



Feminisms in a transnational perspective: *Why not witches? Feminist knowledge in dark times* (IUC, Dubrovnik, 11-15 May, 2025)

This year's seminar seeks to bring together feminists from academia, the arts, and activism to discuss problems of production, articulation, dissemination, reinvigoration and radical use of feminist knowledge given the complex socio-political circumstances we live in. We welcome approaches that explore the possibilities of re-appropriating the subversive and performative potential of *witchcraft* as a means of resisting the rise of populist and right-wing movements that fuel global anti-gender and neo-fascist agendas. We are looking for contributions that imagine and read from a new perspective of "witchcraft subversiveness" within historical, non-Western, and contemporary contexts.

The construction of the witch as a threatening embodiment of active femininity has historically functioned as a social mechanism through which communities could channel negative emotions, aggression, and violence, while also reinforcing patriarchal structures. A historical overview of mass witch trials reveals how the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, demographic shifts, class realignments, epidemics, and agrarian or political crises all contributed to the creation of a threatening "Other" onto which collective fears and anxieties were projected. The cross-cultural and transhistorical association of the "unruly" female body with magical powers, the demonic, the supernatural, and the monstrous has a long lineage. Yet the witch figure continues to serve as a catalyst for misogynistic, sexist, and anti-feminist discourse in contemporary socio-political contexts. From the 1990s "witches" case" in Croatia, involving five female writers and journalists, to the online harassment of prominent women in the gaming industry during GamerGate (2014–2015), and the recent attack by the Israeli UN ambassador towards UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese—accused of witchcraft—these examples clearly demonstrate how old phantasms continue to fuel right-wing backlash against (transnational and anti-nationalist) feminism, progressivism, social justice, and diversity.

We are witnessing how the dynamic of producing a threatening "Other" uncannily mirrors the contemporary social order, as otherness is now attributed to marginalized groups such as migrant workers, ethnic and religious minorities, Roma communities, and the LGBTIQ+ population. This has channelled dissatisfaction, with the devastating consequences of late capitalism, rising illiberalism, and the erosion of democracy functioning to shield elites from popular discontent and anger. Similarly, although women's social status has improved worldwide, cultural stereotypes that construct femininity as either demonic or sacred continue to persist. In this sense, the feminist claim that the struggle is never truly finished is affirmed: as contemporary conditions show, feminism must begin anew with each generation of women. Along these lines, we must continue to uncover, extract, criticize, and deconstruct the patriarchal assumptions that remain unexamined.

Through both its content and modality, the course will focus on feminist creativity, critical reflection, transformative practices, and political engagement that foster alliances between feminists and other progressive social actors joined in resisting the dark forces of hatred, historical amnesia, racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and fascist regression. Particularly welcome are creative interventions by feminists across disciplines that challenge



narrow-minded historical research by expanding traditional notions of the real, the speculative, and the spiritual in order to envision decolonial worlds and better futures.

We invite participants to engage with the following questions and issues:

- Historical witches vs. concepts of modern witches
- The political dimensions of witchcraft across cultures
- How witchcraft serves as a powerful form of feminist and decolonial resistance as well as empowerment
- Magic, power, and spirituality in connection with the modern witch cult
- Case studies of women denounced as witches in the contexts of *Croatia, Scotland, Palestine*, and others
- Subversive representations of witches in literature, art, and popular culture
- Feminist witch studies as a new academic discipline in antifeminist times
- How witchcraft accusations shed light on contemporary conspiracy theories and contests over gendered morality
- The feminist icon of the witch

Eligibility:

IUC courses are conducted at the postgraduate level. All interested MA or PhD students or junior scholars may apply to participate, although the course targets those with a defined interest in women's and gender studies, transnational studies, philosophy, sociology, literary and cultural studies, postcolonialism, or anthropology. The course will be limited to 15 students (25 participants in total) in order to provide sufficient space for discussion, seminar work and student presentations. Participants must seek funding from their own institutions for the costs of travel, lodging and meals. Limited financial support is available for participants from parts of Eastern Europe and some non-European countries (please see <http://www.iuc.hr/iuc-support.php>).

The IUC requires a payment of 55 EUR for the course fee for all participants who are not co-organizers.

The working language of the course is English.

Application procedure:

Please submit a proposal consisting of your curriculum vitae and a short narrative describing your interest in the topic or a 250-words abstract if you would like to present your research at the course. Place all current contact information at the top of your CV. Send submissions by email to Mirela Dakić (mireladakic1@gmail.com). Use the subject: IUC Dubrovnik 2026. The proposal deadline is 8 February, 2026.