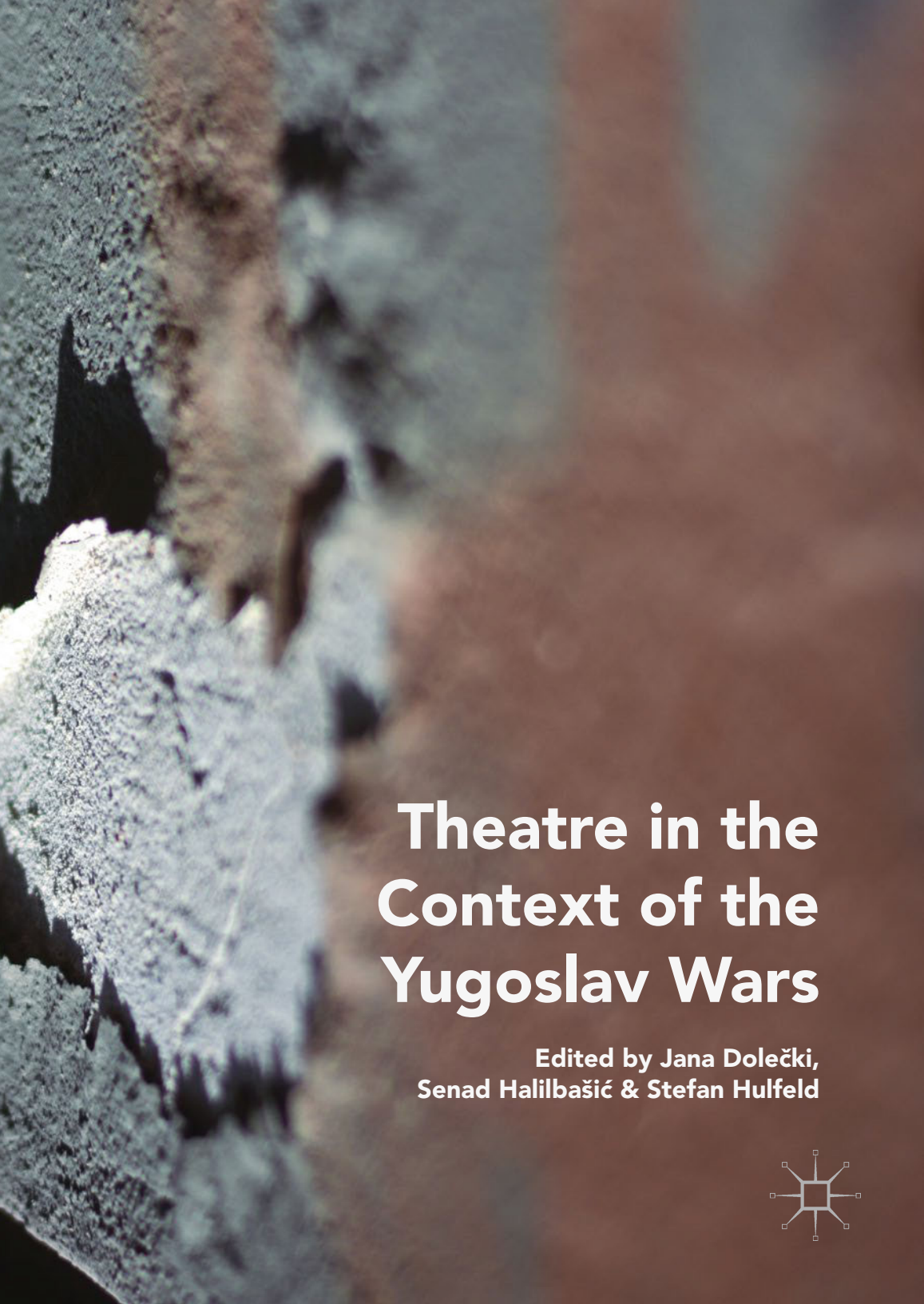

Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars

Edited by Jana Dolečki,
Senad Halilbašić & Stefan Hulfeld

Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars

Jana Dolečki · Senad Halilbašić
Stefan Hulfeld
Editors

Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Jana Dolečki
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria

Senad Halilbašić
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria

Stefan Hulfeld
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria

This research and publication project was funded by the Federal Chancellery of Austria

Bundeskanzleramt

ISBN 978-3-319-98892-4 ISBN 978-3-319-98893-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98893-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018951568

Cover illustration: Senchy/Getty Images

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

First of all, we wish to express our sincerest gratitude to the authors, artists and theatre activists who contributed to this volume—without their remarkable efforts, their questions and comments and their encouragements, this book could not have been made.

