

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE:  
DISCOURSES OF FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM IN  
CROATIA

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on knowledge production in the field of feminist literary and theatre criticism in contemporary Croatia. It offers insight in several issues related to the topic that have so far not been discussed in detail. It aims to contribute to the research in literary studies and feminism in Croatia by offering a detailed analysis of the discourses of feminist literary criticism and raising the issue of the politics of feminist literary criticism. The analysis relies on Elizabeth Grosz' (1995) notion of a feminist text as a discursive positioning. The texts by three authors – Andrea Zlata, Lada Čale Feldman and Nataša Govedić – are analyzed in order to explore different ways in which feminist ideas function in literary criticism in the particular socio-cultural context of Croatia in the 1990s and 2000s. Several issues central to the writing of Čale Feldman, Govedić and Zlata are discussed in order to see how feminist position is articulated in relation to the prevalent modes of knowledge production in Croatian literary studies. I argue that Čale Feldman, Govedić, and Zlata raise important questions about the prevalent modes of criticism in Croatian literary studies. This is effectively done in the theoretical and methodological framing of their texts. They also assert new subject-matters and theoretical frameworks in Croatian literary scholarship.

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# Introduction

This thesis focuses on knowledge production in the field of feminist literary and theater criticism in contemporary Croatia. It offers insight in several issues related to the topic that have so far not been discussed in detail. Since the 1980s, when it has first been addressed as a recognizable critical practice, feminist literary criticism has become visible in Croatian literary studies (see Sablić Tomić, 2005). The books are published and major academic journals bring articles written from a feminist perspective. Also, there is a considerable feminist knowledge production outside academia. The issues that are in focus of feminist literary criticism have also become more visible, entering academic curricula and being discussed not only from a feminist perspective.

The literature that reflects on feminist literary and theater criticism in Croatia raises a number of important issues about its emergence and development. The focus is mostly put on the socio-cultural context that influenced articulation of feminist politics, such as connection with a feminist movement (e.g. Zlatar, 2010), relationship between current literary production and feminist criticism (e.g. Lukić, 2003), and political intervention in relation to the mainstream literary studies (e.g. Čale Feldman, 2001; Jakobović Fribec, 2006; Lukić, 2003). However, what is rarely addressed in those studies is the variety of ways in which feminist literary criticism exists in Croatia.

This refers to the differences between feminist discourses regarding their subject-matters, theoretical framing and articulation of feminist political position. In this thesis, I will analyze discourses by three authors – Andrea Zlatar, Lada Čale Feldman and Nataša Govedić – to explore different ways in which feminist ideas function in literary criticism in the

particular socio-cultural context of Croatia in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>1</sup> I believe that their texts are indicative for feminist criticism in the field of Croatian literary and theater studies. All the text I will refer to in the course of my analysis were published in the 2000s. However, Govedić and Čale Feldman's books are collections of essays written in the early 2000s, some of them already published in the late 1990s.

I find it important to point to some methodological dilemmas which I consider relevant when talking about feminist literary criticism in Croatia. By talking about feminist literary and theater criticism in Croatia, I refer to a body of texts belonging to feminist writing on literature and theater, but also to some other subject-matters. After all the trajectories that have transformed traditional disciplinary fields in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the borders between disciplines have been put in question, which concerns literary studies and theater studies as well. This particularly refers to feminist criticism in these fields because it brings together diverse areas of scholarship. The authors I will analyze in this thesis are also underlining the connectedness between different disciplines, even between critical and literary discourse, questioning disciplinary borders and contributing to the establishment of more flexible analytical models. Bearing that in mind, in the text that follows, I will mostly use the notion of feminist literary criticism. It will also be used to refer to different genres that can be traced in Čale Feldman, Govedić and Zlatar's critical discourses, such as theoretical discussion, essay, and critique.

Further on, it is equally problematic to organize discourses such as literature, criticism and feminism along national categories. By taking national label, I refer to diverse feminist discourses in literary studies that emerge in Croatia. I do not consider feminist literary criticism in Croatia a reflection of national identity. However, I suggest that it did emerge

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<sup>1</sup> The excerpts from their texts which will here be analyzed, as well as those from the literature on feminism and feminist literary studies in Croatia, appear in this thesis for the first time in English in my translation. The excerpts from Zlatar's *Rječnik tijela* (2010) in the second chapter are translated by Katarina Seljan.



from specific historical, political and scholarly context. The text I will analyze will be contextualized in contemporary Croatian literary studies, as well as in a wider context of feminist theory.

There is also a conceptual issue of what is feminist about feminist literary criticism in Croatia. For this I rely on Elizabeth Grosz' (1995) notion of a feminist text as a discursive positioning because it provides an anti-essentialist framework which does not attribute pre-assumed, fixed meaning to feminism. As it is suggested by Grosz, feminist quality of texts should be understood as something that emerges from a specific context. I will explore several issues central to the writing of Čale Feldman, Govedić and Zlatar in order to see how feminist position is articulated in them in relation to the prevalent modes of knowledge production in Croatian literary studies, such as subject-matters, methodology, and political assumptions. To analyze my sources, I will apply discourse analysis as outlined by Fran Tonkiss (1998). Discourse analysis focuses on the production of meaning through texts, drawing from Foucauldian understanding of discourse. This method also draws attention to the relationship between the discourse and the context in which certain discourse is located.

In the first chapter, I will discuss the assumptions about feminism and relationship of feminist criticism and feminist politics in order to lay out the theoretical framework for approaching feminist literary criticism in Croatia. After that, I will provide an overview of the ways in which Croatian feminist literary criticism has so far been discussed. I find that the literature on it addresses the specific and complex relationship between literature, literary studies and politics that has influenced feminist literary criticism in Croatia. Although different feminist literary criticisms, there has been a little analytical attention to them. The aim of this thesis is to fill this gap.

The second chapter focuses on examination of Zlatar's discourse by looking at her two books thematizing literature, gender and the body: *Tekst, tijelo, trauma: ogledi o suvremenoj ženskoj književnosti* [*Text, body, trauma: Essays in contemporary women's literature*] (2004), and *Rječnik tijela: dodiri, otpor, žene* [*Dictionary of the body: Touches, resistance, women*] (2010). Zlatar is interested in issues such of subjectivity and textuality, while her discourse negotiates between academic and literary writing, often blurring the boundary between the two. I will look at the feminist position which is articulated through her choice of subject-matters and methodological framing of her analyzes.

In the third chapter, I will point to the difference between discourses of Čale Feldman and Govedić, both interested in literature and in performance. Govedić is a critic, editor and activist who in 2002 published *Izbor uloge, pomak granice: Književne, kazališne i filmske studije* [*Choice of a role, shift of a border: Studies in literature, theatre and film*] (2002). This book is a collection of essays organized around the notions of gender, performance, and agency. Čale Feldman is a scholar interested in performance as anthropological and theatrical phenomenon. In this thesis I will analyze her books *Euridikini osvrti: O rodnim izvedbama u teoriji, folkloru, književnosti i kazalištu* [*Euridice's Turns: On gender performances in theory, folklore, literature and theatre*] (2001) and *Femina ludens* (2005). Both of her books I refer to here are collections of essays and theoretical studies on gender and performance in literature, theater, folklore, media and popular culture. Govedić and Čale Feldman draw from a wide range of disciplines and argue for establishment of an interdisciplinary analytical framework. I will examine how they address the relationship between performance and their subject-matters and what kind of feminist position is articulated in their discourses.

This thesis does not tend to provide a comprehensive historical overview of development of feminist literary criticism in Croatia. That kind of a research still needs to be

done. However, I hope to contribute to the research in literary studies and feminism in Croatia by offering a detailed analysis of the discourses of feminist literary criticism and raising the issue of the politics of feminist literary criticism.

## Framing the analysis

*To question a term, a term like feminism, is to ask how it plays, what investments it bears, what aims it achieves, what alterations it undergoes. (Butler, 2004, p. 180)*

In this chapter I lay out a framework to approach feminist literary criticism in the 1990s' and the 2000s' Croatia, and to analyze the texts by Lada Čale Feldman, Nataša Govedić and Andrea Zlatar. I discuss the term feminism as I want to use it, relying on Grosz' concept of a feminist text. The ways in which feminist literary criticism in Croatia has been discussed so far will also be addressed, pointing to the particular context of its emergence in Croatian literary studies. The issues of feminist self-representation, politics of literary studies and feminist criticism are raised to address to the different approaches in the field of feminist literary criticism. I will refer to several ways in which feminist literary criticism in Croatia has taken part in the transformation of literary studies in Croatia. I conclude by pointing out that until this study there has been a little attention given to the differences in feminist critical production in Croatian literary studies. Nevertheless, I argue that the texts I review in this chapter discuss other important aspects of feminist literary criticism in Croatia.

### Feminism as “discursive positioning“

Within feminist literary criticism, there have been extensive debates about what constitutes feminist perspective in literary studies. Complexity of these debates and a variety of definitions of the term feminism and assumptions about feminist critical practice are summarized in Grosz' text “Sexual signatures: Feminism after the death of the author”

(1995). Grosz' discussion of the notion of a feminist text offers a useful framework for analysis of feminist texts not only when it comes to literature, but also when it comes to critical and theoretical texts, hence it proves to be useful in the research that I plan to undertake here. For my study, the most important is the emphasis on social context, and its importance for understanding of feminist potentials of any text.

Grosz examines definitions of feminism in feminist literary studies that were trying to link the meaning of a feminist text respectively with the sex of the author, the sex of the reader, the content and style of the text. Each one of these assumptions proves to be problematic if it is understood as a unique ground for interpretation. Although all the texts I analyze in this thesis are written by female critics, the identification of the author or the reader on the basis of gender does not guarantee the text's feminist status. Also it cannot be argued that these texts are feminist due to the author's intentions inscribed in them or due to my own intention to read them as feminist. It is equally problematic to assume that there are distinct objects of feminist literary criticism, or that a style of the text indicates that particular text is feminist.

