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Research Article

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Theatre as a Battlefield for the Memory on the War in Croatia

Nikolina Židek*

This paper historicizes the developments in Croatian theatre as a space of fostering debate on the country's recent past during the war (1991-1995) in three periods: wartime and the post-war transition until Croatia started its European Union accession negotiations (1990-2004), a new wave of dealing with the past from 2005 to 2016, a reverse conservative wave from 2016 to 2019, and the indications of a comeback of counter-memory in 2020, truncated by the pandemic. The study analyses the situation in Croatian society and the main events that affected political and social life, explores the functioning of Croatian theatre institutions, and examines the staged plays, contextualises their plots by explaining the issues and events they treat, and examines the reactions the staged plays provoked, as well as how their effects multiplied beyond the theatre audience. The results showed that after the first period when Croatian playwriting was more focused on war trauma, the theatre opened a crack in the society and contested the hegemonic narrative of a victorious and victim nation. In spite of the reverse trend as of 2013, the counter-memory shown in the theatre crossed the walls and spread to a much bigger audience than that actually watching the plays.

Keywords: Croatian theatre, memory, war in Croatia (1991-1995)

Introduction

Croatian independence from Yugoslavia was accompanied by a bloody war (1991-1995), locally called the Homeland War, clearly denoting its importance in the process of Croatian nation-building. From the beginning of the war, Croatia created a mainstream narrative that it was only defending itself and therefore the Croatian side could not have committed any crimes¹. Such an official narrative has been perpetuated in official statements, commemorations and history textbooks, and has generated an atmosphere of denial of any human rights violations by the Croatian side, while the society does not deal with the dark episodes of its recent past.

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¹ Renner, Judith and Michel-André Horelt. 2008. *Of Heroes and Villains: Competing Identity-Constructions in Post-War Croatia*. *Munich Working Papers in IR* 1(2), 5-27; Bremer, Thomas. 2008. *The Catholic Church and its Role in Politics and Society*, in *Croatia since Independence. War, Politics, Society, Foreign Relations*, edited by Ramet, Sabrina P. and Reneo Lukic. Munich: Oldenbourg, 251-68; Freyburg, Tina and Solveig Richter. 2008. National identity matters: the limited impact of EU political conditionality in the Western Balkans. *National Centre of Competence in Research*,(19); Jović, Dejan. 2012. The War That Is Not Allowed to Be Forgotten: Nationalist Discourse on the "Homeland War" (1991-1995) in Contemporary Croatia. *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen* 3, 52-69.

By taking the theatre as a space of freedom of expression and a reflection of the society, but also as a space of memory production, this paper focuses on Croatian theatre as a space of fostering debate on the country's recent past during the war, as well as efforts of offering a counter memory and demythologising Croatian warriors as sinless and righteous fighters.

Theoretical background

The war in Croatia unquestionably impacted the history of the Republic of Croatia. It has been fundamental for the country's nation- and state-building and the conformation of its society. In order to overcome uncertainty and restore order after the war trauma, the community became the social panorama through which they "defined and redefined their place in the world, thus the memory of the trauma began to form part of the core values, rules and central expectations of the community"².

The war has been a recurrent topic in Croatian theatre. "Presenting and re-interpreting collective historical myths, as well as fostering 'blood and soil' narratives, are the related functions of at least one type of wartime theatre". This type of theatre can be "an active mechanism able not only to reproduce but also to create the patterns of certain national unity"³. According to Blau, theatre is "a function of remembrance. Where memory is, theatre is"⁴. In addition, the repertoire is the embodied performance of memory, providing opportunities for the construction of counter-narratives and the creation of acts of resistance⁵.

For the purpose of trauma representation and event recreation, the theatre also becomes a witness, uses diverse tools and techniques, introduces documentary evidence and turns actors into *hyper-historians* who function as witnesses of the event who are treated in the play and "serve as a connecting link between the historical past and the 'fictional' performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event"⁶. By using documentary evidence, the theatre confronts the audience with facts, crosses the limits of artistic creativity and imagination, and steps into reality by exposing and denouncing violations of human rights, giving voice to the victims who have been silenced.

"The process of selection, memorization, or internalization, and transmission takes its place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of representation. ... They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge."⁷

² Sztompka, Piotr. 2000. Cultural Trauma the other Face of Social Change. *European Journal of Social Theory* 3(4), 457.

³ Dolečki, Jana / Halilbašić, Senad and Stefan Hulfeld. (eds.). 2018. *Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

⁴ Blau, Herbert. 1990. *The Audience*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 382.

⁵ Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire. Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁶ Rokem, Fredie. 2002. *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 13.

⁷ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20-21.

During the performance itself, the theatre, unlike other forms of art, creates *in situ* a connection and interaction between the audience and the actors, and gives way to reimagining and empathy, one of the main elements of education. It also recreates an unspeakable experience, in Walter Benjamin's terms⁸, creating empathy in the audience and beyond, making them act and react, and ultimately fostering the inclusion of those who were marginalised through silence. In this sense, the work of the directors with young people in the plays studied in this paper is extremely important. Other than empathy, the theatre should also bring the *emancipated spectator*⁹ to act.

To put it in the words of Croatian theatre director and theoretician Branko Gavella: "Every evening the theatre transforms an amorphous group of accidentally gathered individuals into a live, organised community that is turned into a collective, that awakens its anesthetised social impulses in an ideal group dramatic action that links and connects the actors and the audience, the authors and the listeners, the idea and its live carriers. Not to have a theatre means to be an empty, unconscious mob; to have bad theatre points to a deep crisis and the illness of the very foundations of a society"¹⁰.

With its multiplying effects during the performance and afterwards, by fostering debate and causing reactions, the theatre can thus participate in the memory production or constitute a space of alternative or contesting memory production.

Croatian cultural policies in the 1990s and their long-term effects

In order to understand the situation in Croatian theatre, it is essential to understand the country's cultural policies. In the 1990s Croatian cultural institutions favoured only one type of cultural production, with a strong national(ist) mark, and excluded all the others that did not fit into the ideological scheme. Public cultural institutions kept functioning on the bases of the former communist system and made their programmes according to the preferences of the political nomenclature. As Senker stressed, "as collective and public cultural activity that cannot survive without direct or indirect financial support, at least not in small and relatively poor national milieu such as ours, theatre is directly sensitive to all the social, economic, and especially political and state crises and changes." In the same line, "since it often enters very deeply in the aspects of social, political and religious life, the theatre is very necessary to every ethnic community and political regime"¹¹.