We would like to thank the Federal Chancellery of Austria for financially supporting a panel discussion with Snježana Banović, Dino Mustafić and Gorčin Stojanović at the 2016 MESS festival in Sarajevo, and for furthering our work on this book by granting us the resources for finalizing this project in due time and scope. For the panel discussion in Sarajevo, we also owe thanks to the Austrian Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Furthermore, we are indebted to the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, and to our own Department of Theatre, Film and Media Studies, at the University of Vienna. They provided significant means of support, both large and small, which were needed as much as they were appreciated: First, in supporting the conference *Theatre During the Yugoslav Wars*, and, second, in lending a hand towards the publication of this ensuing volume. The Austrian association Akademie an der Grenze and its chairman Dr. Klaus Pumberger were staunch partners in securing necessary funds for this project. We would also like to acknowledge the Center for Doctoral Studies of the University of Vienna and their help in organizing the above-mentioned conference, as well as our partner, the Volkstheater Wien.

We also extend our thanks to the fellow Ph.D. candidates at the Department for Theatre, Film and Media Studies, who, time and again, readily engaged in discussion about our contributions to this volume during our research meetings. We are grateful to the students of the class *Theatre During Yugoslav Wars*, taught in the 2015/2016 fall term, since it was their vivid interest in the topic that proved to us the importance of this project, and of giving visibility to the field of research tackled in the following chapters. We hope to have contributed to paving a path for new generations of academics who wish to work on these topics.

We thank Erika Munk for her insightful comments and suggestions at different stages of our work, and we are also grateful for the encouragement given by Marvin Carlson whenever he happened to be in Vienna. Furthermore, we are deeply grateful to Paul Butcher for proofreading our volume and responding to our concerns, linguistic and otherwise, in such a prompt and capable manner. We also thank Lina Dokuzovic, for meticulous inspection of several chapters of this book and for providing us with added knowledge on side.

Finally, we wish to thank our publisher, Palgrave Macmillan, for accepting this volume and placing it within such an inspiring environment in its publishing program, next to the monographs of e.g. Silvija Jestrovic, Milija Gluhovic or Sonja Arsham Kuftinec, all publications with which this book shares interests and perspectives. We especially thank the Commissioning Editor of the Literature and Theatre section, Tomas René, for his trust, advice and patience, and the Editorial Assistant Vicky Bates, who led us competently and with ease through the large amounts of paperwork that tend to go along with the creation of a volume such as this.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Snježana Banović is a theatre director and Professor at the Academy for Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb. She has a Ph.D. in theatre studies and has published on theatre history. She has directed numerous plays in Croatia and elsewhere. Her books include *Država i njezino kazalište* [The State and its Theatre] and *Kazalište krize* [Theatre of Crises].

Ana Dević is a sociologist, a senior Marie Sklodowska-Curie fellow at the KU-University of Leuven. Ana's Ph.D. is from the University of California in San Diego. Relevant publications include "What Nationalism Has Buried: Powerlessness, Culture, and Discontent in Late Yugoslav Socialism," in Stubbs et al. *Social Inequalities and Discontent* (2016).

Jana Dolečki is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department for Theatre-, Film- and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. Her current research focuses on wartime theatre in Croatia and Serbia.

Milena Dragićević Šešić is a Professor and Head of the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Art Management at the University of Arts Belgrade, and the former President of the latter. She has published about 150 essays and 16 books, some of which have been translated. Book titles include *Art and Alternative*, *Neo-folk Culture*, *Art Management in Turbulent Times* and *Vers les nouvelles politiques culturelles.*

Lada Čale Feldman is a Professor in the Department for Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, where she teaches drama, theatre and performance studies.

She has published and edited a dozen books in both Croatian and English, dealing with the aforementioned interests from political-anthropological and feminist perspectives.