The position that takes into concern the complexity of the processes of writing and reading but does not reduce them to only one element, i.e. the sex of the author, the sex of the reader, the content and style, is offered in Grosz's notion of a feminist text as a "discursive positioning". Grosz defines it as

a complex relation between the corporeality of the author, that is, the author's textual residues or traces, the text's materiality, and its effects in making the bodies of the author and readers, and the corporeality and productivity of readers (1995, p. 18).

The emphasis on the materiality of processes of reading and writing implies that the meaning of a text is never finished and fixed. Thus, what ensures a text's feminist status is, according to Grosz, a complex and contextual relationship between the author, the reader, the subject matter, and its style .

One of the implications drawn from Grosz' conceptualization of a text as feminist that I find useful in my approach to feminist scholarship in Croatian literary studies since the 1990s is that it directs attention to the complex conditions under which a text emerges as feminist. In Grosz' words, "no text can be classified once and for all as wholly feminist or wholly patriarchal: these appellations depend on its context, its place in the context, how it is used, by whom and to what effect" (1995, p. 23). Thus, drawing from Grosz' discussion of a feminist text, I approach feminist literary criticism in Croatia as web of specific, context-dependant and plural discourses.

My approach to feminist literary criticism in Croatian will follow Grosz' threefolded answer to the question of what enables us to describe a text as feminist. First, Grosz argues, a feminist text "must render the patriarchal and phallogentric presumptions governing its context and communication visible" (1995, p. 22). Second, feminist text must "problematize the standard masculinist ways in which the author occupies the position of enunciation" (Grosz, 1995, p. 23). The third thing which has to be taken into account when classifying a text as feminist is that a feminist text, as Grosz proposes, must help

to facilitate the production of new and perhaps unknown, unthought discursive spaces - new styles, modes of analysis and argument, new genres and forms - that contest the limits and constraints currently at work in the regulation of textual production and reception" (Grosz, 1995, p. 23).

In my analysis of the texts by Čale Feldman, Zlatar and Govedić, I ask the following questions: what is rendered as feminist in their texts? In what ways Čale Feldman, Zlatar and Govedić problematize the dominant modes of knowledge production in the field of literary studies and theater studies in Croatia?

In my view, part of the answer to these questions is in the particular socio-cultural context of Croatia in the 1990s and 2000s in which the texts I analyze are positioned. In the following section, I examine the literature that reflects on feminist literary and theater

criticism in Croatia because it raises a number of important issues about development and positioning of feminist discourses in the context of Croatian literary and theater studies.

## Socio-historical context

The existing literature about feminist literary criticism in the field of Croatian literary studies offers valuable insight into the complexity of feminist knowledge production in a particular context of Croatia during the last three decades. The focus is mostly put on the socio-cultural context that influenced articulation of feminist politics, such as connection with the feminist movement (e.g. Zlatar, 2010), the relationship between current literary production and feminist criticism (e.g. Lukić, 2003), or to intervention which feminist literary criticism seeks to perform in relation to mainstream literary studies in Croatia (e.g. Čale Feldman, 2001; Jakobović Fribec, 2006; Lukić, 2003).

Feminist literary criticism in Croatia appears in the early 1980s, influenced by publication and critical reception of literary texts written by women authors (see Lukić, 2003; Sablić Tomić, 2005). The 1980s are the period when Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, and Irena Vrkljan wrote literature that “affirmed gender awareness“ (Lukić, 2003, p. 78), and their work was later analyzed from a feminist perspective.<sup>2</sup> All three authors are associated with '*žensko pismo*' ('women's writing')<sup>3</sup>, along the theoretical discussion on *écriture féminine*, as conceptualized by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. In the analysis of the relationship

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<sup>2</sup> Ugrešić and Drakulić are recognized as important figures of Yugoslav feminism due to their literary texts and opened confrontation to the early 1990s mainstream politics and nationalism in Croatia. Drakulić worked as a journalist and wrote about feminism and gender-related issues in popular and political magazines, some of them published in book *Smrtni grijesi feminizma: Ogledi o mudologiji* [*Mortal sins of feminism: Essays in testiology*] (1984). Unlike Drakulić, Ugrešić did not belong to feminist movement or take part in the theoretical discussion on feminism. Direct feminist agenda appeared in Ugrešić's work after 1990, but it is recognized in her literary work in the 1980s (see Jambrešić Kirin, 2008; Lóránd, 2007; Lukić, 2006; Zlatar, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> 'Women's writing' is still one of the central notions in feminist literary criticism in Croatia. For discussion on the change in its usage and meanings over time see Lukić (2003) and Zlatar (2004).

between literary production that promoted gender and feminist issues in Croatia and Serbia and its reception, Jasmina Lukić (2003) notes that critical discussion on literature from a feminist point of view was rare in the 1980s. Lukić argues that in the 1990s' Croatia it was just the opposite: feminist criticism was much more visible than women's writing (Lukić, 2003, p. 77).

Encounter of feminism and literary studies in Croatia is to a large extent influenced by Yugoslav feminist movement (see Fribec, 2004; Jakobović Fribec, 2006; Zlatar, 2010)<sup>4</sup>. In the late 1970s and the early 1980s, there was emergence of several feminist groups in Zagreb and Belgrade, embracement of the second wave feminist theory, research on women in different disciplines and several international conferences on feminism. What characterizes feminism in the 1980s is the presence of feminist discourse not only in intellectual and academic milieu, but also in media, public debates and literature (Lóránd, 2007; Lukić, 2003; Zlatar, 2004). In the late 1970s began the publication of texts about women writers “who were perceived as exemplary figures of world's literature” like Marguerite Duras, Simone de Beauvoir, Sylvia Plath, Doris Lessing, Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker (Lóránd, 2007, p. 32). Sablić Tomić (2005) refers to the publication of special issue of literary magazine *Republika* in 1983 dedicated to ‘women’s writing’ as one of the crucial events which influenced feminist literary criticism in Croatia.<sup>5</sup>

Feminist literary criticism in the 1990s' Croatia also kept its close connection to women’s movement. In present, it is also related to civil society institutions interested in feminist knowledge production and art (see Lukić, 2003; Sablić Tomić, 2005). In 1994

<sup>4</sup> As Lóránd (2007) argues, Yugoslavia had a coherent women's movement and consequently feminism in Croatia cannot be separated from Yugoslav feminism. This means that not only until the break-up of Yugoslavia feminism was thought of in terms of Yugoslavia, but that connections between feminists from different parts of the former Yugoslavia were kept during the war period, and the turns that feminism took in the countries of the former Yugoslavia often coincide.

<sup>5</sup> This issue, edited by Slavica Jakobović Fribec, brings translations of feminist literary theory by Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Virginia Woolf, as well as the texts written by several Croatian critics, and influences feminist critical production in Croatia until present (see Sablić Tomić, 2005; Zlatar, 2004).



*Ženska infoteka* [Women's Infoteka] began to publish magazine *Kruh i ruže* [Bread and Roses]. *Centar za ženske studije* [The Center for Women's Studies]<sup>6</sup>, founded in Zagreb in 1995, the only institution in Croatia providing education in women studies<sup>7</sup>, offers courses in feminism and literary studies, publishes books in feminist theory and women's literature, and from 1998 magazine *Treća* [The Third].

The 1990s in Croatia are marked by extensive feminist critical production not only in literary studies but in other disciplines as well (see Lóránd, 2007). One of the changes in Croatian literary studies in the 1990s in relation to the previous period is the absence of clear delimitation between different academic disciplines and growing interdisciplinary approach to topics such as autobiography, testimony, subjectivity and textuality, war and exile. This was a consequence of not only the changes in literary studies globally, but also of the influence of war and post-war period in Croatia.<sup>8</sup>

The growth of feminist literary criticism in Croatia since the 1990s raised another question: what constitutes a feminist perspective in literary scholarship in Croatia? In the text that follows, I examine how has the issue of feminist politics in Croatian literary studies been discussed and how has feminist literary criticism in the 1990s' Croatia positioned itself as political.

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<sup>6</sup> Kašić writes that *The Center for Women's Studies*, that positioned itself as "connecting theory, art and activism", coded feminism as mainstream in relation to diverse feminist activism and lack of feminism in academic and public discourse (Kašić, 2006, pp. 220-221). Its majors interests are education in women's studies and their implementation into academic curricula, research on gender-related issues and promotion of women's and feminist artistic production.

<sup>7</sup> In the 2000s in Croatia there was integration of gender and women's studies issues in academic curricula, despite the fact that in Croatia they have not been institutionalized but exist outside academia (Potkornjak, Arsenijević, Demiragić, & Petrović, 2008). Promotion of feminist perspective in knowledge production is also carried by individuals who cannot be simply related either to academia or civil society institutions.

<sup>8</sup> The early 1990s in Croatia are a period of double transformation: transition from socialism to multi-party system (but actually one-party rule until year 2000) and market capitalism, and from multi-ethnic federal state to nation state, with the outbreak of war (1991-1995).

## **Feminism as counter-discourse**

As I have already argued, there is no one model of feminist literary criticism in Croatia and I use that term to comprise different feminist perspectives in Croatian literary, theater and cultural studies. They enter in diverse dialogues both with other critical approaches and with feminism at large. Although the development of literary criticism in Croatia has been influenced by feminist movement, that does not imply that there is a simple and unproblematic relationship between them. Before discussing the politics of feminist literary criticism in Croatia, I will address assumptions about the relationship of feminist literary criticism and feminist politics.