During the nineties and until today, there was no clear strategic planning, and the subsidised model of financing cultural programmes of national interest was kept, generally excluding those who did not produce neoconservative programmes¹². The financing was (and still is) on an annual basis, and the

⁸ Benjamin, Walter. 1963. The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov. *Chicago Review* 16(1), 80-101.

⁹ Rancière, Jacques. 2009. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London and New York: Verso.

¹⁰ Gavella, Branko. 2005. *Kazalište i javnost*. In: *Teorija glume*. Zagreb: Centar za dramsku umjetnost.

¹¹ Senker, Boris. 2001. *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio 1941.–1995*. Zagreb: Disput, 6.

¹² Vidović, Dea. 2010. Kulturne politike devedesetih u Hrvatskoj. *Kazalište: Časopis za kazališnu umjetnost* 13(41/42), 72-77.

greater part of it is spent on infrastructure maintenance and overhead expenses, and less for the programmes. Since theatres still depend on public (state and local) funding for up to 90% of their income¹³, this lack of reform of the cultural sector and financing made it impossible to develop a cultural system based on equal conditions for all. As a result, there has been growing polarisation between the dominant official and heavily subsidised cultural institutions and an independent scene oriented towards progressive and contemporary concepts. This is key for understanding the purpose of entering theatre councils or local or state administration posts in order to control official theatre programmes – one of the objects of study of this paper.

For the purpose of understanding the developments in Croatian theatre and playwriting, this paper historicises the developments in Croatian theatre in three periods: wartime and the post-war transition until Croatia started its European Union accession negotiations (1990-2004), the new wave of dealing with the past from 2005 to 2016, the reverse wave of the “conservative revolution” from 2016 to 2019, and the indications of a comeback of counter-memory as of February 2020, truncated by the pandemic outburst. For that purpose the study takes a three-pronged approach: it analyses the situation in Croatian society and the main events that affected political and social life; it explores Croatian theatre institutions, their functioning and their susceptibility to changes in the society; finally, it examines the staged plays, contextualises their plots by explaining the issues and events they treat, and examines the reactions the staged plays provoked, as well as how their effects multiplied beyond the theatre audience.

The war in Croatian theatre and playwriting (1990 - 2004)

The decade of the 1990s was marked by the war, but also by the authoritarian rule of a single party, the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ*), and its President Franjo Tuđman. The official narrative on the war was created in line with the statement of the then-President of the Supreme Court Milan Vuković that Croats could not have committed war crimes because Croatia was a victim of Serbian aggression and therefore led a just war¹⁴. Such monolithic thinking in service of the new state- and nation-building became the underlying motif that pervaded all the pores of the social life in Croatia, including theatre.

“Theatre thus became a platform for openly negotiating its political potentials, engagements and responsibilities in the context of very clearly denoted and mediated positions of Us vs. Them”¹⁵. In this light, “theatre directors were elected by loyalty to the party and national cause and they were supposed to prove their devotion and care for the new ideological pattern, a task they accepted with a lot of enthusiasm”¹⁶. If we take the Croatian National Theatre

¹³ Boko, Jasen. 2002. *Hrvatska drama devedesetih: povratak monologue*, in *Nova hrvatska drama: izbor iz drame devedesetih*, edited by Boko, Jasen. Zagreb: Znanje, 130.

¹⁴ Uzelac, Alan. 2001. Hrvatsko pravosuđe u devedesetima: od državne nezavisnosti do institucionalne krize. *Croatian Political Science Review* 38(2), 26.

¹⁵ Dolečki et al, *Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars*, 4.

¹⁶ Boko, *Hrvatska drama devedesetih*, 7.

(CNT) in Zagreb as a reflection of the situation in Croatian theatre, Boko¹⁷ states that CNT Zagreb entered the nineties with the 17th century poet Ivan Gundulić's romantic-heroic epic poem *Osman* (1992), and closed the decade with the same author's pastoral *Dubravka* – preserving national heritage. As Lukić stresses, during the 1990s the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb completely ignored the war, even though in 1995 the theatre building was physically shelled and its ballet dancers were wounded, while “a few floors downstairs it was constructing a new mythology by reciting verses from ancient times in fancy gowns”¹⁸. Thus, from the beginnings of the newly independent state we can envisage the role of the theatre in the production of memory and consequently in the overall nation-building.

National theatres were treated as an extended arm of politics, especially in the first half of the 1990s. The most prominent example is the celebration of President Tuđman's 75th birthday in the Croatian National Theater in Zagreb in 1997, including a performance in his honour, achieving “mythic stasis and national *univocality*”¹⁹. National mythology ruled the scene, and Croatian playwriting was perceived and promoted “for the cultural, moral and political training” of Croats²⁰. This closure to external influences also resulted in an increase of Croatian plays: from 1990 to 2000, a total of 400 Croatian plays were staged in Croatian official theatres, but only eight treated the topic of war²¹.

There were some exceptions, such as the Theatre &TD that included young playwrights in their repertoire, counterbalancing subsidised official theatres' programmes²². The 1990s also marked the beginning of an emerging independent scene, compensated for the lack of public financing by getting support from the Soros Foundation, which won them the label of “enemies of the state”. This clearly shows the atmosphere of the nineties²³, but this research argues that the same rhetoric was repeated in later periods.

When it comes to playwriting, Lukić covers this period in his book on “war trauma playwriting”, which is “not political theatre because the plays don't advocate for any political view, but they are focused on demythologising and questioning ruling social myths”²⁴. Three recurrent topics are identified:

a) The difficulty of former combatants to reintegrate into peacetime life is treated in Renato Ryan Orlić's *Between the Two Skies*,²⁵ where the characters prefer to stay within the safe walls of a mental hospital. Filip Šovagović also discussed the difficulties of resocialisation in peacetime society in his homecoming play *Brick*, while his *Birds* questioned the sanctity of the Homeland War. In Ivan

¹⁷ Boko, *Hrvatska drama devedesetih*.