Senad Halilbašić is a University Assistant and Ph.D. candidate in the Department for Theatre-, Film- and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. His research focuses on theatre during the Bosnian war. Previous publications include the volume *Bibliothek Sarajevo. Literarische Vermessung einer Stadt* (2012), which he co-edited.

Stefan Hulfeld is Professor of Theatre and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna. His current research agendas focus on theatre historiography and theory. Publications include the chapters "Modernist Theatre" in *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History* (2013) and "Antitheatrical Thinking and the Rise of 'Theatre'" in *A Cultural History of Theatre in the Early Modern Age* (2017).

Branislav Jakovljević is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at Stanford University. His research focuses on avant-garde and experimental theatre, performance theory, performance and politics, and, currently, radical performance and ethics. His most recent books are *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia 1945–1991* (2016) and *Smrznuti magarac i drugi eseji* [Frozen Donkey and Other Essays, 2017].

Aleksandra Jovićević is a Professor in the Department of Storia dell'arte e spettacolo at La Sapienza University in Rome, and a coordinator of the doctorate program in Performance Studies at the same department. She is also curator of a book series, *Politics and Aesthetics of Performance*, for the publisher Bulzoni in Rome.

Nihad Kreševljaković is a historian and cultural manager. He worked as director of the Sarajevo War Theatre SARTR from 2012 until 2016. He is the co-director of the documentary *Do you remember Sarajevo?* He has been working as a producer at the MESS theatre festival since 1994, where he holds the position of director since 2017.

Amela Kreso is an ensemble actress at the National Theatre Mostar. She started working there during the war and has performed in various roles since then. She graduated from the department for Drama and Acting at the University Džemal Bijedić in Mostar. She also served as the theatre's artistic director.

Darko Lukić is a tenured Professor at the Academy of Dramatic Art and a Professor for Doctoral Studies in Literature, Performing Arts, Film and Culture at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. Previous publications include *Uvod u primijenjeno kazalište* [Introduction to Applied Theatre] (2016), *Uvod u antropologiju izvedbe* [Introduction to Anthropology of Performance] (2013), and *Drama ratne traume* [War Trauma Drama] (2009).

Dino Mustafić is a Bosnian-Herzegovinian theatre and film director. He holds a degree in directing from the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Sarajevo, where he studied during the city's siege. He has directed numerous plays throughout the entire Balkan region. He was the director of the international theatre festival MESS.

Jeton Neziraj was the artistic director of the National Theatre of Kosovo, and now he is the director of Qendra Multimedia (www.qendra.org), an independent theatre company focused on contemporary drama and theatre. He has written over 20 plays that have been staged and performed in Europe as well as in the USA.

Barbara Orel is Associate Professor of Performing Arts and head of the research group of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television at the University of Ljubljana. Her areas of research include contemporary European performance theory, politics and culture. She has published in edited collections such as *International Performance Research Pedagogies: Towards an Unconditional Discipline?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

Borka Pavićević is a dramaturge, columnist and theatre activist. She was the artistic director of the Belgrade Drama Theatre, a longtime BITEF associate, and part of the artist movement KPGT. She is the founder of the New Sensibility theatre (1981), and in 1994 she founded the Center for Cultural Decontamination, whose numerous activities are focused on fighting nationalism, intolerance and xenophobia.

Ksenija Radulović holds a Ph.D. in Theatre Studies from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts (University of Arts in Belgrade) and is an Assistant Professor at the FDA, teaching History of Theatre and Drama. Her research interests are drama and theatre studies, and her fields of expertise are directing, respectively redefining classics and reinterpreting classical texts.

Irena Šentevska is an independent researcher and curator. She holds a Ph.D. from the Department of Arts and Media Theory, University of Arts in Belgrade. Her first book *The Swinging 90s: Pozorište i društvena realnost Srbije u 29 slika* [Theatre and Social Reality in Serbia in 29 pictures] was published in 2016 by Orion Art, Belgrade.

Borut Šeparović is a theatre and film director currently living and working in Zagreb. He graduated in philosophy and comparative literature and also holds a Masters degree from the Amsterdam University of Arts. He is the founder and artistic director of the prestigious Montažstroj troupe, "a collective that ties different artistic disciplines and media culture in a socially responsible way."

