

## **I Would See My Husband Only from behind the Statues in the Square**

**Zora Bútorová**

I was happy that finally we had a breakthrough also in Czechoslovakia. Before the fall of communism, it seemed to me as if I had lived in two times. The first one was the time of my profession in which the ice of quiescence and immobility started to thaw. The second one, moving extremely slowly, was our civic time.

In fact, already during my studies in early seventies I had said to myself that I would try *not to be* part of official sociology since with encroaching normalization it became increasingly clear to me that *life (including the professional one) is elsewhere* – there where critically thinking people proscribed by the regime were. It seemed quite simple to me: if someone from my field found out or wrote about something interesting that critically reflected our reality then s/he *had to* be at odds with the regime. I shunned those who were not in such conflict with the establishment.

I think I was a typical person from the “grey zone” – as dissident sociologist Jiřina Šiklová called it. Together with others I worked in “non-nomenklatura” organizations where we strove to use the existing space for *normal* work that would be in accord with universal norms of our profession. We organized seminars with scholars who worked on the margins of official science. Out of principle I never quoted resolutions of congresses of the Communist Party in introductions to my papers as it was expected, and avoided researching themes in which I would have to prove the validity of Marxist-Leninist dogmas. At that time this was a deviation from prevalent patterns of behavior. Perhaps not accidentally the term *positive deviation* was coined by Slovak sociologists and later it caught on also elsewhere, for instance among environmentalists. In the second half of the 1980s, I established together with my colleagues the Section of Sociology of Science at the Slovak Sociological Association with the aim of creating another space for critical self-reflection. Since we openly rejected the monopoly of the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of society we came into conflict with the feared official representative of “normalized” sociology, Czech professor of scientific Communism, Karel Rychtařík. In the weekly magazine *Tvorba* he warned against “thin ice of alternative sociology” and we responded with a series of letters to the editor in which we rejected intimidations and espoused the ideal of free multi-paradigmatic science. Bratislava was far away from Prague and we felt less endangered than our Czech colleagues.

At that time I worked at the Department of Theory of Science and Forecasting at the Computing Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) where ideological control was relatively weak. Together with Fedor Gál, Pavol Frič and Ivan Dianiška we involved hundreds of scholars marginalized by the communist regime into the discussion about the obstacles to development of our science. To the Presidium of the Academy we presented a concept of the reform of the system of management of science although we rightly expected that it

would be rejected by the authorities. Simply, we were testing how far we could go in challenging the status quo and tried to push the boundaries of the permitted and the acceptable.

In September 1989, together with other sociologists we moved our struggle from the intra-disciplinary level to the civic sphere. We wrote a letter to President Gustáv Husák against the imprisonment of the “Bratislava Five”. The official regime responded with verbal assaults. Most of them were aimed at those signatories who were members of the Communist Party; my situation of a non-member was a little easier.

By the end of the same month, a congress of the Slovak Sociological Association took place for which our Section of Sociology of Science prepared a thick “tome” of analytical materials characterizing the untenable state of our discipline from various perspectives. We made a number of copies and handed them out; we believed in the power of critical words. Official representatives of the Association did not dare to stop us and hence exposed themselves to our pressure for change. By voting we succeeded in removing several pseudo authorities from the leadership of the Association. But I also remember that some colleagues condemned us for the letter to the President – we allegedly jeopardized the whole sociological community in Slovakia. What gave us the right to sign the letter as sociologists? November was still far away...

During that Fall it became clear to me that the decisive battle had to take place between citizens and the regime and not inside communities of professionals. As many others, I was increasingly growing impatient. And when also notoriously disciplined East Germans got into motion and removed the Berlin wall, the feelings of shame and guilt caused by our passivity were almost unbearable.

On November 18, some of us, not just sociologists, got together at the apartment of sociologist Soňa Szomolányi and discussed what to do next. As soon as we learned about the alleged death of student Šmíd during the clash between students and the police in Prague we agreed that the following day they we were going to light up candles in the city center. However, just a few hours later everything turned out differently. Time started running and from that moment it was galloping like crazy: meetings at the Umelecká beseda, Hviezdoslavovo square and then each evening in Square of the Slovak National Uprising...

Since November 19 I would see my husband Martin who became one the leaders of Public Against Violence only from behind the statues in SNP Square where I would stand shivering with cold together with Soňa Szomolányi and other friends. Our daughter was fifteen and she would go to the rallies by herself; our seven-year-old son would usually stay at my mom’s. However, I brought him along that evening when large snowflakes were falling and Karel Kryl, the most popular protest singer who returned after many years from emigration, was singing *Děkuji* (Thank You). That was such *absolute moment*. Everything inside me melted into one feeling of gratefulness that I could live through this whole era – the period before the door of freedom in my country was closed, the years when it was firmly padlocked and also that incredible moment when finally the door of freedom was wide open.

Evening after evening I would recharge my energy in the Square. During the day in the Department of Theory of Science and Forecasting we would discuss measures to reform the management of science. I still have before my eyes people such as Ladislav Kováč, František Šebej, Pavol Brunovský, Pavol Demeš, Jana Plichtová, Milan Šútovec, Šarlota Pufflerová. I did not miss a single public rally – from the rally of the employees of the Slovak

Academy of Science in support of demands of students, the Civic Forum and Public Against Violence, to the big meeting of the Forum of Scientists and Researchers of Slovakia, to the first meeting of the newly created Council of the Scientists at the SAS. I had my share in the formation of this new democratic body. To this day I feel excited and uneasy when I remember how my “fellow fighters” entrusted me right before Christmas with elaboration of the conception of this new “parliament” of the SAS. The first meeting of the Council took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1990.

During those euphoric weeks I never considered taking on some higher positions; and when I was asked to do so I refused with no hesitation. I wanted to carry on my research activities. I believed that when the *rules of the game* would be well tuned people would express their hidden potential: they will work better and behave more decently... Moreover, it seemed to me that after the fall of Iron Curtain, our analyses lost their relevance. I thought, for instance, that it would be meaningless to speak about positive deviants, as that type of behavior that used to a positive deviation would in newly-gained democracy surely become an everyday norm. This was a huge illusion.

Of course, in November 1989 I had no idea that shortly I would embark on public opinion research because I would want to have my finger on the quick pulse of the new era. And I would have never thought that a few years later I will be lured by the theme of gender inequalities and the position of women in society. I could not imagine I would also try academic work at a university, in a polling agency and in an independent think tank. And I had no idea how superficially I knew the culture in which I lived and how many exciting findings and unpleasant surprises about barriers within my society and within myself I was going to come across. Yet, I have preserved that fundamental feeling of gratefulness. *Děkuji.*

Translated by **Eva Riečanská**

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