from the fear of the unknown to the creation of the ‘known’ enemy is only a small step” (Drakulić, 2001, p. 88). Her observations are not revolutionary, but they are on point, albeit heard many times before. The foreigners, the migrants, have become the tangible enemy (even more so if they are Muslim, if they come from the Middle East or Africa, or if they bring along a somewhat different cultural code). The right-wing populist leaders use these foreigners as scapegoats, claiming their individual state’s national, cultural, and social identity is in jeopardy.

Nevertheless, sometimes, the Other is not someone from an entirely different geographical and cultural environment. There are differences in terms of social justice and overall status between the citizens of Eastern and Western Europe, as Drakulić’s research also shows. In particular, in *Café Europa Revisited*, she focuses on Eastern Europe and the refugees from the Middle East and other parts of the globe. In the chapter “A Parrot in Sweden, and Other Immigrant Issues (On Old Immigrants and New Refugees),” she talks about her migration to Sweden (she married a Swede) and contrasts that with refugees from Bosnia who came to Sweden shortly after the Yugoslav Wars. She describes the difficult conditions to which refugees were exposed, even though Sweden was supposed to be a welcoming country; she parallels that with her relatively easy transition (also because her husband was Swedish). She specifically talks about a Muslim family, the Fazlics, who were among the 75,000 Bosnian refugees who sought asylum. We read:

When I met Faruk and Alma, they had been already waiting for two years to be granted asylum. It was difficult to live in such suspense—most of all for Faruk, who had a university degree and had worked in a local administrative post back home. He found it humiliating to live jobless; he felt helpless, a burden to his family and to society. While the authorities review their case, a process that can last for years,

12 See specifically the Introduction and the chapters “European Food Apartheid,” “Fueling Fear,” “A Parrot in Sweden, and Other Immigrant Issues,” and “When Aunt Angela Met Donald Trump.”

asylum seekers are allowed to work but only under special conditions. (Drakulić, 2021, pp. 129)

Drakulić explains that the Bosnian refugees had to prove themselves as society's best-integrated migrants, and only then would the state grant them asylum. What worked in their favor, though, was that they were Europeans and generally better educated than some of the non-European refugees. Consequently, Sweden was more generous toward Bosnians than, for example, toward people from Afghanistan or Syria, observes Drakulić, immediately adding that her remark is not politically correct. However, regarding migrations and welcoming refugees, things have changed in the last few years. She gives specific data:

Within a relatively short time, societies in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe have switched from open to closed, from welcoming refugees to firmly rejecting them. In an opinion poll published by the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, the proportion of respondents showing willingness to help refugees had fallen from 54 percent in 2015 to 30 percent in 2016. During the same period, the number of those in favor of taking fewer asylum seekers almost doubled, from 34 percent to 60 percent. New immigrants and refugees feel the change in atmosphere too. They are settled in enclaves or ghettos, where more and more drug-related crime, honor killing, violence and rapes are reported, especially in the south of Sweden, where the majority of refugees and asylum seekers live. (Drakulić, 2021, pp. 133–134)

Drakulić speaks about the commonly known stigmatization of Muslims throughout Europe and other parts of the world. She rightly states that “political use of identity, reducing a nation to a religion, was the vanguard of what is happening today in the rest of Europe” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 9). “Today’s immigrants and refugees are, in the same way, no longer allowed to be individuals, not even members of a state or a nation. They are reduced to a religious identity” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 9).