List of Figures

Introduction

Stefan Hulfeld, Jana Dolečki and Senad Halilbašić

This volume assembles twelve academic contributions and six statements by theatre practitioners and active participants of the wartime theatre realm under the title *Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars*, with the aim to explore and consolidate a research field that has been opened up in the last decade by a number of monographs and papers. This introduction first raises some general remarks about the volume, its research objectives and its title. Second, it addresses the context behind a photograph (that would have been our choice for the cover), which mirrors some of the preceding remarks. Third, it also provides an overview of the individual chapters and experimentally explores correlations between them. And finally, it initiates reflection upon the further development of the research field promoted by means of this volume.

S. Hulfeld (✉) · J. Dolečki · S. Halilbašić
University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: stefan.hulfeld@univie.ac.at

S. Halilbašić
e-mail: senad.halilbasic@univie.ac.at

J. Dolečki et al. (eds.), *Theatre in the Context of the Yugoslav Wars*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98893-1_1

"Yugoslav Wars"—A chronological overview of key events

May–June 1991: Rising violence following ethnic tension in Croatia; Croatia and Slovenia declare independence from the SFR Yugoslavia; Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) takes over border areas of Slovenia leading to the Ten-Day War.

September 1991: JNA openly attacks areas in Croatia; the Croatian War of Independence starts.

October 1991–December 1991: Full-scale armed conflicts are happening throughout Croatia. The Serb entity in Croatia proclaimed its independence as the Republic of Serbian Krajina, but remained unrecognized by any country except Serbia.

January 1992: Vance peace plan is signed, creating zones for Serb-controlled territories, and ending large scale military operations in Croatia; UNPROFOR forces arrive to monitor this peace treaty; the Republic of Macedonia declares independence; Republic of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina—the future Republika Srpska [Serb Republic]—is proclaimed.

April 1992: Bosnia and Herzegovina declares independence; the Bosnian War begins, as well as the siege of Sarajevo that would last for 1425 days in total and result in more than 10,000 people killed by the forces of the JNA and, subsequently, the Army of Republika Srpska. Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is proclaimed, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro and with Slobodan Milošević as president.

May 1992: UN impose sanctions against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, banning all international trade, scientific and technical cooperation, sports and cultural exchanges as well as air travel; Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina became UN members states.

March 1993: The Croat-Bosniak War begins, a conflict between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the self-proclaimed Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, supported by Croatia.

May 1993: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), a body of United Nations, is formed in The Hague, Netherlands.

March 1994: Peace treaty between Bosniaks and Croats is signed (Washington Agreement), arbitrated by the United States.

May 1995: Croatia launches *Operation Flash*, retaking its territories from the forces of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, followed by the exodus of 11,500–15,000 Serbian refugees.
July 1995: Srebrenica genocide reported, with more than 8000 Bosniaks killed by the units of the Army of Republika Srpska under the command of General Ratko Mladić, who is sentenced to life in prison by the ICTY in 2017.
August 1995: Croatia launches *Operation Storm* and reclaims over 70% of its pre-war territory, followed by the exodus of approximately 200,000 Serbian refugees; NATO launches a series of air strikes on Bosnian Serb artillery and other military targets.
December 1995: Dayton Agreement signed in Paris, marking the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
March 1998: Fighting breaks out between Yugoslav forces and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, Slobodan Milošević sends in troops and police.
March 1999: NATO starts the military campaign *Operation Allied Force* in Kosovo.
June 1999: Conflict in Southern Serbia between Albanian militants and Yugoslav security forces begins upon the end of Kosovo War.

1.

The title of this volume promises to explore an art form in a geographical area and during a time span defined by the term "Yugoslav wars," that is to say, the territory of the (Ex-)Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Although the topic-time-place coordinates may seem very fixed to readers not familiar with the complexity of this historical context, we consider that the main concepts of the title and reasons for choosing them need to be addressed.