¹⁸ Lukić, Darko. 2009. *Drama ratne trauma*. Zagreb: Meandar, 334.

¹⁹ Čale Feldman, Lada. 2018. *Within and Beyond Theatre: President Tuđman's Birthday Celebration at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb*, in *Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars*, edited by Dolečki, Jana / Halilbašić, Senad and Stefan Hulfeld. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 156.

²⁰ Boko, *Hrvatska drama devedesetih*, 10.

²¹ Boko, *Hrvatska drama devedesetih*, 14.

²² Boko, *Hrvatska drama devedesetih*, 11.

²³ Vidović, *Kulturne politike devedesetih u Hrvatskoj*.

²⁴ Lukić, *Drama ratne traume*, 15.

²⁵ All the plays and their respective stagings are listed in the bibliography in the order that they appear in the paper.

Vidić's *Big White Rabbit*, soldiers coming back from the warfront were also unable to find their place in society. Finally, in Nina Mitrović's *When We Dead Slay Each Other*, dead soldiers kept fighting in their graves, implying that the war does not finish when the soldiers surrender their arms.

b) Wartime rape, treated in Slobodan Šnajder's *Snake Skin* with regard to children of wartime rape, and *Marija's Pictures* by Lydija Scheuermann Hodak presented testimonies of women who were victims of sexual violence.

c) The massive forced evictions of Croatian Serbs "under state blessing"²⁶ at the beginning of the war. Miro Gavran was the first to write about this in his comedy *Eviction* in 1995. In Nina Mitrović's *Neighbourhood Upside Down*, a Croatian veteran is about to be evicted from an illegally occupied flat whose owner is a Serb, but both sides are portrayed as victims: one who was deprived of his ownership, and another who fought for the country and has nowhere to go. *Umbrella Organisation* by Ante Tomić and Ivica Ivanišević defied the myth of Croats as the only victims and touched upon several sensitive issues, among them the massive exodus of Croatian Serbs, and the rapid switch to radical patriotism. The general public, especially war veterans, harshly criticised it, a trend that would later establish this social group as the main mnemonic actors and the guardians of the mainstream narrative.

The reactions should be contextualised and serve as a transition to the next period to be analysed below. The play was staged in 2001, when Croatia started extraditing Croatian top military officials to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as part of the European Union integration conditions. The first crisis occurred with the indictment against General Mirko Norac in January 2001. In February, massive protests were held in Split, accusing the government of treason.²⁷ The play was staged only a few months later in Split, in the Croatian National Theatre, a particularly provocative fact given that national theatres are "the very altar of the temple where national mythologisation is supposed to be created and preserved"²⁸.

Dealing with the uncomfortable past in the society and in theatre (2005-2016)

In 2000, when a centre-left coalition took power after a decade-long rule of the right-wing HDZ, Croatia turned towards European integration and started cooperating with the ICTY. The government balanced itself between the pressure of the international community and the domestic pressure coming from the nationalist opposition. Therefore, the Prime Minister Ivica Račan had to present cooperation as a necessary means for the sake of EU accession. As soon as Croatia started cooperating in 2000, the Parliament adopted a Declaration on the Homeland War, stating that it was a "just and legitimate, defensive and liberating, and not an aggressive and conquering war".²⁹ Contrary to all expectations, the victory of the reformed nationalist HDZ party in 2003 was a

²⁶ Lukić, *Drama ratne traume*, 326.

²⁷ N.N. 2001. Miting u Splitu: Od potpore Norcu do zahtjeva za raspisivanjem izbora. *Monitor*, 12 February 2001

²⁸ Lukić, *Drama ratne traume*, 270.

²⁹ Deklaracija o Domovinskom ratu. 2000. *Narodne novine* 102, 13 October 2000 (accessed: 4 July 2018).

big step forward in cooperation with the Tribunal, while domestically promising support to the Croatian army members' defence, which involved "protecting the historical truth about the Homeland War"³⁰.

After extraditing the last fugitive Croatian national, General Gotovina, Croatia started its negotiations for EU accession in October 2005. To further strengthen the nationalist narrative, in 2006 the Parliament adopted a declaration on the final Operation Storm, carried out by Croatian troops in 1995, that liberated the Serb-occupied territories of Knin and surroundings, framing it as a "legitimate, victorious, antiterrorist, final and unforgettable battle", encouraging the scientific and educational community to transform the battle into a "part of the Croatian useful past for the future generations".³¹

The discourse enshrined in the two parliamentary declarations was further repeated in official statements, commemorations and history textbooks, thus reaffirming the 1990s mainstream narrative that Croatia was only defending itself. It consequently strengthened an atmosphere of denial of any human rights violations by the Croatian side in the society, which was made to believe that the ICTY cooperation was the last sacrifice at the altar of the homeland.

Fifteen years had passed since the declaration of Croatian independence, and ten years since the end of the war. A new generation of playwrights and directors appeared, "that had nothing to do with wars, but was the victim of these wars and had the courage to ask the questions regarding what really happened from the nineties until today"³².

One of the first examples was the member of an earlier generation active since the mid-80s: Mate Matišić's *Posthumous trilogy*, staged in 2005 and 2006, discussed topics such as mafia trading with the human remains of the victims of the war, the war veterans who are not a 'lost generation', as in the previous period, but idle retirees who live from state pensions (*Sons Die First*), and the issue of wartime rape, but this time committed by Croatian soldiers against a Serb woman (*Woman Without a Body*). The defenders of the mainstream narrative reacted promptly, stressing that the plays "pretentiously concentrated on non-Croat victims... thus imposing guilt on the Croatian nation as a whole because there is not a single positive character of Croatian ethnicity"³³.