The (re)rise of nationalism (it was already strong during the Yugoslav Wars and prior) and xenophobia is something that Drakulić marks as one of the most dangerous characteristics of post-communistic Europe, identifying in it also one of the main culprits for the economic crisis (which also contributed to migrations). The immigrants (also those from Eastern Europe nowadays) are being blamed for all kinds of things, from theft to stealing jobs and social aid funds in Europe. The first crack in the perhaps too rosy picture of the European Union appeared with the financial crisis of 2008, Drakulić states, and goes on to say that by 2015, “right-wing parties had appeared on the horizon in elections in Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy and Finland” (Drakulić, 2021, p. xvi). The same thing happened in Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia. That brought to light many prejudices, injustices, and human rights violations. Regarding research data and Drakulić’s commentary, one of the more powerful chapters in *Café Europa Revisited* is “When Aunt Angela Met Donald

Trump,” in which she addresses the European refugee crisis that revealed all the cracks in the system. She writes about how Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovenia erected razor-wire border fences in Europe during the greatest influx of refugees between 2015 and 2016. Nevertheless, already in “Whose Afraid of Europe?” she noted: “In a nationalism culture, identity is made up of borders, territory and blood and one is forced to choose one nation, sometimes with unexpected results” Drakulić (2021, p. 92).

As mentioned earlier, not only is the system unjust and unbalanced regarding war refugees, but there are substantial prejudices within the EU regarding people from Eastern Europe. Drakulić anticipates this crack between the East and the West already in *Café Europa: Life After Communism*, most explicitly in the story “Invisible Walls Between Us.” It was written in the year 1995, when Croatia was not yet in the EU (but, as revealed in *Café Europa Revisited*, not much has changed after the admission to the EU); she describes people’s disappointment with Europe and especially with the way Eastern Europeans were treated when crossing into Western Europe.

We believed that after 1989 we would be welcomed to an undivided Europe, that we would somehow officially become what we always knew we were – that is, Europeans. Finally, we would join the others, the French, the Germans, or the Swiss. But we were wrong in nourishing that illusion. Today, the proof of our status in Europe is easy to find. It awaits us at every western border crossing in the stern face of a police officer looking down upon us, even if he doesn’t say a word. (Drakulić, 1996, pp. 14–15)

Moving to more contemporary times, in the chapter “European Food Apartheid: Are All Stomachs Not the Same?” (in *Café Europa Revisited*), Drakulić describes a case of her friend from Bratislava, who visited her in Vienna recently with her six-year-old grandson, and Slavenka served him Nutella for breakfast. He wondered why Nutella tasted better than at home. “This brought us to the heart of a recent controversy about differences between food products in Eastern and Western Europe. The labels are the same, but the content is different! When we entered the EU, we believed it to be a community in which all citizens enjoyed an equal right to freedom; it did not occur to us that Coke and Nutella would not be of the same quality” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 12). After her detailed analysis of the European food market, she states that she had lost trust in the union. She recalls Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, which portrays a society where all members are equal, but some are still more equal than others. Finally, she connects food production with politics: “The logic of capitalist production was then turned into a political issue. The unequal quality of food offered a good platform for the nationalist populism of Eastern European leaders who saw their chance to stir up anti-EU feelings. Nothing can provide more wrath or pride than food” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 19).

Drakulić’s latest writing accentuates another aspect of migrations: those from the East to the West in search of a better, more prosperous life. This aspect, in itself,

is nothing new or extraordinary in any way, as nomadic existence has become quite common in present-day globalized societies. As Rosi Braidotti points out in the Introduction to her book *Nomadic Subjects Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, published in 1994 (and still holding a topical value), “being nomadic is not a glamorous state of jet-setting [...] It rather points to the decline of unitary subjects and the destabilization of the space-time continuum of the traditional vision of the subject” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 10). She elaborates:

Being homeless, a migrant, an exile, a refugee, a rape-in-war-victim, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant, an expatriate, a mail-order bride, a foreign caretaker of the young or the elderly of the economically developed world, a high-flying professional, a global-venture financial expert, a humanitarian relief worker in the UN global system, a citizen of a country that no longer exists (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union): these are no metaphors. [...] These are highly specific geopolitical and historical locations—it’s history and belonging tattooed on your body. (Braidotti, 1994, pp. 10–11)