Despite the emphasis on different modes of feminist textual production, I find that Grosz' notion of a feminist text offers a possibility to see feminism if not as homogeneous, then as still a coherent discourse. What I propose to see as coherence in feminist literary criticism is concisely summarized in Toril Moi's (1989, p. 117) definition of feminist criticism as "a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to struggle against patriarchy and sexism, not only a concern for gender in literature". In Moi's definition of feminist literary criticism there is an assumption about close relationship between feminist textual production and feminist struggles, just as is the case with Grosz' notion of a feminist text as a context-related discourse that challenges patriarchal assumptions.

In the variety of critical approaches which can be embraced under the common term of feminist literary criticism, politics functions as the element which gives it consistence. However, this does not imply uniformity of feminist positions articulated in different texts, or that all of them are in similar ways related to the politics of feminism at large. Assumption about the close connection of feminist theory and practice, namely women's movement, as

well as the assumption about theoretical work as inherently political are raised by Ellen Rooney (2006). Although Rooney reacts to the development of feminist literary criticism, i.e. its institutionalization in the US academia since the 1980s, I find that she offers valuable insight into the relation between feminism and politics.

What Rooney warns about is that feminism often forgets that it is itself an ideology, and thus leaves its politics unexamined. She argues that feminism involves representational strategies and counter-narrative positioning, rooted in the understanding of the politics of feminism as a critique of “the dominant order” and “patriarchal oppression” (Rooney, 2006, p. 73). However, the politics of feminism in the field of feminist literary criticism should not be taken for granted, but feminist criticism should be understood as contextual and embedded in the power relations governing feminist knowledge production in a particular moment.

Here I want to point to Zsófia Lóránd’s (2007) research on feminism in socialist and post-socialist Yugoslavia because it in a careful way examines feminist self-positioning in of the 1980s’ Yugoslavia and the 1990s’ Croatia. Lóránd finds that counter-discursive positioning in those different socio-historical contexts brings consistence to Yugoslav feminism. She argues that Yugoslav feminists aimed at the creation of a counter-discursive position, but they have also looked for a “common platform of discussion and debate with a communist one” (Lóránd, 2007, p. 43). Feminism kept this kind of positioning after the break-up of Yugoslavia and foundation of Croatian nationstate, followed by the outbreak of war (1991-1995). Consistence in counter-discursive positioning of feminism is also evident in opened confrontation with the 1990s nationalism.<sup>9</sup>

In my view, Lóránd carefully deals with assumptions about feminist politics. She analyzes public engagement, writing and personal narratives by three authors she considers

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<sup>9</sup> In 1992, five Croatian intellectuals, Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, Rada Iveković, Vesna Kesić and Jelena Lovrić - not all of them taking part in feminist movement or associating themselves with feminism - were proclaimed to be “witches” and “raping Croatia”, and not being enough patriotic. This was caused by their criticism of ethno-nationalistic discourse on mass rapes in war and repression on the freedom of expression. For more detail see Lukić (2003) and Lóránd (2007).

important in Yugoslav feminism, i.e. writers Drakulić and Ugrešić, and philosopher Rada Iveković. Lóránd finds that they represent different approaches to feminism, which leads her to conclude that “neither women’s experience nor feminism as such can be universalized” (2007, p. 31).

The discussion about the relationship between feminist movement and criticism, literary studies and politics is important for my analysis of feminist literary criticism in Croatia because it brings greater awareness about the power relations in which we are all embedded. To raise questions about the politics of feminist literary criticism does not mean to devaluate political claims made from a feminist perspective but to challenge its universalization. Thus, I do not approach the texts I will analyze in this thesis as inherently political. Instead of that, I consider political implications that these texts raise as something specific and context-dependant.

### **Towards the politics of feminist literary criticism in Croatia**

Feminist literary criticism in Croatia has articulated its position by challenging gender-blind and patriarchal assumptions of the mainstream literary studies in Croatia. Other than that, it also addresses the specific intersection of gender and national identity in the 1990s’ Croatia that has influenced literary and critical production.

Croatian feminist literary critics have raised the issue of marginalization of women writers and formation of literary canon, disclosing the belief in autonomy of literary studies. Čale Feldman (2001) and Slavica Jakobović Fribec (2006) point out that in Croatian literary studies there are different critical approaches to women authors and not all of them entail a feminist perspective. Čale Feldman is critical towards attempts to incorporate women writers to national literary canon without challenging political implications of literary classification

and canon formation.<sup>10</sup> Marginalization of women authors remains an issue, Jakobović Fribec argues, until there is no clear feminist critical perspective in literary studies.<sup>11</sup> But Sablić Tomić (2005) writes about the importance of any work on women authors because it affirms their writing and opens up the space for new interpretations. Similar argument is made by Rooney about the emergence of literary criticism in the 1970's U.S. academia. In that particular context, Rooney says, feminist literary criticism challenged the view that the mainstream knowledge production is politically neutral: "The idea that knowledge could be purely objective, isolated from consciously advocated and unconsciously lived values, was in this respect precisely an 'ideology', one with consequences within the university and beyond." (Rooney, 2006, p. 80)

The 1990s' Croatia is characterized by re-patriarchalization and marginalization of interest in gender in both literary and critical production. Prevailing understanding of literature, along nationalistic politics, refers to importance of literature in the construction of national identity (see Čale Feldman, 2001; Jambrešić Kirin, 2008; Lukić, 2003). As Vladimir Biti (1995) points out, the early 1990s are for Croatian literary studies a period of redefinition of its identity in the context of changed socio-historical circumstances. Writing about how troubling reception of semiotics into Croatian academia was, Biti argues that "literature continued to be the most salient guardian of national tradition and national identity" (1995, p. 113).

In the analysis and evaluation of the position of feminist criticism in literary and theater studies in Croatia in the 1990s, Čale Feldman (2001) argues that feminist criticism has been marginalized because of the commitment of literary studies to take part in the

<sup>10</sup> The other reason of Čale Feldman's dissatisfaction with the ways in which feminist criticism has been practiced in the 1990s' Croatia is general absence of contemporary theory from Croatian literary and theater studies. She argues that "the propulsive transnational feminist literary theoretical scene" is "explicitly pushed aside as the foreign body, unsuitable for 'local' conditions" (Čale Feldman, 2001, p. 40).

<sup>11</sup> The example of such work is Dunja Detoni Dujmić's historiographical study on the 19th and the early 20th century Croatian women writers *Ljepša polovica književnosti* [*The prettier half of literature*] (1998).

establishment of a strong national identity. She argues that Croatian literary studies are laden with the mainstream national politics and falsely deny the connection between literature and politics. The author emphasizes the potential of feminist literary criticism to bring in necessary “critical intervention“ and “feminist revision“ (2001, pp. 45-46).

In my view, the strong emphasis on the patriarchal and nationalistic assumptions of literary studies still characterizes feminist critical production in literary studies in Croatia. Critical reception of Drakulić's and Ugrešić's work from a feminist perspective that happened during the 1990s and in the early 2000s puts focus on the literary aspects of their work, but also on their feminist and anti-nationalistic engagement (e.g. Jambrešić Kirin, 2008; Lukić, 2006; Zlatar, 2004). The discussion about marginalization and absence of wider reception of Ugrešić and Drakulić's work in Croatia, that were otherwise recognized internationally, also includes strong criticism of the implicit politics of Croatian literary studies. For example, in the analysis on exile in the work of Dubravka Ugrešić, Jambrešić Kirin (2008) argues that in the 1990s mainstream literary studies in Croatia had been wanting to create a unified national literary canon. At the same time, there was a hesitation to include some internationally affirmed authors into the canon and to see their “critical political engagement and aesthetic, artistic integrity as parts of a single literary project, and not as detached and separable component“ (Jambrešić Kirin, 2008, p. 147). The author concludes that such treatment of writers that problematise “otherness, difference, non-belonging, marginality of any kind“ contributes to the claim that “co-production of national identity and national pride are still constitutive duties of literature“ (Jambrešić Kirin, 2008, pp. 147-148).

The studies that I have addressed in this chapter focus on different aspects of feminist literary criticism in Croatia but they rarely address and analyze the variety of ways in which feminist literary criticism exists in Croatian literary studies. This refers to the differences

between feminist discourses regarding their subject-matters, theoretical framing and articulation of feminist position. Concerning that, in the following chapters I will analyze texts by Andrea Zlatař, Lada Čale Feldman and Nataša Govedić.

## The politics of literature in Andrea Zlata's critical discourse

In this chapter, I will analyze the characteristics of Zlata's discourse pointing to the texts' feminist status on thematic and methodological level. I will first examine how the notion of women's literature in *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* (2004) relates to what is understood as a point of feminist critical intervention. Secondly, I will analyze the discursive construction of the self and experience in Zlata's writing as a part of critical argument. Thirdly, I will examine the author's imaginative writing about the body and literature in *Rječnik tijela* (2010).