The next noteworthy project, *Generation 91-95*, staged in 2009, was based on the novel by Boris Dežulović³⁴, inspired by the conflict between Croat and Bosniak (Muslim) armed forces during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995). The central plot is a face-off of two groups of soldiers on a secret mission, dressed in the enemy army's uniform in the summer of 1993. The actors were twelve young men born during the war, between 1991 and 1995. The play points to the fact that the sides in the Bosnian war were people with similar names and faces,

³⁰ Subotić, Jelena. 2009 *Hijacked Justice: Dealing with the Past in the Balkans*. Ithaca- London: Cornell University Press, 99.

³¹ *Deklaracija o Oluji*. 2006. *Narodne Novine* 76. 10 July 2006 (accessed: 4 July 2018).

³² Munjin, Bojan. 2012. Političko kazalište danas u ime svih nas. *Kazalište: Časopis za kazališnu umjetnost* 15(49/50), 34.

³³ Nikčević, Sanja. 2015. *Odjeci Domovinskog rata u hrvatskom kazalištu i drami*. *Hrvatska revija* 3 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

³⁴ Dežulović, Boris. 2005. *Jebo sad hiljadu dinara*. Zagreb: Europapress holding.

who speak similar, if not the same, languages. Thus, an enemy's identity is only the uniform he wears, and the identity of one group in opposition to the other is artificially constructed through military drill, school and the media. Furthermore, the best target group for this drill are precisely children and young people, extremely malleable material for the construction of identity and the incitement of hate. Šeparović plays with that fact by working with actors of the age between boys and men, who are simultaneously old enough to keep playing war and to go to a real one. In the second part, in a fictionalised dialogue that was based on a nine-month workshop with the actors, they concluded that the war was not inevitable, thus questioning the official narrative that Croatia was only defending itself from an external aggression.

Trilogy on Croatian Fascism, directed by Oliver Frlić and presented as such,³⁵ is the first attempt of direct demythologisation of the official narrative, by offering a counter-memory and reminding of the events that have been systematically denied by the state institutions, the media, and consequently, society. The first part is an adaptation of Euripides's *Bacchae*,³⁶ referring to the original plot, when the gods drive humans to insanity and incite them to slaughter. It starts with a scene of four actors hanging in closed bags with the tags of victims who were (some even still today) waiting for justice: Milan Levar, former Croatian Army officer and witness at the trial against Croatian Army officers for crimes committed against Serb civilians, killed by a bomb placed under his car in 2000; Josip Reihl-Kir, peace-seeking Osijek Police Chief killed in 1991 by the Croatian side while trying to prevent the conflict between Croats and Serbs in the Osijek area; Aleksandra Zec, a twelve-year-old Serb girl murdered by members of the Croatian Police reserve unit in the outskirts of Zagreb after witnessing the execution of her father;³⁷ and an unknown Croatian soldier, the only survivor, who ended up in a wheelchair and carried the three bodies along as a burden. The play finally raised the issue of the torture of prisoners of war and civilians at the Lora Port Military Prison in Split, the city where it was staged in 2008 at the Summer Festival. It was first cancelled by the festival director Milan Štrlić as a precaution, since in the performance Frlić referred to a statement by Ivo Sanader (Prime Minister at that time) at the previously mentioned protests in Split against the Hague Tribunal in 2001, while in opposition. When the mainstream media published the news on the cancellation of the performance, Prime Minister Sanader himself "cancelled the cancellation" of the performance. This eventually turned out to be one of Frlić's main strategies: spurring debate in society before the staging of his plays.

The second part, *Aleksandra Zec*, staged in 2014, used photos from the crime scene and testimonies of the perpetrators, acquitted for procedural errors. The pronounced lines were excerpts of the authentic perpetrators' depositions, mixed

³⁵ The plays were individually staged earlier: *Bacchae* (2008), *Aleksandra Zec* (2014), *Hrvatsko glumište* (2014)

³⁶ The 2015 *Bacchae*, which formed part of the *Trilogy*, was not the same performance as the 2008 *Bacchae* staged in Split: it was not even a remake in proper sense, and was created with an almost completely different cast.

³⁷ The killers of Milan Levar were never found; the killer of Josip Reihl-Kir, Antun Gudelj, was found guilty after 17 years and 3 retrials; the criminal trial for the murder of Aleksandra Zec was dismissed on grounds of procedural errors, but the surviving Zec children sued the Republic of Croatia in a civil suit and, near the end of the court case in 2004, the Croatian government agreed to a settlement and compensation of 1,500,000 Croatian kuna (200,000 euros).

with the imaginary lines of a family about to be killed. What is particularly important about *Aleksandra Zec* is the public discussion provoked beyond the theatre audience. At the premiere, veterans' associations organised protests in front of the theatre, carrying banners with messages such as "402 Croatian children killed by *Chetniks*",³⁸ "86 children killed in Vukovar", "When are you going to stage a play about Croatian victims?" or "Aren't 402 children killed by savage *Chetnik* bombings against civilian targets enough for you, Frljić?"³⁹ The force of the mainstream narrative is seen in the messages of the protesters: instead of interpreting the play as a protest against the killing of an innocent child, it was perceived as *serbophilia*, as an attempt of vilifying Croats and underestimating Croatian victims. The performance itself started with the same question by an actress to the audience: "Why haven't you staged a play about the Croatian children killed in the war?"

Finally, the last part, *Croatian Theatre*, which also premiered in 2014, dealt with the responsibility of the theatre itself, which instead of being the ultimate platform of the freedom of expression during the 'dark years' stayed silent, relativised or even fostered war crimes. This part provoked particularly harsh criticism by theatre professionals, especially those who were denounced for their role in the 1990s in the play. Again, the only character present in the three parts, Aleksandra Zec, appears in the final scene, pointing a machine gun at the actors who are dancing and having fun, calling upon their conscience.

In 2015 the three plays were eventually staged together as a *Trilogy* at the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka and included the speeches of current leading political figures and pointed to the continuous and systematic denial of the dark side of the Croatian war.