Regardless of the often unfair treatment, people from Eastern Europe tend to frequently move westwards, according to Drakulić. In the article “Eastern Exodus,” published in February 2020, she talks about the “extreme depopulation” of the Eastern members of the EU due to “a combination of mass emigration and low birth rates. Nationalist governments pander to patriotic sentiments but consistently fail to address the social and political problems which drive young adults westwards.” Of course, migrations are far from being a new phenomenon in Europe (Drakulić mentions mass migrations to the United States in the previous century, then the late 1960s and 1970s, when people from Yugoslavia specifically left their homeland for Germany and other Western European countries for, she states, “saving the Yugoslav economy”). However, she believes these new intra-European migrations are different from the previous ones, explaining that “for the first time in history, this part of Europe is experiencing a real brain drain” (Drakulić, 2020). “Previously, those who left were unskilled manual workers, now they are the most qualified” (Drakulić, 2020). She does not feel optimistic about the return of the migrants, as they, especially younger people, want to escape “corruption, injustice and lack of hope for a better future” (Drakulić, 2020). In her opinion, the main culprit of this situation are nationalist governments “supported by both the Catholic and the Orthodox Church”; they keep fueling people’s patriotism “instead of securing those basic needs that would keep young and educated people and families at home, like jobs and housing loans” (Drakulić, 2020).

The questions of Europe and European identity and what it stands for are pertinent questions that must be re-examined, redefined, and reevaluated. Europeanism—“an identity in the making” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 99)—is indeed a contested notion, a notion that no longer (if it ever did, in the first place) brings up a sense of

security and community. Instead, it invokes the images of physical and psychological walls against immigrants. Drakulić sees this as a “self-fulfilling prophecy: the fear of immigrants threatens to destroy the very social and political fabric, culture, tradition, religion and way of life that Europeans want to protect” (Drakulić, 2021, p. 100). Spreading awareness about social inequality is something that she has attempted to achieve and continues to do so. Some of her writing seems to linger on certain notions of the communist past. It can, therefore, feel outdated, or perhaps the writer just has not done enough research, so her observations read superficial, not sufficiently capturing all the complexities of issues at hand (e.g., her view on feminism in the East). However, when it comes to social injustice and migrations (including intra-European migrations), she accurately depicts the present situation. Moreover, she gives historical context essential for a well-researched and well-composed narrative, whether fictional or non-fictional.

CONCLUSION

The thematic span of Slavenka Drakulić’s work is broad, and she has undoubtedly touched upon many crucial topics over the years, including those that are still frequently considered taboo—namely, rape in combination with war atrocities, illness and dying, destructive sexual desire and abuse, and aging and facing the proximity of death. Moreover, as discussed, she has a series of books that analyze and evaluate life under communism and post-communism.

Drakulić’s voice has maintained its global resonance over decades, and her work (be it her writing or activism) continues to be even more recognizable outside Croatian borders than in her homeland. She is, without a doubt, one of the most prominent journalistic, essayistic, and literary voices of our times. One of the aspects that makes her writing unique, attractive, and topical is the fact that she uses the immersion technique. Namely, she utilizes her own experiences and the experiences of people she interviews as the primary source for her texts. She combines that with documentary data (archival documents, court proceedings, statistical data, etc.) that she collects during the research stage. She embodies the characteristics of an investigative journalist and a masterful writer, skillfully combining the two approaches, which results in stylistically perfected texts.

In terms of topics that she has focused on continuously over time, nationalism surely needs to be pointed out. She believes that nationalism is still a very real and tangible problem that makes reconciliation (concerning the issues of the recent and more distant past, including the Yugoslav Wars) impossible, causes economic and social crises, and contributes to many of the present-day challenges in Europe and beyond. She likes to provoke and engage the reader so that she can perhaps trigger a more active stance in today’s world. She believes an active social stance is required in all areas of life, not only when it comes to women’s rights, for example,

which are also frequently at the center of her attention. Moreover, Drakulić's texts are generally not imbued with nostalgia and sentimentalism but touch upon the past in terms of its potential to carry lessons for our present and our future. Her voice is a global voice, or, in the words of Gloria Steinem, in her review of *As If I Am Not There*, Drakulić's voice "belongs to the world."