### (De)construction of women's literature

*Feminist critics do not just rediscover or reclaim the female author; in a certain sense, they create her.*

(Felski, 2003, p. 64)

The focus of *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* is literature written by women, especially contemporary Croatian authors. Zlata uses the notion of women's literature to organize her book on conceptual level.<sup>12</sup> Women's literature is invoked as a material entity, a literature written by female authors. For feminist literary critics theoretical conceptions of authorship have been an issue with significant political implications. They could not rest easy with the poststructuralist questioning of the author as originator of the meaning in the text. Feminist literary criticism raises the issue of authorship in another way, pointing to the socio-historical

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<sup>12</sup> In this chapter, I use the notion women's literature in the sense that Zlata uses it.



position of the female author and feminist politics. Rita Felski suggests that the crucial issue for conceptualization of authorship in feminist literary criticism is visibility. She argues that

a striking image is a way of pulling together individual works into a coherent grouping of highlighting distinctive traits that connect texts. (...) In other words, allegories of authorship are best read as speculative fictions or myths; they do not tell anything reliable about the motives, desires, or situations of actual female authors. (Felski, 2003, p. 88)

In my view, women's literature in *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* is used as it is described by Felski. Zlatar directs attention towards authors, as well as towards thematic and formal characteristics of literature which have not been widely accepted in Croatian literary studies at the time *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* was published. Central part of the book is dedicated to the work of four contemporary women writers in Croatian literature: Irena Vrkljan, Dubravka Ugrešić, Slavenka Drakulić and Daša Drndić. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, Drakulić and Ugrešić have been marginalized by mainstream criticism and the public due to the intersection of patriarchal and nationalistic assumptions which characterized Croatian literature in the 1990s. From the beginning, Zlatar says, Vrkljan, and especially Ugrešić and Drakulić, have been perceived as “a foreign body, as something that at its roots does not and cannot belong to the dominant, male, self-satisfied discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Croatian literature” (ibid., p. 82). Vrkljan is one of the main representatives of the poetic model of *écriture féminine* in Croatian literature, while Drndić in her novels raises many controversial issues about the legacy of history such as fascism. Thus, I find that *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* emerges as an important feminist work in the context of Croatian literary studies.

Feminist criticism working with notions of women authorship and women's literature appears to be problematic in the context of the debate over category “women“. Judith Butler (1990) criticizes feminist politics organised around identity categories because it fails to recognise the differences in which women are historically constructed. She argues that

feminist identity politics normalizes new accounts of supposedly shared femininity, which does not bring the power relations that construct it into question. However, contemporary feminist literary criticism is, as Rooney (2006) argues, not ready to detach from the identity categories like “women“. She writes:

Without the grounding provided by the category woman, it is not possible to pursue any political program whatsoever, within the academy or elsewhere. The alternative – “to tear down the ‘identity’ woman” or “to seek some other identity altogether” – is not an alternative politics. It is a retreat from the political as such. (Rooney, 2006, pp. 85-86)

As it is discussed in the second chapter, feminist literary criticism can, Rooney proposes, be political if it questions its own political assumptions and representational strategies. She suggests that the solution can be found in a materialist approach, which insists on “women” as “material”, e.g. “non-discursive” entity. If all representational practices are historically determined, and representation is a production of the meaning, than critical texts that construct and deconstruct “women” can also be seen as political forces. In that sense, a critical text is related to what is understood as feminist political commitment (see Rooney, 2006, p. 89). In *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, the tension between construction and deconstruction of women’s literature is solved by referring to a particular context that requires a feminist intervention.

I propose to see Zlatar’s simultaneous construction and deconstruction of women’s literature as a feminist representational strategy. The author discusses the idea of continuity in Croatian women’s literature and suggests it is impossible to regard it in terms of tradition. She argues that there are no subject-matters or style characteristics that would bring different female writers together. There is an “obvious ‘absence’ of common literary key of identification” (ibid., p. 79), but female writers are related by their social positioning. Zlatar

moves away from the idea of establishing a distinctive female writers' tradition, as well as from direct linkage between literature and gender.

In *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, the author makes an intervention in the canon of national literature not only by straightforward articulation of feminist politics but also by offering valuable interpretations of authors that have not been in the focus of mainstream Croatian literary criticism by the time the book was published. Zlatar identifies and analyzes four different poetic models of contemporary Croatian women's literature. These are: "intimistic prose" by Irena Vrkljan, "femininity" in the novels of Drakulić, autobiographical and ironic in Ugrešić's work, and the mixture of documentaristic and fictional in Drndić's novels (Zlatar, 2004, p. 83).

In my view, Zlatar's discourse functions as feminist because it succeeds to assert new subject-matters in Croatian literary scholarship. This refers not only to the authors who are in the center of her critical interest, but also to a wider range of topics related to the theme of gender and literature. The analysis of women's literature in *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* is prepared by theoretical framework that suggests poststructuralist, constructivist understanding of identity and emphasizes the complexity of relationship between the text and the subject. Zlatar examines sociological, anthropological, philosophical and literary scholarship on subjectivity and textuality, i.e. Ervin Goffmann, Anthony Giddens, Jean-Luc Nancy, Stuart Hall, Paul Jay, Manfred Frank, Niklas Luhmann, Roland Barthes. She is interested in theoretical discussion and analysis of textual construction of various identities and experiences in the text. Some of the issues in her focus are gender, sexuality, exile, trauma, autobiography, testimony.

Although feminist literary theory is introduced in the discussion about theoretical conceptualization of women's writing and social position of women authors throughout

history (e.g. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Cixous' notion of *écriture féminine*), Zlatar does not rely on feminist theory in her interpretations. Nevertheless, I find that *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* articulates feminist position by introducing new themes in the focus of Croatian literary studies. In the text that follows, I propose to see her discourse as feminist on the level of methodology as well.

### **The uses of personal in feminist criticism**

One of methodological practices associated with early feminist literary criticism which can be detected in the work of Andrea Zlatar is articulation of feminist position through the use of the first person singular pronoun and with reference to personal experience. Zlatar's *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* and *Rječnik tijela* include different uses of personal. Some of them do meet the requirements of autobiographical discourse, but not all uses of personal in her writing involve autobiographical self.<sup>13</sup> Articulation of personal in Zlatar's discourse also raises association with the feminist slogan "personal is political". I analyze Zlatar's use of personal in order to see how it relates to feminist politics below.

The first person pronoun has often been used by feminist critics. In her analysis of the 1980s US feminist writing, Nancy Miller calls the usage of personal in feminist writing personal criticism. Miller defines it as "an explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism" that includes "self-narrative woven into critical argument" (Miller, 1991, pp. 1-2). She emphasizes that feminist usage of personal in the 1980s' academic writing has been related to the issue of "the constitution of authority and the production of theory" in critical

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<sup>13</sup> Lejeune defines autobiography as "retrospective narration written by real person concerning his [sic!] own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (1989, p. 4)). To be classified as autobiography, the text must render self-evident the identification of the author, narrator and protagonist specified in the notion of the "autobiographical pact" (Lejeune, 1989, p. 5).

text (Miller, 1991, p. 2). Miller argues that personal was understood as an opposition to dominant critical positioning and “abstract”, “de-personalized” theories that render body, especially female body, “invisible” and “silent”. In relation to that, personal criticism assumes the self and experience as a grounding of the argument.

Understanding of the self and experience as a foundation of the discourse has been challenged by poststructuralist and feminist emphasis of construction of subjectivity and self-representation.<sup>14</sup> Feminist authors working from a poststructuralist framework such as Elspeth Probyn (1993), Lynne Pearce (2004) and Linda Anderson (2006) emphasize that autobiographical and personal in a feminist text should not be seen as true referents but as discursive categories that get constructed through representation. They suggest that it is possible to use personal and make political claims if the usage of autobiographical self in the text is seen as a speaking position. The self is in that sense understood as something that stretches beyond individual and reaches other women’s experiences. As Pearce (2004) writes the relationship between the self and other is always dialogic and inscribed with power relations, both with the reader and with the object of text, so personal can be strategically employed to gain a new perspective on the object of analysis.

Already in prefaces to both of her books, Zlatar lays out methodological approach which relies on the articulation of personal. In the preface to *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*, the author emphasizes that the choice to write about women's literature is based on her personal reading preferences. Zlatar says: “In last three years I have mostly been reading: continuously, thoroughly, and particularly affiliated. Women's books, books written by women, books about women. Almost exclusively.” (2004, p. 5) Zlatar discourse relies a lot on the employment of

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<sup>14</sup> Joan W. Scott raises the methodological issues related to historiographical writing from the point of view of experience. She says: “It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience” (Scott, 1991, p. 779). This implies impossibility of objective knowledge and calls for a “historicizing” (ibid.: 790) of experience in the sense of Foucauldian genealogy of the discourse, since all categories of analysis are “contextual”, “contested” and “contingent” (Scott, 1991, p. 796).

autobiographical self. In *Rječnik tijela*, creating a discourse that is neither academic, publicistic or literary, Zlatar refers to her critical work as “autobiographical literary criticism” (2010, p. 12).

In *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* and *Rječnik tijela* I find different uses of the first person pronoun.<sup>15</sup> Zlatar’s critical discourse can be classified as personal criticism, i.e. the use of the self as foundational category and primary point of reference for critical argument. This usage of personal often intertwines with the ‘strategic’ use of self but often it is questionable to make such distinction. In *Rječnik tijela* personal is more present in the discourse than in *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*. The discourse is characterized by intertwining of literary criticism, and autobiographical writing. *Rječnik tijela* includes different modes of confessional autobiographical writing: memoir, diary, travel writing and even poetry. The sections that refer to autobiographical, confessional self are italicized or separated chapters and subchapters. They are thematically and methodologically connected to analytical parts of both Zlatar’s books. In this way certain subject-matters that are in the author’s analytical focus, e.g. textual construction of subjectivity and experiences, are more easily introduced.

In my view, Zlatar's discourse is put in contrast with “neutral” voice that prevails in Croatian literary studies. By opening the critical discourse to personal, she aims to problematize theoretical and methodological assumptions ruling critical productions in Croatian literary studies. In the next section I will analyze in more detail the discursive construction of the self and experience in Zlatar’s writing as a feminist self-representational strategy which articulates personal as a site to reflect on social and political context.

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<sup>15</sup> For overview and a detail analysis of different uses of personal pronoun in contemporary feminist writing see Pearce (2004). Pearce also warns that the usage of personal pronoun might not always have the epistemological value. Today self-writing has also been “associated with a cultural tradition of bourgeois self-indulgence and exclusion on the one hand, and of commercial/ideological appropriation and exploitation on the other hand” (Pearce, 2004, p. 107).