Trilogy on Croatian Fascism also had an impact on the theatre itself, and other plays that followed treated other sensitive issues from the Homeland War and further opened space for debate. Such is the case of *The Fall*, directed by Miran Kurspahić, which premiered in 2016 at the Zagreb Youth Theatre. It also used original transcripts of the telephone conversations between the Croatian political and military leadership (including President Franjo Tuđman) and the Lieutenant Colonel Mile Dedaković, commander of the defence of Vukovar, the town in Eastern Slavonia almost completely destroyed by Serbian forces at the beginning of the war in 1991. Vukovar symbolises the sacrifice of Croatia, laid on the altar of the homeland for its freedom and independence. The yearly commemoration of the fall of the town on 18 November, Remembrance Day of the Sacrifice of Vukovar, is one of the most important Homeland War commemorations, built into the very foundations of the creation of Croatian nation-state, with a strong mark of victimisation that sends the message that Croatia was a target of aggression by a superior enemy. The play evolved around the issue of treason and questioned the responsibility of the state leadership for the fall of the town for not having sent the indispensable help for the town's defence. The first act was played in two different rooms at the same time: the

³⁸ The term 'Chetnik,' which historically mainly refers to Serb royalist and nationalist guerrillas during the Second World War, was widely used in the 1990s as an epithet by Croats and Croatian media to refer to all Serbs.

³⁹ Derk, Denis. 2014. *Kraj predstave Aleksandra Zec publika dočekala u dubokoj šutnji*. *Večernji list*, 15 April 2014 (accessed: 6 July 2018).

first room shows the events from the perspective of the state leadership, and the second from the perspective of the command of the Vukovar defence, thus implying that there are different versions of the truth. Its second part is “a complete historical fabrication of an alternative history of 1993 and an entirely different outcome of the war, in which the City of Zagreb, President Tuđman and his headquarters are surrounded by enemy forces, awaiting the final fall”.⁴⁰ In his last hours, the President is faced with his conscience regarding the fall of Vukovar, thus alluding to his personal responsibility, a taboo in the Croatian society. The play started and finished with original recordings by Radio Vukovar journalist Siniša Glavašević, one of the symbols of the tragedy, who was reporting until the last day and was executed by Serbian forces. As in *Aleksandra Zec*, by pronouncing the lines from the transcripts, the play created an atmosphere of extreme anxiety. The spectators could observe that on the stage the defence of Vukovar was hoping for salvation until the last moment, knowing that in fact it never came.

Another work worth mentioning is the last part of the omnibus *Que sera, sera*, titled *The General*, by Mate Matišić, which premiered in June 2015 at the Satirical Theatre Kerempuh in Zagreb. A Croatian Army general explains to the Croatian President that: “This is not the country that I fought for... If we could abolish it and start from scratch... So that it could become as we had imagined it when it did not yet exist...”⁴¹. In the earlier plays the disillusionment generally came from war veterans, who were enlisted or voluntarily defended the country. But in this case, it was the first time that an (imaginary) army general showed his discontent with the country he fought for. It is also very interesting to observe that while in theatre the imaginary veterans are the ones who offer a counter narrative, in real life the veteran organisations are in fact the main guardians of the (still) monolithic memory on the Homeland War.

One step forward, two steps back: the conservative revolution (2016-2019)

The wave of counter-memory in theatre soon came to an end. The rise of the conservatives started in 2013 and gradually grew, until it reached its peak in 2016 with the radical right government coming to power.

The first warning was a wave of strong and organised activism by a Catholic civil society organisation called *In the Name of the Family*, which at first advocated for the issues characteristic for such groups: the initiative to introduce the definition of marriage as “a union between a man and a woman” in the Constitution in 2013, the object of the second referendum ever organised in the independent Croatia (after the EU accession referendum), where the majority of citizens voted in favour⁴². Soon afterwards, they also started to intervene in other fields. In 2013 they supported the war veterans in a series of protests against introducing Cyrillic signs in Vukovar on public institutions according to

⁴⁰ The play booklet.

⁴¹ Matišić, Mate. 2015. *General* - part of the omnibus *K'o živ, k'o mrtav (Que sera, sera)* Zagreb: Archive of the Satirical Theatre Kerempuh, 104

⁴² Petričušić, Antonija / Čehulić, Mateja and Dario Čepo. 2017. Gaining Political Power by Utilizing Opportunity Structures: An Analysis of the Conservative Religious-Political Movement in Croatia. *Croatian Political Science Review* 54(4), 61-84.

the Constitutional Law on National Minorities. The situation worsened when the government decided to install the signs and the citizens, mostly veterans, started destroying them. This resulted in conflicts with the police and many injured protesters⁴³. The peak of the protests occurred at the annual commemoration of 18 November in Vukovar, when the President Ivo Josipović and the Prime Minister Zoran Milanović were blocked by the veterans from participating in the commemoration walk, so there were two separate walks. After that, the veterans, supported by the Catholic Church and religious groups, gathered signs to call for a referendum on the issue of Cyrillic in Vukovar, but it was eventually rejected by the Constitutional Court.

The shift toward conservatism started to spread to the field of education and culture. In 2013, under the pressure of religious groups, a poster with a lesbian Virgin Mary advertising the play *Fine Dead Girls* was withdrawn from the Zagreb Drama Theatre Gavella. The play was about a young lesbian couple in Zagreb who face hostility from neighbours and family, including a religious fundamentalist father.

In 2014, while the centre-left coalition was in power, new directors of the Zagreb and Rijeka Croatian National Theatres were elected, Dubravka Vrgoč and Oliver Frljić, respectively. Frljić announced that the CNT Rijeka would become a theatre of “a liberal, plural, different Rijeka that this City owes to its future”, while Vrgoč presented a more moderate approach, offering her stage in Zagreb for discussions with European intellectuals⁴⁴.

The change of government marked a strong turn to the right in Croatian politics and society. In October 2015, during the election campaign in Rijeka, the then-HDZ leader Tomislav Karamarko stated that “unfortunately, the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka is neither Croatian nor national any more, and it has become a space of cultural occupation that mocks Croatian culture and the nation” announcing that this would change after HDZ’s electoral victory and epitomising Frljić as an enemy of the people. As a response, Frljić put a banner on the building of the CNT Rijeka reading “Karamarko, come for Sex”, inviting him to the play with the same title and telling him to cool down.⁴⁵

HDZ eventually won the elections and formed a coalition government with technocrat Tihomir Orešković as Prime Minister, while his Deputy was Tomislav Karamarko, HDZ conservative president. The new government appointed Zlatko Hasanbegović, a revisionist historian, as Minister of Culture in February 2016. Almost five thousand renowned culture professionals, gathered in a civil society group called *Kulturnjaci*, signed an appeal to the Prime Minister for the removal of Hasanbegović, “due to his lack of experience and lack of knowledge of the work of local and national cultural institutions nor European funds, and his public statements expressing extremist ideological standpoints contrary to the

⁴³ Ljubojević, Ana. 2016. Speak up, Write out: Language and Populism in Croatia. *Narratives of Identity in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 40, 29-55.