First of all, what does "theatre" mean in this context? And more importantly, can we state that known concepts and definitions of theatre are challenged, extended, accentuated or corrupted in times of acute and violent socio-political transformation, such as war? Looking through some existing major research contributions, and especially those assembled in this volume, a possible answer to the above-mentioned question becomes quite obvious: during times of war, the usual theoretical

common-places tend to be either shifted, intensified, questioned, or even reversed. Furthermore, widely shared distinctions or dichotomies in the field of aesthetics tend to be blurred. On one side of the spectrum, under exceptional life conditions imposed by the war, the pure fact of maintaining and producing theatre gains a strong meaning, e.g. as a collective act of humanity or in order to maintain "normality" (meaning the "regularity" of everyday life) against all odds. Simply performing and attending theatre, as some texts in this volume show us, may provide efficacious devices to challenge the peril of death and strengthen the will to survive. On the other hand, sometimes this maintaining of "normality," persisting to produce theatre repertoires as though nothing of stronger social and political significance was happening outside the theatre stage, could be considered the exact opposite—an escape from the responsibility of theatre, as a public space, to communicate with its reality regardless of the consequences this may bring. And it is exactly this ambiguous position that speaks volumes of the effect that theoretical concepts of theatre could bear during wartime. Escapism as one possible function of theatre can result in an act of collective denial, or of sharing hope—and many shades between the two.

On another level, and starting from the fact that wartime presupposes a certain national or other homogeneity required for actual combat, theatre can be used as an artistic weapon to fight for national independence and new forms of collective identity. This is crucial in the case of Yugoslav wars, which were fought along ethnic and national lines. 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. As some of the contributions in this book demonstrate, most of the state-funded theatres throughout all of the warring countries almost unanimously followed the call for national unification initiated by the dominant political powers (or, in some rare but respectable cases, decided to position themselves precisely against it). 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. Furthermore, considering some theoretical positions perceiving ethnicity and ethnically based collective "identities" as not only a "requirement" of an ethically motivated war but also its products,[1] throughout this volume, theatre will also be evaluated as an active mechanism able not only to reproduce but also to create the patterns of certain national unity.

As already stated, in the case of ethnically based wars, national denotation becomes one of the most central issues of the discussion on wartime theatre. As we shall see in the presented texts, identification with concepts of nationality took place on different levels and via different modes—from the renaming of institutions (adding the attributes of ethnic affiliation), choosing "national" authors and nationally "relevant" topics, staging works in specific language idioms, et cetera. Furthermore, this also happened by means of expulsion—modes of forming nationally defined theatres could also be found in the reality of what was missing from the theatre stages. Authors, actors and theatre professionals of "other" ethnic affiliations suddenly perished from the nationally-defined stages, thus reflecting not only the general wartime atmosphere, focused on naming and removing enemies from the "nation's body," but also indicating to what extent theatre was engaged in this process. Of course, one should be aware of the perils of generalization; this is exactly why the theatrical phenomena that escaped implementing the imposed nationalistic rhetoric and its brutal consequences will be further addressed throughout the texts assembled here.

Theatrical performances allow one to present oneself in a potentially limited, marginalized or suppressed public sphere and to speak out in disagreement. Individual responsibility can be enacted and postulated; fear and hopelessness can be expressed. However, the wartime context not only challenges the existing concepts in the realm of theatre, but also brings about new ones. For example, the question of whether one should perform theatre during a war becomes a prevailing one, reflecting the ethical position of theatre and its practitioners in the overall scheme of political power and its mechanisms of mediation. This question meanders through most of the texts included in this volume—the mere fact of engaging oneself in theatre production resonates with the theatre practitioners' diversified ethical concerns during the wars in Yugoslavia. As in this research field, theatre and war relate to the concrete activities of human beings, responsibility becomes a crucial topic: the responsibility of those who produced and witnessed art, or those who made use of performative acts to achieve or promote certain ideological agendas, as well as the responsibility of those who carried out war activities or atrocities.

Considering all this, "theatre" in the context of the Yugoslav wars must be understood as a wide notion including all sorts of theatrical interactions, regardless of their organizational form, respectively, their more social or artistic ambitions. The will to act or witness *coram*

publico, to establish relationships in order to step out of the logic of war or to take sides, the existential need to communicate, to claim the above-mentioned responsibility or to evoke a special kind of reality in a shared space where playful, symbolic, fictional or utopian features can become potentially efficient, serves as a criteria of what has to be explored.