## Feminism and the '*reading fantasy*'

In order to discuss the construction of the self and experience in Zlatar's writing on women's literature, I will look more closely at the chapter "Arheologija svakodnevnice" ["The Archeology of Everyday Life"] from *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* (2004). My approach to the self in Zlatar's critical writing is informed by Pearce's (2004, p. 84) distinction between "essentially self-directed" autobiographical and "strategic" use of the self. The thematization of the relationship between gender and literature in this chapter differs quite a lot from the discourse of literary interpretation and theoretical discussion which dominates the rest of that book. I find that combination of critical commentary with the articulation of personal experience can be regarded as methodological choice related to the author's feminist agenda.

The text is organized around the theme of popular fiction, reading and gender, with references to a particular historic time, the early 2000s in Croatia. I find that the usage of personal as an argument dominates in parts where there is evocation of feminist discourse and attempt to re-inscribe conventional understanding of gender and literature in positive terms. Zlatar signals that her approach to the debate on women writers and chick lit, which she considers to be a devaluated form of contemporary popular literature that is gendered as feminine, is not going to be approached from a point of view of a critic but from a point of view of a reader. She emphasizes that her choice is to read popular literature she can identify with:

I will say it simply and clear – over the last few years, I have preferred to read cheerfully, amusing and urban books written by women, and dealing with everyday life. Death to historical novels and masked heroines' voices! I want a heroine that is forty, lives in some European metropolitan city, and has problems both at home and at work. How else could I identify with her? (Zlatar, 2004, p. 186)

Zlatar's relying on autobiographical self and experience could be problematic in several ways. This refers to assumptions about reading as identification, as well as to generalizations about women's experience as something shared and reflected in literature. Though poststructuralists have criticized such assumptions, identification may not be completely denied from a perspective of theories of reading. As Pearce says, "it seems to be equally problematic to deny that this is – on occasion – part of the *reading fantasy*" (1997, p. 18).

In my view, the narrative of female experience is articulated to rewrite the stereotypical image of the female reader and devalue popular fiction written by female authors in positive terms. Female reader has since modernism been associated with mass culture, commodification and passivity (see Felski, 2003; Huysmann, 1986). Evocation of personal and self-representation of narrator as a reader makes it possible to address what are considered to be positive values of popular women's literature. Zlatar draws from Janice Radway's study *Reading the romance* (1984) and argues that chick lit is potentially subversive. She writes:

Contemporary *chicklit* – let us finally call it by its real name - contemporary urban women's fiction, actually insists on the subversive function and subversive agency of female point of view in experiences and depiction of events. In case of this fiction, women's *right to public* comes about as a *right to quality literature*, and its playfulness does not make it less valuable. This kind of women's urban fiction is neither educative nor instructional but does facilitate the processes of the female readers' self-realization and self-affirmation. (Zlatar, 2004, p. 191; emphasis in original)

The discourse on reading similar to the position that Zlatar articulates in "Arheologija svakodnevice" has been important in early feminist literary theory. Reading has often been understood as subversive practice. For example, Judith Fetterly argues that feminist reader is a "resisting reader" who by reading "against the grain" controls what patriarchal texts do to



her (see Felski, 2003; Pearce, 1997). Feminist literature on reading for pleasure and representation of feminist critic as a reader, in Felski's words,

interweaves the scholarly and the personal, the critical and the confessional, using each to illuminate the other. The role of emotion and pleasure in aesthetic experience is a question for thoughtful investigation, not simply an excuse to emote an alibi for anti-intellectual sentiments" (2010, p. 56).

Zlata uses personal and constructs the reader in the sense in which Felski describes the early feminist critical interest in reading and gender. In "Arheologija svakodnevice", constant shifting between position of the reader and position of the critic is used to illuminate that reading and literature are gendered, and to point to a sexist subtext of the debate on popular literature written by female authors and read by female readers.

I find it important to note that *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* was published in 2004, and it can be seen as a part of the debate on women and literature that took part in the early 2000s in Croatia.<sup>16</sup> There is no reference to the specific events from the debate but Zlata refers to books she considers to be unjustly discredited, some of them written by Croatian writers like Arijana Čulina, Vedrana Rudan and Rujana Jeger, who are associated with chick lit. In argue that Zlata uses the self and personal to put a new perspective to the object of text and render the context in which the debate on chick lit took part as sexist.

In my view, Zlata's methodological choice to base her arguments in "Arheologija svakodnevice" on the use of the self suggests feminist politics. The author aims to make a feminist intervention into the field of literary studies by re-inscribing devaluated forms of literature written by women authors in positive terms. In the following section, I will look at *Rječnik tijela*, a text that largely relies on the autobiographical self. My attention will be

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<sup>16</sup> The debate raised the issues of gender, high and popular literature, literary value. For more details see Oraić Tolić (2006) and Visković (2006).

focused on Zlatar's methodology and politics implied in the thematization of the body and literature.

### ***Dictionary of the body***

*Rječnik tijela: Dodiri, otpor, žene* [*Dictionary of the body: Touches, resistances, women*] (2010), organized around the issues of body, gender and literature, consists of texts belonging to different genres of autobiographical writing and literary criticism, blurring the boundary between literary and critical discourse. The theme of the body has also been central to *Tekst, tijelo, trauma*. Zlatar is one of a few literary critics in Croatia interested in those literary themes. In *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* the author analyzes several themes in contemporary literature belonging to the connotative field of the body, e.g. sexuality, illness, rape, touch, from a framework involving poststructuralist and feminist literary theory. These issues stay in the focus of *Rječnik tijela* but the body is brought in relation to literature in quite a different way. While in *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* the focus was on the body as a literary topic, in *Rječnik tijela* the literature is a productive source of images around which Zlatar with a lot of confidence builds her own conceptual framework to theorize the body.

In *Rječnik tijela*, Zlatar addresses the issue of representation of the body in contemporary literature and culture. In the preface, she writes that one of the possible subtitles she had for the book was “Funkcionalne pretvorbe tijela u književnosti” [“Functional transformations of the body in contemporary literature“]. She argues against the body/mind split that can be overbridged by usage of the term “functional“. On the other hand, in contemporary culture “[t]he bodies are defined through their function even when they are not placed as means or objects.“ (Zlatar, 2010, p. 10). Zlatar argues that example of such

negative use of the body can be found in sport, where the body is “transformed to a machine, and its individual abilities are brought to the maximum of possible development“. Further on, she addresses medicalization<sup>17</sup> and aesthetization of the body, which is evident in the ways in which fashion and beauty industry standardize bodies, especially female ones.

I find it interesting how Zlatar does not rely on the rich tradition of the philosophy of embodiment (see Grosz, 1994) but builds her own conceptual framework to address the issues of corporeality and literature. Zlatar's approach to the body is build upon both contemporary fiction and anthropological, sociological, philosophical and feminist literature (e.g. Mary Douglas, Julia Kristeva). The works that are most often referred to are Mikhail Epstein's *Filozofija tela* [*Philosophy of the body*] (2009), collection *Dictionnaire du corps* (2007), edited by Michele Marzano, and collection *Histoire de corps*, edited by Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigaarello. *Rječnik tijela* is also in a dialogue with the tradition of criticism of the mind/body divide in the Western philosophy and theories of embodiment (e.g. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Elizabeth Grosz). However, the vocabulary and analytical categories are to a large extent rendered from contemporary fiction.

In *Rječnik tijela* the body is not invoked only through oppression. It is also represented in terms of agency and materiality. The source of such body images is found in literature:

In fact, reading of the contemporary literature, i.e. the texts for themselves, was directly and indirectly speaking against *functionalization* of the body, against its objectivation in stereotypical representations, against uses and abuses of the body. (Zlatar, 2010, p. 11)

This quote illustrates not only political implications but also the methodology of *Rječnik tijela*. The book is organized around concepts which are metaphorically or metonymically related to the body. Central concept that stands for the body is touch:

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<sup>17</sup> “We have to be healthy in order to fulfill our social functions better, and that way we will contribute to the society financially. In cases of illness and ageing, we are burden to society, and that costs it.” (Zlatar, 2010, p. 10)

Touch was left somewhere behind, existing as a trace on the skin. (...) Touch and trace, indelible and invisible. As a trace of a tear on one's face. You know exactly where it goes, how does it flow down, you follow its way, then wipe it with your finger. As time goes by traces fade away, the mark inscribed on the skin by someone's touch disappears in an instant. It lasts at least from the inside, because the body remembers. The body is our greatest memory storage, reliable for the sole reason that we cannot consciously control it. (Zlata, 2010, p. 17)

As I have already argued, Zlata's discourse often transcends the border between literary and academic, critical and imaginative writing. The sensation of touch opens up a field of connotations that are rewriting the body against the common associations with bodily parts and along the body/mind divide.

The association of the body with touch opens up themes like communication, embodiment, self and other. Following Epstein, Zlata writes about haptics, the theory of touch, because "in its basics, it [touch] assumes interaction of an individual with its surroundings, human agency that is mediated by skin as organ of that sensation" (2010, p. 19). The author argues that individuals get sense of the self and experience the social owing to the sensation of touch. Touch is at the same time the border and the connection, a complex but culturally marginalized sensation that negates the oppositions between the self and other, rational and emotional, mind and the body (see Zlata, 2010, pp. 17-30). The author's interpretations of contemporary literature, mostly organized around the idea of transgression of binaries, emphasize the complexity of the relations between the self and others, and understanding of the body as psychic and material.