⁴⁴ Munjin, Bojan. 2014. Između nacije, sudbine i umjetnosti. Promjene u Hrvatskom narodnom kazalištu u Zagrebu i Rijeci. *Kazalište: Časopis za kazališnu umjetnost* 17(59/60), 106.

⁴⁵ Zebić, Enis. 2015. Frljić za RSE: Karamarko bi spaljivao i nepoćudne knjige. *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 13 October 2015 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

Croatian Constitution”.⁴⁶ But having Hasanbegović as Minister of Culture gave legitimacy to conservative groups, which gained more and more power in the society and started to wage an open war against “the enemies of the Homeland”, whose strongest symbol in theatre was unmistakably Oliver Frljić, who openly challenged the official memory of a heroic and innocent nation. Very soon, in March 2016, someone broke into his and his girlfriend’s apartment, he started receiving threats, he was spat on and physically assaulted, and he received a phone call with a bomb threat in CNT Rijeka. The Minister of Culture Hasanbegović reacted by stating: “everybody in the public sphere, especially those who are in charge of cultural institutions, should have responsibility towards the public and stop burdening the society with nonsense”.⁴⁷ In a different context, the HDZ Secretary General Milijan Brkić sent a message to those who claimed they don’t feel safe in Croatia to go somewhere where they will be safe.⁴⁸ But this government was short-lived, since in June 2016 it was defeated in a vote of no-confidence due to the conflict of interest of Vice Premier Karamarko. The same party, HDZ, won the elections in September, but with a more moderate Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, who replaced Zlatko Hasanbegović as Minister of Culture, but kept him as a Member of Parliament.

In April 2017, Frljić’s play *Our Violence and Your Violence*,⁴⁹ treating the issue of Europe closing borders to refugees, was performed at the Croatian National Theatre in Split as part of the Festival of Croatian Drama and Author Theatre. The play included a scene of a naked woman wearing a hijab, taking the Croatian flag out of her vagina, and Jesus Christ descending from the cross and raping a Muslim woman. This caused reactions both from the Catholic Church asking the festival organisers to ban the play⁵⁰ and the Coordination of Veterans’ Associations filing criminal charges against Frljić, claiming that the play offended citizens on religious and national grounds. In front of the theatre protesters held banners reading: “Do your performance in Serbia”, “Don’t provoke us”, “In war and peace we are ready”, “This play insults me”. Also, a group of protesters entered the theatre where they sang patriotic songs, while the rest of the audience responded with the children’s song *Kad bi svi ljudi na svijetu*, written in 1963 by Arsen Dedić, considered an anthem to peace. The police eventually led the protesters out, and the play was staged, but it clearly confirmed that the veterans are very important mnemonic actors who deem themselves as a moral authority and consider themselves qualified to intervene in cultural policies.

On the other hand, given their contribution in the defence of the country, the institutions started yielding to their pressure. As a reaction, the Ministry of Culture issued a press release stating that: “by respecting the artistic freedom and aesthetic standards of each artist, they should take into account religious

⁴⁶ Derk, Denis. 2016. Premijeru dali apel za smjenu Hasanbegovića: On nije ni demokrat ni antifašist. *Večernji list*, 4 February 2016 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁴⁷ HINA. 2016. Intendant Frljić upozorio na šokantnu i prijeteću ilustraciju koju je dobio. *Telegram*, 12 March 2016 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁴⁸ D.H. 2016. Brkić Pupovcu: Ako se osjeća ugroženo, neka ode tamo gdje neće biti ugrožen. *Index*, 8 March 2016 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁴⁹ It was a co-production of HNK Rijeka, Wiener Festwochen and HAU Berlin, premiered in 2016

⁵⁰ Pavlić, Vedran. 2017. Controversial Play Performed Despite Protests and Bomb Threat. *Total Croatia News*, 25 April 2017 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

and national sentiment, as well as the basic human rights of every individual and social group.”⁵¹ Also in 2017, the Association of Croatian Veterans insisted that the organisers move the date of the Theatre Night, scheduled for 18 November, because it overlapped with the Remembrance Day of the Sacrifice of Vukovar, under the explanation that “some people will have fun while others will visit graves and light candles and honour the victims... and some will even enjoy plays whose authors are Serbs”.⁵² The festival was moved to 25 November.

Very soon, MP Hasanbegović stated that the director of CNT Zagreb Drama Ivica Buljan was inspired by his colleague Oliver Frlić and used public money to transform the CNT into “the headquarters of pseudo leftist architheatrical activism”,⁵³ and the *Vigilare* religious NGO protested against the poster for the CNT Zagreb annual subscription, stating that it should “preserve national and cultivate classical culture and not to carry out provocations by banalising the values of the majority of Croatian people”, labelling it as “the *frlićisation* of Croatia”. The poster showed an actress and a man with covered face, which *Vigilare* associated with sexual intercourse, “promoting fornication, vulgarity and trash in the Croatian public space”.⁵⁴

In June 2017 Hasanbegović founded the new party *Neovisni za Hrvatsku (Independent for Croatia)* and very soon entered Zagreb City Assembly. In December 2017 he regained a decision-making position in culture by getting appointed as the member of the Theatre Council of the CNT Zagreb, 51% financed by the City. The actors of the CNT Zagreb signed a petition against Hasanbegović, labelling his appointment as an “ideological vengeance and devastation” of the leading Croatian theatre.⁵⁵

In January 2018 Frlić staged Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* at the Kerempuh Satirical Theatre in Zagreb. In Croatian society, “which is on an obsessive quest for its identity, Pirandello’s drama on theatre acquires novel meanings. As one of the co-signers of the Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals, Pirandello may come upon ideologically fertile grounds in Croatia, at least based on the number of (public) actors who are, though not necessarily consciously, in search of him.”⁵⁶ Frlić brought the main protagonists of this new radical wave into his play, including Zlatko Hasanbegović and Željka Markić, the leader of the conservative religious group *In the Name of the Family*. Throughout the play the characters swore that they did everything “in the name of the family”, which had a double meaning – the fact that the original text treated the topic of family

⁵¹ Press Release of the Ministry of Culture regarding the events at the Festival of Croatian Plays Marulić Days 22 April 2017.