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POVZETEK

PRIPOVEDI O SOCIALNI (NE)ENAKOSTI, FEMINIZMU IN MIGRACIJAH V IZBRANIH DELIH SLAVENKE DRAKULIĆ

Leonora Flis

Avtorica se v članku osredotoča na dela hrvaške novinarki, publicistke in pisateljice Slavenke Drakulić (1949), ki se dotikajo tem socialne (ne)enakosti oziroma krivic, ki so jim izpostavljene določene družbene, etnične in verske skupine ali narodi v celoti. Avtorica izpostavi tudi feministične teme v delih Slavenke Drakulić ter vprašanje migracij, oboje v povezavi z družbeno neenakostjo. Slavenka Drakulić je s svojimi besedili najprej pritegnila pozornost hrvaških medijev, v 90. letih prejšnjega stoletja pa je zaradi svoje glasne kritike režima v domovini izgubila pozicijo vplivne kolumnistke in novinarki, vendar se je s svojim pisanjem hitro uveljavila v Evropi in v ZDA. V novinarskih prispevkih in knjigah (tako fikcijskih kot nefikcijskih) intimne zgodbe običajno vtke v širši družbenozgodovinski kontekst. Avtorica v članku analizira njena dela (na primer *Café Europa: Life After Communism* in *Café Europa Revisited: How to Survive Post-Communism*), ki problematizirajo feminizem v Vzhodni Evropi (in ga primerjajo z njegovo zahodno različico). Drakulić meni, da je bila emancipacija žensk v Vzhodni Evropi inherentni del političnega sistema, vendar pa je sistem v resnici deloval patriarhalno in potrebe po resničnem feminizmu (vsaj skozi oči sistema) v teh državah ni bilo. Govori o potrebi po močnejšem angažmaju žensk, tako v preteklosti kot tudi danes. Zapostavljanje pravic žensk je seveda del problema družbene neenakosti, o kateri Slavenka Drakulić govori v več svojih besedilih. Avtorica se posveti tudi tistim njenim zapisom, ki govorijo o socialnih razlikah in krivicah tudi skozi prizmo migracij. Drakulić se ukvarja tako z migracijami beguncev iz kriznih območij kot tudi z migracijami znotraj Evrope (z Vzhoda na Zahod). Pri obeh tipih migracij opaža veliko kršitev človekovih pravic in vzpostavljanje koncepta »Drugega«, ki je predstavljen kot sovražnik ali pa nekdo, ki je postavljen v pozicijo inferiornosti ter na ta način stigmatiziran in marginaliziran. Pravzaprav v nacionalizmu oziroma nacionalizmih, ki se že dolgo razraščajo v Evropi in širše, vidi največjega sovražnika ter vzrok za družbene neenakosti in za sovražnost med narodi. Avtorica v članku problematizira nekatera opažanja Slavenke Drakulić, ki se zdijo nekoliko zastarela in neizdelana ali pa preprosto premalo podkrepljena z dejstvi (na primer feminizem, ki se je razvil v Vzhodni Evropi). Podrobneje se posveti njenim nefikcijskim besedilom, omeni pa tudi romane, ki prav tako izpostavljajo pogosto tabuizirane teme (na primer smrt, staranje, zlorabo, posilstvo). Skozi analizo del Slavenke Drakulić avtorica pokaže na njihov širok tematski razpon, izpostavi nekaj pomanjkljivosti njenih analiz, vendar poudari tudi kvalitete njenega pisanja, pri katerem običajno ne zapade v sentimentalnost in nostalgijo, ampak nas spodbuja, da preteklost razumemo kot polje učenja za našo sedanost in prihodnost.