In Zlata's writing, the concepts which are metaphorically related to the body are often associated with resistance. In the analysis of the body as metaphor in contemporary feminist cultural criticism, Pearce argues that such conceptualization of the body is often found in the writing of contemporary feminist critics:

This metaphoric conceit of the skin as a 'border', that is about contact and connection as well as a 'limit' or 'boundary', is seen to be of a particular interest to feminists

wishing to reclaim the body from the more negative and reductive connotations that adhere to it in masculinist thought. (2004, p. 140)

The semantic field of the body that Zlatar refers to in *Rječnik tijela* also invokes disruption and defamiliarization of its conventional representations. The bodies in *Rječnik tijela* are ageing and old bodies, ill bodies, ugly bodies, uncontrollable bodies. They are mostly, but not exclusively female bodies. They are cultural representations and material bodies. They are acted upon and agents.

To conclude, I suggest that feminist politics in Zlatar's critical discourse is present on both the thematic level and in methodology. Thematization of literature, gender and the body is related to what is perceived as object of feminist critical intervention. This refers not only to questioning of power relations related to literature but also to the assumptions ruling mainstream critical production in Croatian literary studies.

## **The politics of performance: critical discourses of Lada Čale Feldman and Nataša Govedić**

One of the central concepts of Čale Feldman and Govedić's critical discourses is *izvedba* (performance). The notion of performance appears as an object of their analyzes of literature, folklore, popular culture, film, theater, performance art. Both authors approach their subject-matters from an interdisciplinary perspective that blurs the boundary not only between traditional disciplinary fields but also between theater and everyday practices. However, I find that Čale Feldman and Govedić's critical discourses are quite different regarding the methodological framework and feminist political position articulated in them.

To address these issues, in this chapter, I will first situate them in the theoretical framework of performances studies. After that, I will analyze Čale Feldman and Govedić's texts by pointing out to the relationship between their methodological frameworks and several characteristic subject-matters, from which their feminist politics emerges. They will also be situated in the context of Croatian literary and theater studies.

### **Theater's "flexible essentialism"**

Performance as a characteristic of various cultural practices has been in the center of performances studies, an interdisciplinary area of scholarship that has developed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as intersection of disciplines such as theater studies, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, comparative literature. But as concept common to those various disciplines, performance does not have the same meaning for them. It is often

used in relation to the terms performativity and theatricality. The term performativity in contemporary theoretical discourse refers to the process by which subjectivity is produced and regulated as a set of cultural practices which constitute individuals in different ways. Such understanding of performativity, derived from J. L. Austin's speech-act theory, is represented by the work of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler. Theatricality, according to Josette Féral (2002), refers to the specificity of theatrical, stage-related performance that rests on the recognition of the difference between the space of the theater and the space out of it.

The elision of the concepts performance, performativity and theatricality can be found in Čale Feldman and Govedić's texts. According to Shannon Jackson (2003), that is characteristic of feminist theater studies. For feminist theorists of theater and performance, the implications of poststructuralist understanding of subject are too ambivalent regarding feminist politics. Jackson argues that feminist theater scholars often combine performativity with an emphasis on the materiality of theatrical performance in a way that does not bring feminist political assumptions into question.

That is made possible by theatricality's "flexible essentialism", which refers to the associations of theatricality with "both the concrete and the mimetic mode" (Jackson, 2003, p. 198). Jackson (2003, p. 199) writes: "In a feminist struggle that wanted to maintain a political project and de-essentialize it, theatricality's flexible essentialism allowed feminism to have it both ways." In find that the emphasis on both material and representational, "fictional" character of performance that is present in Čale Feldman and Govedić's writing allows them to addresses their subject-matters in ways that are productive for feminist intervention their critical discourses articulate. I discuss that in more detail below, pointing to their several characteristic themes.

## On the stage of theory

Čale Feldman's "flexible essentialism" emerges from the theoretical grounding of her discourse in anthropology of performance, feminist performance studies and theory of performativity as represented by Butler. The author relies on the work of anthropologists of performance Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, and on feminist theorists of performance, such as Peggy Phelan and Elin Diamond. In both *Euridikini osvrti* (2001) and *Femina ludens* (2005), Čale Feldman discusses various theoretical positions in order to elaborate on the analytical framework that would, in her view, enable more profound approach to gender and performance.

Čale Feldman enters a dialogue with different theories of gender, text and performance. The way in which she does that challenges the prevailing assumption in the knowledge production both in a more traditional theater studies and in contemporary feminist scholarship. In the text "Nevolje s izvedbom" ["Performance trouble"] (2001), Čale Feldman enters the debate about performativity and theatricality in contemporary theories of gender. Here I turn to Jackson's summary of the ways in which the notion of theatricality has been used by feminist theorists and in contemporary theory interested in performance:

Depending upon context, convenience, and polemics, theatricality can as easily find itself on the essentialist as anti-essentialist side of a conceptual binary. Theatricality is used as a metaphor for representation and, in other contexts, as an anti-representation ground for the authentic. While a history of Western thought associates theatricality with the figural, allegorical, and surrogated nature of representation, a host of critical theorists in the late-twentieth century used theatrical examples to characterize the literal, the stable, or the naively metaphysical "real" (Jackson, 2003, p. 189)

Example of the association of theatricality with "real" can be found, if we turn again to Čale Feldman's criticism of Butler, in Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler argues that gender is created through various performative acts that render it as "natural" and



“prediscursive”. In *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990), she writes:

If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. (Butler, 1990, p. 136)

Butler’s understanding of gender as performative has been widely accepted by feminists as a possibility of anti-essentialist politics. Performativity makes identity unstable, fluid, open to resignification and emphasizes its potential to destabilize and subvert categories of identity.

Čale Feldman criticizes Butler on the basis of the neglect of performer's materiality and representational status of theater. She argues that Butler too easily dismisses the discussion about gender performance in theater. In her view, Butler is wrong to assume that theatrical conventions assure “fictional” status of performance in the theater, which renders theatrical performance as hardly subversive.

But in fact, Čale Feldman writes, “theatrical gender identity is also ‘readable’ only on the basis of formerly established gender cultural codes“ (2001, p. 109). She emphasizes that theatrical conventions should also be seen as “citations” that arbitrarily guarantee “viability of postulated but actually tentative and conventional ontological distinction“ between ‘real actor’ and ‘fictional gender role’ (Čale Feldman, 2001, p. 109). Thus, the author emphasizes, both performances - gender and theatrical – have “fictional” and “authentic” character and can equally be subversive. In the following part I am going to demonstrate how Čale Feldman's “flexible essentialism” functions in her theorizing and interpretations of gender (and) performance.

## Gender on stage

The viability of Čale Feldman's intervention in feminist theories of gender and performance and applicability of her theoretical framework is convincingly demonstrated in the analyzes of performance in folklore, theater, literature, popular culture. I consider that to be especially important regarding the local context in which she is situated as a critic.

In my view, Čale Feldman's introduces subject-matters and methodological approach that challenge prevalent modes of theoretical and critical production in Croatian literary and theater studies. In her analyzes, she demonstrates interdisciplinary approach to her subject-matters. Theoretical framing of her analyzes includes gender performativity, anthropological understanding of performance and theatricality. Interdisciplinarity never prevailed in the mainstream knowledge production in Croatian literary and theater studies but it has always been present. Today there is a growing body of literature written from an interdisciplinary perspective. I suggest that certain aspects of Čale Feldman's, as well as Zlatar and Govedić's critical discourses have important part in those transformations of Croatian literary and theater studies.

To turn to the positioning of Čale Feldman's critical discourse in the local context and feminist theory at large, I want to point to some themes that are in her focus. First of them is the theory of gender in/and performance. Čale Feldman often points out the misfits of theater studies and feminist theory that did not capture the complexity of performance and gender. In the text "Paradoksi spola/roda u kazališnoj teoriji i praksi" ["Paradoxes of sex/gender in theater theory and practice"] (2001), the author points to the materiality and instability of gender in theatrical performance. One of the paradoxes of theater that the title of the essay refers to is theatricality's "flexible essentialism", i.e. the status of performance as "fictional" and "material" at the same time. That implies that the body on the stage should be understood

as both specific material body and as a sign. Čale Feldman examines how the nature/culture binary, often associated with the binaries sex/gender and female/male, functions in theater. She argues that another theatrical paradox is related to gender in theater. In the history of the European theater women were not allowed to act on the stage and female roles were performed by men but, the author elaborates, cross-dressing of fictional characters and actors on the stage could have been perceived as a construct, thus offering possibility to do what was otherwise impossible out of the theater. Čale Feldman is very careful about association of gender performance with subversion. She does not assume that theatrical cross-dressing is subversive by itself. But, according to her, social relations that govern gender performances out of theater are challenged when they differ from more conventional theatrical and gender performances.

Acting and actresses are two other important themes for Čale Feldman's feminist criticism of both traditional theater studies and feminist criticism. She argues that gender is in complex ways historically present both in theater itself and in theatrical theory since the theories of acting all the way to the 20th century involve the idea of "sexual difference".<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the author suggests that gendered perspective in theory and actress as a theme have been neglected in the history of Western theater studies. Čale Feldman is also critical to revisionist feminist theater theories that are essentializing and perpetuating "patriarchal history of theater" (2001, p. 88). For example, she argues that feminist performances that want to subvert "traditional masculine objectifying gaze" can actually perpetuate it:

If traditional masculine schema extruded feminine as a third, transforming it into imaginary (cultural) fetish that mediates the communication about its "nature" between male performer and spectator, similar happened in women's theater, which by

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<sup>18</sup> Čale Feldman writes that "the idea about the actress as a woman a priori – inconceivable, artistically untainting physiognomy, and also the idea about woman as actress a priori, bare mask projected by masculine desire – ethical and ontological nothingness" are as well present in the 20th century theories of performance (2005, p. 72).

extrusion of male body and use of its own “nature“, realizes theatrical communication of women about male “culture“. (Čale Feldman, 2001, p. 89)

I suggest that importance of theatricality's “flexible essentialism” in Čale Feldman's text should be found in her emphasis on the complex dynamic of social and theatrical performances. In her view, both gender and theatrical performances potentially destabilize themselves and the system they take part in. But, as I have already suggested, Čale Feldman does not take for granted that female body on the stage is subversive. In “Aura glumice“ [“Actress' aura“] (2005), relying on Diamond and Butler, she argues that acting is irreducible to the “real” or to “fiction” because performance is fluid and heterogeneous. Čale Feldman quotes on Feder and Zakin's text about Derrida and “women” to argue that “acting, just as sexual difference, spites attempts of reliable ontological anchoring“, and that “acting produces specificities that can not be easily subsumed “under the sign of identity“ and at the same time discloses the structure of any ontological order“ (2005, p. 71). She illustrates that performance is a complex web of material bodies, social constructions and aesthetics by bringing in the examples of female performers of *commedia dell' arte*, and the late 20th century female performance art.