⁵² N.N. 2017. Zbog zahtjeva braniteljske udruge Noć kazališta prebacili na drugi datum. *Večernji list*, 21 September 2017 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁵³ HINA. 2017. Hasanbegović: Zagrebački HNK je stožer pseudoljevičarskog prakazališnog aktivizma. *Novi List*, 15 September 2017 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁵⁴ Ivanov, Davor. 2017. Plakat za novu sezonu HNK uznemirio duhove: "Možda se oni koji brinu o ćudoređu sada približe zgradi kazališta". *Dnevnik.hr*, 20 September 2017 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁵⁵ HINA. 2017. Glumci Drame HNK-a protiv imenovanja Hasanbegovića u Kazališno vijeće: Nadamo se da rad nije sasvim devalvirao u srazu s individualnim fanatizmom. *Novi List*, 30 December 2017 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁵⁶ Satirical Theatre Kerempuh - about the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* <http://www.kazalistekerempuh.hr/repertoar/sest-likova/>

relations, while also referring to the name of the association.⁵⁷ Thus Frljić offered an image of what Croatian society had turned into.

The situation worsened even further when Hasanbegović's former Vice Minister, Ana Lederer, was appointed Head of the Zagreb Office for Culture in June 2018. She immediately stated that Frljić and his “political activism cannot be financed with the taxpayers’ money”, stressing that Frljić hated anything that had to do with Croatia as a state.⁵⁸ Frljić considered that Lederer sent an open message to all the directors of Zagreb theatres that are co-financed by the City of Zagreb not to work with him, and that she would use her power for revenge against political opponents.⁵⁹

This did not directly affect Frljić, since he already had artistic engagements in Germany and Austria until 2021. However, it definitely affected Croatian theatre. British daily *The Guardian* published an article on “Europe’s hottest theatre directors”, stressing that Frljić is “one of the continent’s most controversial theatre directors – and one of its most necessary”.⁶⁰ Thus, while Frljić continued his professional path in Europe’s renowned theatres, the director of the Croatian National Theatre Zagreb, Dubravka Vrgoč, in order to preserve her position and appease the conservatives, staged a play by Miro Gavran, a mainstream playwright. At the press conference before the premiere, Gavran stated “that he tried to have as little politics as possible in the play” and that “the audience should not fear that he would ‘bother’ them with politics, given that the majority of our citizens try to escape politics, especially when they want to spend a night at the theatre”.⁶¹ This message is in line with the trend established in the 1990s: the official theatre should be loyal to the national cause, or at least not defy it.

In parallel to the institutional pressure against the dissonant voices, in November 2018, at the monastery of Herzegovina Franciscans in Zagreb, a play was staged based on the life of Slobodan Praljak, on the occasion of the first anniversary of his performative suicide shortly after being found guilty for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The author and director, Slobodan Prosperov Novak, stated that Praljak's “loyalty to his principles leaves us breathless”. He also remarked that “higher national values are being drawn into mud and purposefully questioned and doubted... The core of the culture should be developed around institutional culture that should be based on a national cultural policy”. Finally, he concluded that Croatian culture should go upwards –the same direction in which the Croatian general Slobodan Praljak rose to the skies.⁶² Very soon Ana Lederer and Zlatko Hasanbegović were dismissed from their duties as Head of Zagreb Office for

⁵⁷ Bajruši, Robert. 2018. [Bujančeva svadba u Kerempuhu](#). *Jutarnji list*, 21 January 2018 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁵⁸ Pofuk, Branimir. 2018. [Frljić mrzi svakoga i sve što ima veze s Hrvatskom](#). *Večernji list*, 14 June 2018 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁵⁹ Borković, Goran. 2018. [Zagreb nije Ana Lederer](#). *Novosti*, 23 June 2018.

⁶⁰ Trueman, Matt. 2018. [Move over Ivo van Hove: Europe's Hottest Theatre Directors](#). *The Guardian*, 3 September 2018 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁶¹ Ožegović, Nina. 2018. [Miro Gavran: Živim odmijenim životom obiteljskoga čovjeka koji pripada neupadljivoj srednjoj klasi](#). *Tportal*, 2 November 2018 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

⁶² Magaš, Vjekoslav. 2018. [Slobodan Prosperov Novak: Zašto sam napisao monodramu za svoga prijatelja Praljka?](#) *Hrvatski tjednik*, 27 November 2018 (accessed: 24 September 2021).

Culture and member of the CNT Zagreb Council respectively, since Hasanbegović's party voted against the mayor's city budget plans for 2019. By the end of this period the counter-memory was almost ousted from Croatian theatre and it was questionable when it would be back, or in which form.

The comeback of counter-memory? What kind? *The Hotel Zagorje*.

On 14 February 2020, *The Hotel Zagorje* premiered: written and staged by Anica Tomić and Jelena Kovačić, based on the novel of the same name by Ivana Bodrožić⁶³, a play about the memory of women who waited and endured during and after the Homeland War. Unlike in the case of *Aleksandra Zec* and *The Fall*, which confront the audience with the facts of a crime or a traumatic event, *The Hotel Zagorje* offers a different, female, and emotional perspective. The original plot is about a girl who went for a summer vacation and never returned home because her hometown, Vukovar, was under siege during the years of the war. In 1992, "after the family hospitality expired"⁶⁴, some 500 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Vukovar, mostly women, children and elderly people, were forced to settle in tiny hotel rooms in the former political school for communist officials named after Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito, better known as *The Hotel Zagorje*, while men stayed at the frontline and many never returned. This temporary solution became their home for several years. The play reconstructs the life of these women where "the young girls waited for their fathers to return, the women were waiting for their husbands, waiting for the war to end, waiting to return to their homes, for somebody to reply to their mournful letters, at least to see them read by somebody"⁶⁵. Today the hotel is abandoned and devastated and in the play its images of the current state alternate with warm, sad and sometimes even funny memories of Ivana, the main character, and her family and childhood friends. The robustness of the building and its current state of devastation and abandonment is apparently contrasted with the fragility of women who had to endure, but the consequences that this experience left on them are precisely symbolised by the present state of the hotel.

