2004-05 Faculty Development Grant

I traveled to Dubrovnik, Croatia, to attend and present my work at a one-week seminar in Feminist Analysis with emphasis on the issue of Citizenship: Longing and Be/longing.

Dubrovnik, Croatia, last week of May, 2005. Incredible!! It turned out to be more like a conference and less like a seminar, as there were three main professors from the Universities of Zagreb, Belgrade and Rutgers, but there were also papers read by other participants from other countries and also by graduate students from Rutgers, Belgrade and Zagreb universities. The interuniversity Center is actually a branch of the University of Zagreb, in Dubrovnik. There were all kinds of other seminars going on simultaneously, mostly in medical fields.

The seminar set out to refute the myth that Citizenship has nothing to do with feminism. It was SO nice NOT to talk about sexuality for once. The best thing that I took with me was meeting all the different women (and 2 men) whom I would never have met otherwise: Women from Serbia, Bosnia, Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, Hungary, Iran, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, and US (Rutgers). Nobody from England, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, Mexico, Romania. Two artists, including me. Ages 25-60. Twenty three women, two men. While many had PhDs in things like Anthropology, Political Science, Women's Studies or Human Rights, most were not academics, but worked in the actual field with refugees, war prisoners, immigrants, and so on. It made me re-appreciate the social sciences and empirical evidence, the testing of theory in dealing with serious and life threatening issues. All spoke English very well. EVERY single person (except the 3 Americans) was living or working in a country other than the one they were born in and even that has often changed names. It was mind boggling.

The theme of the EU was present throughout all the presentations.

One of the most interesting presentations was by Joanna Regulska, prof. at Rutgers, who talked about the tension between ideas of the European Union and sustaining national distinctions. Immigration and migration is constantly changing and challenging the boundaries in spite of the European Union. The European union is an economic entity, trying to become a political one. She believes that supranational
institutions are the allies of migrant workers, while national governments are trying to protect the local job market. There is a lack of class action suits by migrants, esp. women. The question that came up is WHAT KIND OF "CITIZEN" IS IT THAT CANNOT VOTE, CANNOT WORK, CANNOT GO TO THE DOCTOR IN A EUROPEAN COUNTRY.

Ed Cohen, also from Rutgers, talked about biological and political IMMUNITY. What some of the medical metaphors mean. There are theoretical biologists that challenge the idea of the individual and who maintain instead that organisms evolve by symbiosis and cooperation. Body is a fiction of the self, not just corporeal, but corporate. He talked about the moment when BODY replaced SOUL as the locus of subjectivity and personhood. I had the chance to read the original Habeas Corpus document that talked about the sanctity of life, liberty and property (!) For him (Ed), citizenship is a paranoia-fear of the outside. Names that were mentioned were Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, Michael Taussig, Horkheimer, Adorno, Slavoj Zizek I have to look up this book that was recommended to me: Engen Eisen: Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship. Also, everyone is talking about the Italian political philosopher and theorist Giorgio Agamben, but I’d never heard of him. Must read. Apparently he teaches in the US.

A group of women that work in UN humanitarian organizations talked about Migration and how it is both a gendered and gendering experience. There is FOLKLORIZATION of women migrants, in the sense that they carry the burden of keeping the traditions alive and of soothing the ego of the men (against the indignities of immigration) but at their own expense. One told the example of Iraqi immigrants in Finland, where women have to freeze under their traditional desert robes, while men can wear nice leather jackets lined with fur.

Using theory from Paul Ricoeur, John Locke, Hanna Arendt and Karl Jaspers, Dasa Duhacek explained how consent legitimates governments and how ethnicity can be a beneficiary of the most atrocious evils. Ethnicities and nations function as imagined communities and assign political rights to their members. The strategy in Serbia as with the Nazis is to identify the whole population with the government so as to ensure the survival of individual guilty Serbs. There ensued a LONG discussion on the difference between GUILT and RESPONSIBILITY.

According to Hanna Arendt there is collective responsibility but individual guilt. According to Balibar (Who Comes After the Subject?) the citizen is unthinkable as an isolated individual.

Contemporary Balkan intellectuals prefer the term Responsibility because it is a secular-political term, as opposed to Guilt which easily becomes Sin, which can be absolved, which ends up in religion. Remember that Milosevic was ELECTED by the people, so the issue of responsibility/complicity of citizens looms large. Obvious connection with the USA.

Ethel Brooks (Rutgers) read a paper on the effect on communities of the disappearance of immigrants that reverse their migration and go back to the original country. Nobody talks about this!

Another issue that come up repeatedly was the RENNAISSANCE OF PATRIARCHY that women are experiencing in formerly communist countries. There used to be 50% women in the government. They call this "declarative equality," meaning legislated rather than organic. Now: there are only 4%!

Anarchism was evoked seriously, positively and with respect as a valid political orientation. In the evening while drinking, they regressed to singing old communist songs from their childhood. Apparently this is called Yugonostalgia.

A professor from Finland talked about Catholic, Lutheran and Orthodox views of the Virgin Mary. I think she works with Philippine nannies and talked also of the problem of raising one's own children long-distance while caring for the children of others on a daily basis.

After the seminar was over, a group of us rented a minibus (with driver) and went over to Bosnia (three hours away) to a city called Mostar, with a famous 15th century bridge that was destroyed in the war and now has been rebuilt. We also visited a mosque from the 16th century that was destroyed and rebuilt. There are still bomb ruins all over the place because they can't afford to repair. And they try to advertise their victimhood. All their tourist postcards were of bombings and fires. There was a cemetery in the middle of the town and everyone died in 1993. But in a restaurant we were refused a table because one of us was African! Tragic racism from a town that was pulverized first by the Serbs and then by the Croats, who, historically, have not been nice to either the Moslems or the Jews .. There are no Jews left.
Shoes at the mosque. ALL ARE NIKE!!