There are many historical and scholarly reasons to use "theatre" in the given context as an umbrella term and to abstain from the usual differentiations (cultural performance, performance, activist art, theatricality, performativity, et cetera) at the first level of defining the research area. Only one of these reasons shall be emphasized: the availability of food, water, electricity, financial means, public spheres or the access to public media and communication, are goods that warring factions aim to bring under their control, while the preconditions to establish theatrical interactions on a small scale can hardly be abolished or totally controlled. The organizational forms, spaces, means and aims of theatrical interactions depend greatly on such accidental factors, but their importance, effectiveness or artistic value is not determined by whether people gather in a functioning National Theatre building, an improvized venue, in front of the loading platform of a van, on public squares or streets, or in some private or clandestine spaces. Thus the decision to generally label as "theatre" interactions bearing the potential to create or transform specific realities in a playful or symbolic manner stems from the objective to make very different events comparable and to further explore their interdependencies. This strategic lack of terminological differentiation on the first level allows us to value phenomena which are obvious and hidden, "loud" and "silent," persistent and ephemeral, while their analysis aims to initiate reflections about divergences and interdependencies in every respect.

Obviously, "theatre" during the Yugoslav wars turned out to be highly relevant for opposing or at least different reasons for various groups of people according to their actual life conditions and needs. In the shadow of state-controlled media and comprehensive crises of all sorts, theatrical performances gained a vital communicational significance in negotiating the roots, the state and the future of individuals and communities, in which the framing of the latter with an ethnic, religious, nationalistic and/or martial zeal conflicted with promoting a multiethnic, multi-confessional, anti-nationalistic and peaceful mode of coexistence. While theatre in Europe generally faced a loss of importance for the community as a means for negotiating social needs and values, theatre in the context of the Yugoslav wars increased its significance in all respects, simultaneously with bloodshed.

"Yugoslav wars" is another term that is less defined in our context than one might presume. Historians may have depicted (and are still depicting) armed conflicts and war crimes summarized under the term "Yugoslav wars," they may have analyzed different factors causing these wars in the framework of the breakup of SFR Yugoslavia; and they may have counted approximately how many deaths, casualties or missing persons resulted from these wars (see above: "Yugoslav Wars"—A chronological overview of key events).[2] Of course one must be aware of this kind of knowledge; but as "theatre" presupposes that actual persons establish actual relationships in actual spaces during a definite time span, "war" necessarily gains a concrete meaning in this context as well. Theatre in the context of war lacks any abstractness, and instead denotes concrete experiences in concrete situations. Therefore, the notions of war in this particular case could not be more ambiguous and complex—although narrowed down to similar dates and toponyms, the "same" war can be defined and narrated differently, as we can witness by analyzing the current state of historiography and everyday politics in the successor countries. In Croatia, the term "homeland war" or "the war of independence" is still very much used officially to describe the armed conflict that took place on its territory, with attempts to label it an armed conflict with strong traits of civil war still being scrutinized[3] and even potentially penalized.[4] On the other side, in the official narratives of today's Serbia, this conflict is predominately called simply the "war in Croatia." The problem of designating an armed conflict as a war is even more present in the case of the conflicts between Croatian and Bosniak armed forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or in the case of armed combats between the Serbian Army and the Albanian minority in Kosovo. Although a common understanding of these conflicts still cannot be negotiated, and the use of the plural form thus also points to the lack of minimal agreement, the contributions of this volume address this problem by challenging the aforementioned notions, each in its own way.

The point of departure for our research activities in this field can be found in two Ph.D. projects currently being led at the University of Vienna, one focusing on theatre during the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the other on wartime theatre in Croatia and Serbia. In need of widening the research field with existing and new approaches to these topics, we organized the conference *Theatre During the Yugoslav Wars* in November 2015 (while also conducting a seminar for students under the same name in that very semester).[5] With this, an international

research network was eventually established, and in the closing discussion of the conference, the idea for a related book project was brought up. Some major learning steps and changes in our mindsets accompanied its planning and realization, one of which is reflected in the shift of the preposition in the title from the initial "during" to the much wider "in the context of."