The Hotel Zagorje hopefully marks a new moment in dealing with the memory in the Croatian theatre. First, because it marks the reappearance of memory in theatre after a period of silencing any dissonant voice, although this potential new wave has been stopped by the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. Second, because it opens a new crack – a not so controversial memory, but still a different kind of memory: not a heroic memory of a victorious nation, nor a narrative of innocent victims of external aggression, but the memory of refugee women and children who are today adults, trying to give a new meaning to what happened in their childhood, and the double tragedy that they lived in the Hotel Zagorje: the tragic fall of their hometown and the subsequent displacement, as well as the lack of empathy of other Croats towards them, thus questioning the whole legacy of the Homeland War.

⁶³ Bodrožić, Ivana. 2010. *Hotel Zagorje*, Zagreb: Profil.

⁶⁴ Tomić, Anica and Jelena Kovačić. 2020. *Hotel Zagorje / The Hotel Tito*, manuscript - courtesy of the authors, 2.

⁶⁵ Tomić and Kovačić, *Hotel Zagorje*, 2

Conclusions

This paper shows how Croatian theatre treated the topic of war, a topic that is at the core of Croatian identity since its road to independence. After the first period when Croatian playwriting was more focused on war trauma, the theatre opened a crack in the society and provoked controversy in and beyond the audience by bringing up the issues and events that were systematically denied, contesting the hegemonic narrative of a victorious and victim nation. This wave was made possible due to a combination of factors – the main one being the European Union accession negotiations, when Croatia was under meticulous scrutiny regarding its democratic standards. After entering the EU in 2013, we observe a wave of reversals, a conservative revolution that targeted educational and cultural institutions to silence every dissonant voice: through public protests, gathering signatures for referendums, appeals to the institutions for anything they consider to be not according to their values, and even occupying decision-making posts in strategic areas and influencing theatre programmes.

In spite of this reverse trend and adverse reactions, the counter-memory shown in the theatre crossed the walls and spread to a much bigger audience than that actually watching the plays. It addressed a wider society by contesting the mainstream narrative, even if in a fictional way, creating the potential for a future memory change. In spatial and literal terms, the "coming out" of the theatre to the streets points to the potential of theatre as "politics by other means"⁶⁶. In figurative terms this "coming out" shows the flip side of the Croatian narrative that still has to gain its space in the social memory and it is currently finding ways to do so.

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⁶⁶ Boko, Jasen. 2003. Suvremeno hrvatsko kazalište u ogledalu medija. *Kazalište: Časopis za kazališnu umjetnost* 7(13/14), 130-32.

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Plays (in the order that they appear in the paper):

- Renato Ryan Orlić: *Između dva neba (Between the Two Skies)*, director Jasmin Novljaković, Teatar ITD, premiere: 2002.
- Filip Šovagović: *Cigla (Brick)*, director Paolo Magelli, Croatian National Theatre Split, premiere: 1998.
- Ivan Vidić: *Veliki bijeli zec (Big White Rabbit)*, Zagreb Youth Theatre, director: Ivica Kunčević, premiere: 3 February 2004.

- Nina Mitrović: *Kad se mi mrtvi pokoljemo (When We Dead Slay Each Other)*, dir. Saša Anočić, Zagreb Satirical Theatre Kerempuh, premiere: 2004.
- Slobodan Šnajder: *Zmijin svlak - Die Schlagenhaut (Snake Skin)* director: Roberto Ciulli, Theatre an der Ruhr, Tübingen, premiere: 1996.
- Miro Gavran: *Deložacija (Eviction)*, director Robert Raponja, Teatar &TD, Zagreb, premiere: 1995.
- Nina Mitrović: *Komšiluk naglavačke (Neighborhood Upside Down)* director: Saša Anočić, Croatian National Theatre Rijeka, premiere: 2003.
- Ante Tomić and Ivica Ivanišević: *Krovna udruga (Umbrella Organisation)*, director: Mario Kovač, Croatian National Theatre Split, premiere: 2001.
- Mate Matišić: *Sinovi umiru prvi, (Sons Die First)* director: Božidar Viočić, Zagreb Drama Theatre Gavella, premiere: 2005.
- Mate Matišić: *Ničiji sin (No One's Son)*, director: Vinko Brešan, Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka, premiere: 2006.
- Mate Matišić: *Žena bez tijela (The Woman Without a Body)* director: Dražen Ferencina, Agit-Kult d.o.o. Varaždin, premiere: 2006.
- Boris Dežulović, Goran Ferčec and Borut Šeparović: *Generation 91-95*, Zagreb Youth Theatre; director: Borut Šeparović; premiere: 24 November 2009.
- Trilogija o hrvatskom fašizmu (Trilogy on Croatian Fascism)*, director: Oliver Frljić, dramaturgy: Marin Blažević, Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka, premiere: 2008/2014.
- Pad (The Fall)*, Zagreb Youth Theatre, director: Miran Kurspahić, premiere: 7 May 2016.
- Mate Matišić, Svetislav Basara and Hristo Bojčev: *K'o živ, k'o mrtav (Que sera, sera)*, director: Dino Mustafić, premiere: 5 June 2015.
- Naše nasilje, vaše nasilje (Our Violence, Your Violence)* director: Oliver Frljić, premiere: 29 May 2016 (Vienna).
- Slobodan Prosperov Novak: *Ja, Slobodan Praljak (I, Slobodan Praljak)* premiere: 29 November 2018.
- Anica Tomić and Jelena Kovačić: *Hotel Zagorje*, Gavella Theatre, director: Anica Tomić, premiere: 14 February 2020.