In my view, the approach to performance in *Euridikini osvrti* (2001) and *Femina ludens* (2005) that brings together various theoretical frameworks allows Čale Feldman to address from a feminist perspective the themes that were for a long time marginal to the interest of Croatian scholarship, like popular culture, media, ritual, autobiographical writing, the body. In the essay “Šteta što je kurva: Glumica i njezina dvojništva između postkomunizma i posthumanizma“ [“It's a pity she's a whore: Actress and her doubles between post-communism and post-humanism“] (2005), Čale Feldman analyzes media image, roles and personal narrative of Croatian actresses Mira Furlan and Ena Begović.<sup>19</sup> In an

<sup>19</sup> Čale Feldman's book, *U kanonu: Studije o dvojništvu* [In the canon: Studies about the phenomenon of doubling] (2008), co-written with Morana Čale, focuses on the “phenomenon of doubling, understood as a

analysis of the changes of the actress' status in Croatian popular culture and theater from socialist period through the period of transition, Čale Feldman shows how the body of actress functions as a sexualized object of theatrical gaze, media commodification and national identity. At this point, I want to argue that Čale Feldman convincingly demonstrates that representations of gender and national identity function in a complex way that often blurs the boundary between theatrical fiction and everyday life and therefore also requires interdisciplinary approach.

### **The nation on stage**

Čale Feldman's discourse is, as I have already argued, the site of intervention into feminist theory and theory of performance, especially in the relation to Croatian humanities. One of the focuses of her analytical interest has been Croatian drama and theater. She was among the first critics that have approached national literature and theater from a point of view of feminist criticism and performance studies. I find her analyzes to be valuable to feminist intervention into the field of knowledge production in Croatian humanities. The other major intervention of Čale Feldman's critical writing is in her questioning of the process of canon formation, as well as in addressing of problematic positioning of the institutions of literature and theater in relation to the construction of national identity and politics.

The author gives a lot of attention to the analysis of Croatian drama and theater and offers what I consider to be complex and incisive analyzes of both canonical and contemporary authors. She is especially interested in the issue of feminist theater practice. In *Femina ludens* (2005) she points to the play of contemporary Croatian author Ivana Sajko

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constant anthropological structure and as a sign of modernity, a psychic obsession and literary figure, procedure of motive" (2008, p. 355).

*Bilješke s odigrane predstave: Arhetip Medeja, monolog za ženu koja ponekad govori* [Notes from a played performance: Archetype Medea, monologue for a woman who speaks sometimes] as a feminist and “post-drama”<sup>20</sup> play built around idea of ambiguity and deconstruction of gender, as well as transgression of the border representation/reality. It is important to note that some parts of *Euridikini osvrti* (2001) and *Femina ludens* (2005) belong to the genre of theater and literary review. In my view, they point to the author’s wish to affirm themes that are marginal from a position of traditional literary and theater studies.

As I have already suggested, another important site of Čale Feldman's feminist intervention is the canon of Croatian literature and theater. In “Spolna metateza i kazališna metalepsa u hrvatskom dramskom modernizmu i postmodernizmu” [“Sexual metathesis and theatrical metalepsis in Croatian modern and postmodern drama”] (2001), the author writes about gender inversion, cross-dressing practices and actress as a character in the work of Ivo Vojnović, Marijan Matković, Ranko Marinković, Pavao Pavličić and Slobodan Šnajder<sup>21</sup> Čale Feldman prefers the term “sexual metathesis”, taken from Camille Paglia, over “cross-gendering”. “Sexual metathesis”, she writes, refers to the rhetorical practice of a change in gender of characters, between character and person upon which the character is based, between character and the addressee of the text, as well as identification of the author with a character.<sup>22</sup> For Čale Feldman, cross-gendering in performative practices challenges the category of gender. It is a

<sup>20</sup> The term “post-drama” Čale Feldman takes from Hans-Thies Lehman who uses it to describe the characteristics of the 1970s’ performance practices that challenge the binary fiction/reality and put emphasis on corporeality performance (see Čale Feldman, 2005, p. 188). Sajko's play is juxtaposed to Árpád Göncz’ *Magyar Médea* [Hungarian Medea] due to the similar social context, i.e. post-socialism. Čale Feldman argues that while Sajko challenges conventional representations of gender and theatrical strategies, Göncz’ play is a political allegory that is “far from Euripides’ transgressive rebel” Medea (2005, p. 190).

<sup>21</sup> Ivo Vojnović is the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century dramatist and novelist. Marijan Matković and Ranko Marinković are important figures of Croatian drama of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while Pavao Pavličić and Slobodan Šnajder are contemporary writers.

<sup>22</sup> Čale Feldman take the term from Paglia's book *Sexual personae: Art and decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990).

strategy that dramatizes and problematizes the category of gender as cultural construct, which is, thanks to that, strategy critically seen as sexual economy of culture, distribution not only of gender attributes but also of privileges that culture appoints to male and female gender (2001, p. 214).

The author finds that the plays she analyzes “fit into the existing canon of the thematization of female position – especially female experience and female body – but at the same time **work against** that canon“ and 'subvert' culturally distributed gender attributes (Čale Feldman, 2001, p. 214; emphasis in original). She argues that although throughout the history of Croatian literature and theater female body is an archetype of the nation, its representations changes and “resists” inscription of national identity. The author calls for awareness about the ways in which particular constructions of gender and national identity shape literary and theater production. She calls for a feminist revision of the Croatian literary canon.

As I hoped to illustrate, Čale Feldman's critical discourse that introduces contemporary feminist literary and performances theories to Croatian scholarship, and enters in a productive discussion with them, resulting in thoughtful analyzes, represents a significant and promising site of feminist intervention to Croatian literary and theater studies. In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze Govedić's *Izbor uloge, tijelo granice* (2002).

### **Performance and politics *by any other name***

Govedić's discourse in *Izbor uloge, pomak granice* (2002) draws from the contemporary feminist theory, performance studies, and philosophy and raises questions of politics and ethics of art, critical practices and everyday life. The book brings together literary, film and theater criticism, organized around the topics such as freedom of choice, ethics, hybridity and liminality. I want to demonstrate that the ways in which the author

establishes a dialogue with a wide range of theoretical texts point to the central idea of the book: to contribute to the social transformation.

Govedić elides the notions of performativity, performance and theatricality in an anti-essentialist way. The notion of performance that frames the author's analyzes of various literary text, performances, film, etc. is based upon Derrida's deconstruction. In the text "Znak kao performer: granice književnoga teksta i liminalni teatar Jacquesa Derrida" ["Sign as performer: the limits of literary text and the liminal theater of Jacques Derrida"] (2002), which to a large extent frames her critical discourse, Govedić invokes poststructuralist understanding of language as performative and therefore inherently unstable. For Govedić, "sign is the same as a performer [in theater]", it is "a supplement of a mask of something else" (Govedić, 2002, p. 60). She writes about how performance moves the border self/other and represents the openness to the other, as well as the openness of stage, "a synonym of endless transition" (Govedić, 2002, p. 51). Govedić writes:

Theater is a process of permanent thematization of the border between performer and the audience, play writer and director, performer and performer, the drama text and performance, political and aesthetical, private and public. (...) A text is infinite multiple porosity of internal and external limits. Intense liminality also results in the growth of the theatricality of the text. (2002, p. 60)

She argues that performance is characterized by resistance to the binary thinking, hierarchies, fixation of identities, which makes textual and theatrical practices political. These issues appear as central notions in *Izbor uloge, pomak granice* (2002).

In my view, Govedić aims to demonstrate in her writing what she describes as a "dialogic" theoretical model. By laying out anti-essentialist understanding of performance and the text, the author argues for "performative" critical practice that transgresses the borders between different disciplines and discourses. Govedić finds examples of such approach in various texts and performances that, according to her, destabilize fixed and conventional



meanings and “perform “the **plural subject**” (Govedić, 2002, p. 510; emphasis in original). She lists some “performances” that achieve transgression: Nabokov’s choice not to make difference between literary and critical, and literary and political, “hybridity” and “theatricality” of Marina Cvetaeva’s work, Cixous’ *écriture féminine* and feminism, “a plural **critical** theory” opened to other disciplines and critical practices (Govedić, 2002, pp. 278-279; emphasis in original). Govedić argues for a model of feminist theory that emphasizes the plurality and complexity of cultural texts. She says:

I really do not know any epoch, any male or female author (regardless how misogynist or egalitarian they were), that do not include many gender **pluralities** or even gender distortions of creative judgment of **both** male and female disguises, citations, intonations, gestures, strategies of offense and defense, emotional priorities, internal and external identifications. (Govedić, 2002, p. 18; emphasis in original)

Apart from emphasizing their plurality, inherent instability and political potential, another analogy between the theatricality of Derrida’s deconstruction and the theater is important part for Govedić’s articulation of feminist political position. She emphasizes that both theater and deconstructive writing are characterized by unstable corporeality:

As well as in the theater, [in the text] there are many ways to move the border or embody the text, but both of them are mediated by a performing body and spectators’ bodies. As well as in the theater, the presence of the performing body comes about only under the mask of sign, hence as a paradoxical absence. (Govedić, 2002, p. 61)

I find that the author emphasizes corporeality of performing body in order to criticize social practices that are restrictive to the body. In that sense, she analyzes ballet dance.