We started to define the project as a theatre-historiographical one and broadened our time-span focus to 1999, giving less attention to those approaches pursuing the traces and consequences of war in contemporary performances. One reason for this type of intervention in the temporal determinations of our initial project is found in the fact that, even if the administrative dates of the first and last armed conflicts can be determined to a certain extent, their influence on the state of theatre cannot. Another reason for focusing on a quite narrow time-span, with the dedicated objective of working in the field of theatre historiography, is certainly the urgent need to systematically collect, analyze and debate the remnants of theatrical activities of the war era. While a quite considerable amount of productions are well documented, and some museums, state or theatre archives, and magazines from the region provide important collections and material, a lot of basic research still has to be done, especially when considering those forms of theatre happening outside urban centres and "out of reach" of the media and further public interest. Furthermore, as we have experienced throughout our work on bringing this volume together, some phenomena of wartime theatre, for very different reasons, are still underrepresented in this research field, thus also missing basic analytical treatment (e.g. the wartime theatre activities in Banja Luka). A systematic theoretical framework in organizing and debating this very material that we already know or that we still have to discover was lacking, especially on an international, English-speaking level. This was another motivation for the specific focus of our first theatre-historiographical attempts.

These are still important goals to achieve when considering our given intentions, but we learned from the contributions in this volume that history in this case decisively affects the present. In many case studies, the past and the present proved to be interwoven in numerous ways, with respect to theatre practice from the 1990s until this very day: therefore, it is difficult to determine whether and when exactly the Yugoslav wars came to an end. The period of war, be it as an armed and executed conflict between two or more opposing political entities or in the form of the

"new wars" of the post-Cold war era,[6] can rarely be curtailed by defined initial and final dates. In the case of all the wars fought in the course of Yugoslavia's breakup in the 1990s, there was never any formal declaration of war by the opposing parties. An end to the wars was mostly achieved through international peace conferences, and they were officially ended by peace agreements, as, for example with the Dayton Agreement in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or with the Kumanovo Agreement in the case of the war in Kosovo. But while the Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz famously defined war as "the continuation of politics by other means," the editorial team behind this volume was often confronted with the question of whether some present-day events surrounding our research project are not proof that, even in times of declarative peace, there may still exist something like the continuation of war by other means. More than once, we were reminded of the repercussions of the wars on the present; and theatre practice seems to entail a distinct potential to measure the long-term damage on individuals and communities, and to remember what the public discourse wants to define as forgotten or to rage against states of denial. The scandals regularly provoked by the theatrical inquiries of the theatre director Oliver Frljić are only the most distinguished, but not the only proof of this.[7]

In conclusion, we decided to define the research field using the preposition "in the context" as a "history of the present," which led us to think about and to adjust the historiographical concept.

2.

We experienced the extent to which the temporal determinants of the Yugoslav wars, as well as the notion of theatre, were subverted while preparing this volume—more precisely, in dealing with the choice of a cover photo for the book. Initially intrigued by the photographs presented by Branislav Jakovljević in his lecture at the mentioned conference in Vienna, we engaged in a delicate task of finding a visual expression of the books' main topics and controversies. While we were successful in finding such a picture, the publisher unfortunately rejected our choice due to its cover design policy. However, the selected photo deserved to become part of this introduction out of different reasons.

The mentioned picture, taken by the photographer Velija Hasanbegović in early 2018, impressed us due to its visual message simultaneously being vague and documentary, sufficiently general to

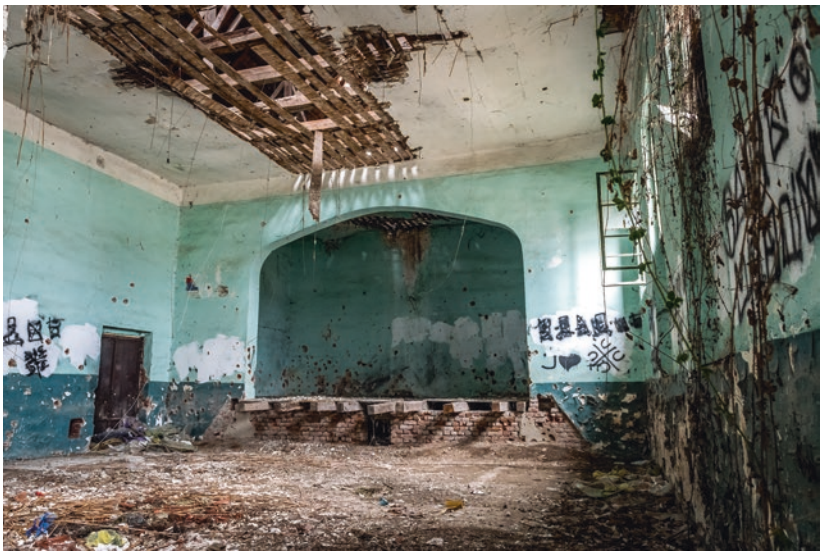

Fig. 1 Interior view of the stage in the former cultural center of Pilica [Dom Kulture], located in the territory of Republika Srpska (district of Zvornik), March 2018 (Photo courtesy of Velija Hasanbegović)

