

BY MASHA UDENSIVA-BRENNER

# RADMILA GORUP

## FROM BELGRADE TO COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



From left to right, at Gorup's retirement party in May 2013: Radmila Gorup; Gorup with Ivan Gorup; Gorup flanked by Catharine and Olga Nepomnyashchy, and Valerie Hopkins.

"I still do not feel retired," said Radmila Gorup, senior lecturer emerita, who taught in the Columbia University Slavic Department from 1980 until last spring. Though she is currently not teaching classes (but hopes to do so occasionally), she continues to participate in the University community, returning to campus every second Friday of the month to cochair a University Seminar and staying active in the Njegoš Endowment at the East Central European Center.

Gorup was born in Kragujevac, a town in central Serbia, but lived and studied in Belgrade until she immigrated to North America. Her departure had nothing to do with ideology. "I loved my country and had a hard time leaving it," she said, noting that the Yugoslavia of that time differed from other East European countries; citizens were permitted to travel abroad and had access to Western cultures. She had been asked to join the Communist Party, but she made excuses for why she couldn't join and faced no problems. "I always wanted to be independent. Here, too, I am not a member of either the Democratic or Republican Party."

In 1963, she married Ivan Gorup, a Canadian of Slovene origin, and left with

him for Montreal, where he worked, in 1964. After a few years, Ivan was transferred to New York City, and the couple moved again. Gorup started graduate school, receiving an M.A. in French literature and then a Ph.D. in linguistics from Columbia University. But finding a job in New York proved difficult. After teaching linguistics as an adjunct professor at New York University, she was offered a language lecturer position in the Columbia Slavic Department. For the first ten years (during which she spent some time as a lecturer at Berkeley), Gorup taught Serbo-Croatian. Then, in the early 1990s, Yugoslavia fell apart, and things became complicated: suddenly, she found herself teaching Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin. "It was a big challenge to go from one to four national or political languages in the same class," she said.

Gorup explained that Serbo-Croatian was popularized in the 1950s and '60s, "because of Yugoslavia's independent politics and liberal economic policies." This continued even into the late 1980s, when the country's economic situation declined, and the political situation destabilized. Since the wars of the 1990s, however, and the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the successor

nations have become small, "disoriented and impoverished." They are no longer in the position to become prominent international actors. Teaching the languages, which has always been difficult, has become even more so: "There was and is no will to produce material that would be appropriate for teaching abroad," Gorup lamented. She has worked hard to produce her own materials, and maintains that an enthusiastic instructor can find a teaching approach regardless of the resources available. Overall, Gorup is pleased with her professional life.

"I met hundreds of young, bright people and tried to be a representative of Yugoslav cultures as best I could," she said. "I never regretted my decision to come to Columbia. Even though I did not have a tenure-track job, I felt fulfilled and loved my work."

Throughout her career, Gorup has maintained both her language-teaching profession and an active presence in the field of theoretical linguistics. She has published books and scholarly articles on a number of subjects; her newest, *After Yugoslavia: The Cultural Spaces of a Vanished Land* (Stanford University Press), came out in June 2013.