Relying on feminist theorists of embodiment, i.e. Rosi Braidotti, Hélène Cixous, Elizabeth Grosz, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Sandra Lee Bartky, Govedić emphasizes that the body in performance is always marked by its materiality (e.g. sex, race, age, appearance), which also refers to the complex processes of cultural inscription upon the body. But since the body on stage is a sign, Govedić writes:

(the body) is always intersection of complex critical discourses of social inscriptions – as public and political and personal (private). Movement can never be separated from the body, and the body by itself is a cultural stage. And a complicated mask. On the stage, the body is the most powerful site of parody or subversion, thus the site of potential explosion of classical social control of uniformed protagonists. (Govedić, 2002, p. 315)

*Izbor uloge, pomak granice* (2002) strongly emphasizes the political potential of any “performance”: artistic or media representation as well as critical practice. In my view, one of the functions of such discourse is to promote texts and performances that, according to her, challenge “conventional” representations of gender and have potential to dismantle other binaries as well. For example, in the analyzes plays of Ivana Sajko, Govedić emphasizes Sajko's focus on the body, “subversion” of gender stereotypes and of the border between life and death. Govedić also promotes various performances that function out of the mainstream cultural institutions, such as contemporary performance and dance.

To sum up, I find that by establishing an intertextual dialogue between various disciplines and theoretical frameworks – literary, film and theater criticism, performance studies, cultural studies, feminism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis – the author aims to create an analytical model to address cultural “performances” that does not conform to the traditional disciplinary closures, and takes clear political stance.

## **The role of the context**

In Govedić's discourse political agenda is strongly rhetorically emphasized by pointing to the liberating potential of any “performance”. Her aim is to engage in the creation of “ethical subject” that contests oppressive and reductive cultural practices. The idea of “ethical subject” is taken from Levinas:

[F]or Levinas (1969) “listening“ is not *obedience* (submission to the authority); listening is, on the contrary, openness to the Other and its questions – no matter if it is human or divine Other. Levinas' listening to the Other disputes both our and other's position of authority. The process by which the Others question us is defined as pre-condition of the formation of the ethical subject. (Govedić, 2002, p. 188)

In my view, Govedić's insistence on the establishment of a dialogue between various positions that form “subject” is important part of the political intervention she aims to achieve because it can raise politically important questions. In Govedić's view, “ethical subject” is best represented by Antigone. The author enters a debate with Hegel, Irigaray and Butler's approach to Antigone. She situates herself in a tradition of feminist readings of that text. Govedić argues that various readings of Antigone have missed to see that in the classical myth, Sophocles and Anouilh's plays Antigone is defined by her ‘free choice’ to contest all conventions (gender, class, religious, political), authority and initiate a dialogue:

I would not be at all interested in the play *Antigone* if her “solution” (or permanently actual philosophical enigma) would skip the moments of the heroine's conscious choice of autonomous, self-legitimate way, or it would omit Antigone's decision to the *discourse of love* as the one that erases the border of the gain/loss, the border of loving your fellow beings alive *and* after death. (2002, p. 24; emphasis)

The idea of a writer, a reader and a critic as “ethical subject” gives consistence to Govedić's discourse and stays crucial for social critique. The author calls for a political responsibility of art and criticism. In *Izbor uloge, pomak granice* (2002) there are references to the political situation in the 1990's Croatia: war and post-war period characterized by strong nationalism. Drawing from Edward Said and Julia Kristeva, Govedić discusses the relationship between art and politics, which indicates that she understands literature, performance and criticism as a possibility for a social change, and argues that they should challenge the idea of “authority”: canonical, authorial, gender, social. The author criticizes political position of Croatian academia, intellectuals, and media in the 1990s. In her view,

they, as “cultural authority”, took part in “authoritarian” repression.<sup>23</sup> In the text “Kazalište i njegov totalitarni dvojnik” [“Theater and its totalitarian Other“], the author writes about the role of intellectual, criticism and artistic practices (contemporary Croatian theater especially) in relation to the oppressive political system she calls “totalitarian”, i.e. Croatian mainstream politics in the 1990s. Govedić argues that the idea about depolitization of cultural practices contributes to the preservation of such a system. In the discussion about the politics of Croatian theater and drama based on the analysis of the plays of contemporary Croatian and Serbian play writers and directors, Govedić argues that they did not challenge nationalism and oppressive political system but stick to the totalitarian discourse of victimization instead of offering more “democratic” political model.

In my view, by emphasizing the dynamic relationship between cultural practices like art and criticism, and power relations in which they are embedded, Govedić offers a strong social critique. In comparison to Zlatar and Čale Feldman, her discourse is rhetorically the most assertive. I find that straightforward articulation of political agenda is its great strength.

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<sup>23</sup> Govedić focuses on the problem of 'internalized authority' and 'repressive hierarchy and values'. She renders her arguments from Horkheimer's idea of internalization of fear and refusal of responsibility that allow the control of the authority.

## Conclusion

This thesis has addressed particular theoretical and methodological assumptions related to feminist knowledge production. It has been done by looking at the texts of three feminist literary critics in Croatia - Lada Čale Feldman, Nataša Govedić and Andrea Zlata. Since I have proposed that feminism should not be taken for granted since it emerges from a particular socio-historical context in which it is positioned and at the same time takes part in its construction, I wanted to see what constitutes feminist position in the texts by Čale Feldman, Govedić, and Zlata.

I have illustrated several different ways in which feminist position is articulated in a particular socio-historical context, i.e. Croatia in the 1990s and 2000s. This concerns subject-matters, and theoretical and methodological framing of the texts by Čale Feldman, Govedić, and Zlata. In my view, all three authors I have analyzed raise important questions about the prevalent modes of criticism in Croatian literary studies. This is most effectively done in the methodological framing of their analyzes.

What I find to be one of the most interesting characteristics of Zlata's *Tekst, tijelo, trauma* and *Rječnik tijela* is the variety of different uses of autobiographical discourse. Together with the author's thematization of textual representation of identity, it casts a new light on the dominant modes of critical writing in Croatia and questions the border between literature and criticism. However, the use of personal by itself does not assume feminist position. Zlata's discourse represents one of the most prevalent modes of feminist literary criticism in Croatian literary studies – the one interested in the criticism of literary canon. I find that her books have an important role in focusing critical and public attention to the work of writers such as Drakulić, Ugrešić and Drndić, as well as to contemporary literature written by

women. Zlatar introduces into Croatian literary studies themes that have been important for feminist criticism, such as the body. Although her discourse does not rely much on feminist theory, my analysis has illustrated that it is effective in other ways.

What I consider to be especially important about Čale Feldman's *Euridinkini osvrti* and *Femina ludens* is the elaboration of theoretical framework for analysis of gender and performance. Its validity is, in my view, proven by the author's insightful analysis of various literary texts and performances in folklore, theater, and popular culture. In my view, this represents a significant and promising site of feminist intervention to Croatian literary and theatre studies. I have tried to illustrate that Čale Feldman is a critic who approaches her subject-matters with great self-reflexivity. Her writing is an example of feminist discourse which in effective manner challenges disciplinary borders, and questions the assumptions in knowledge production in literary and theater studies.

In my view, the way in which Govedić in *Izbor uloge, pomak granice* in a straightforward way raises the issue of political responsibility and the role of the feminist criticism and social transformation, is one of the most notable characteristics of her discourse. Grounded in poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, her analyzes of literature, theater and film point to the complex relationship between cultural practices like art and criticism, and power relations in which they are embedded.

I have argued that it is problematic to assume one model of feminist literary criticism and that it is necessary to question what constitutes the politics of feminist literary criticism. My analysis has illustrated that the texts of Lada Čale Feldman, Nataša Govedić and Andrea Zlatar I have analyzed can be classified as feminist due to their subject-matters, theoretical and methodological assumptions, and style. Their feminist status has to be seen in the relation to a particular context of literary criticism in which it emerges. In my view, Čale Feldman,

Govedić, and Zlatar's texts function as feminist because they challenge the prevalent modes of criticism in Croatian literary studies. This is effectively done in the theoretical and methodological framing of their texts. They also succeed to assert new subject-matters in Croatian literary scholarship.

What I have found to be similar in the discourses of Čale Feldman, Govedić, and Zlatar is their materialist, but anti-essentialist approach to gender. In Zlatar's texts, it emerges from theoretical grounding in poststructuralist theory and strong emphasis on embodiment, while in Čale Feldman and Govedić's texts, it is a result of "flexible essentialism", i.e. emphasis on a material and discursive character of any discourse (see Jackson, 2003). As I have already suggested, the three authors I have analyzed in the course of this thesis can also be related regarding the characteristics of their discourses that challenge disciplinary borders. In order to address other ways in which their discourses are consistent, a more detailed research has to be undertaken.

My expectation is that this thesis will prove as a contribution to the analysis of representational strategies and politics of feminist literary criticism in Croatia. It aims to provide a theoretical framework that can be applied in order to address the relationship between feminist literary criticism and feminist politics. In my view, further research of feminist literary criticism in Croatia should address in more detail the issue of reception of feminist theory and feminist criticism in Croatian literary studies. I believe that such research would bring more self-awareness to various modes of feminist knowledge production in Croatia.

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