be placed in different times and places, but at the same time located in a very specific place and within a striking context (Fig. 1). This image, portraying an abandoned space existing somewhere on the border between fact and fiction, storytelling and history-telling, became a conceptual frame we wanted to further address in this introduction in order to distinguish more precisely between the various discourses raised when addressing theatre and war.

At first glance, the motif of the devastated stage might be associated with an abandoned venue which has fallen into decay over time. But then, one might recognize the holes and bruises on the concrete walls, as well as the white paint covering graffiti with new graffiti over it, some of it later made unreadable. The former *are* bullet holes; the latter document an ongoing battle to symbolically take possession of this place of remembrance.

One might think that our interest in this photo was raised by its apparent trespassing of the clear border of the war as a "material,"

and theatre as a "medium" of presentation. The war affects theatre in numerous ways, transforming not only its traditional modes of representation but also very often its ways of functioning—there are numerous cases of theatre houses and stages being closed, used as shelters, moved to safer cities or zones, transferring performance times to matinees. But the photograph mainly reminds us of the possibility that a stage can become the scene of atrocities as well.

It shows an interior view of the stage in the former cultural centre of Pilica, located in the territory of Republika Srpska, one of the two legal entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The venue was originally built as one of many cultural centres [Dom Kulture] throughout the former Yugoslavia, established with the foundation of the socialist state after World War II in order to provide a space for art and culture in remote and non-urban areas of the country. They were usually used for cultural manifestations, guest performances by theatre groups, concerts, film screenings, et cetera. In the course of the Bosnian War, the Pilica Cultural Centre twice became a scene of horrendous war crimes: up to 750 men and boys of Muslim ethnicity were detained in the centre for several days at the end of May 1992, following the ethnic cleansing of multiple villages in the district of Zvornik. They were supposed to be relocated to the safe area of Sapna, but this never happened: on June 1, 1992, those civilians were taken away from the Cultural Centre by armed forces of the Army of Republika Srpska [Vojska Republike Srpske, VRS], executed in the surrounding areas and buried in mass graves.

As part of the genocide that took place in Srebrenica and its surrounding areas in 1995, on July 16, approximately 500 Bosnian-Muslim men and boys were executed by VRS military personnel in the cultural centre of Pilica itself, using automatic weapons and hand grenades. The theatre stage, the storage area beneath the stage and the auditorium became horrendous crime scenes.[8] These two documented and prosecuted war crimes in Pilica were not the only cases in the course of the Bosnian War in which a theatrical space turned into a place of the gruesome suffering of innocents, as one of our contributing authors, Branislav Jakovljević, recently pointed out with reference to the case of Čelopek (also located in the district of Zvornik), where the stage of the cultural centre became a torture chamber.[9]

Showing the image of this specific place of detention and execution in the introduction of an international academic volume dealing

with theatre in the context of the Yugoslav wars reminds us of the most dreadful effect of war and what this conflict meant for those imprisoned in the cultural centre of Pilica and expecting to be killed. We selected it as a memorial sign for this purpose, because the scholarly point of view tends to gain distance and, therefore, lose sight of some unbearable truths, especially by focusing on theatre and those individuals, among others, who had the strength to use it as a playful means of survival or active revolt.

Furthermore, we find that this photograph comments on the inability to factually reclaim the end of war and underline one of the numerous ways it still lingers, with or without the complicity of official systems of political power. Once we had received the photos from the actual place and compared them to those taken in the last few years in other contexts, we noticed a certain "graffiti war" taking place on the walls of the venue, which, in the meantime, had became a place of annual commemoration for the victims who had been tortured and killed on the spot. Over the course of just a few years, we could follow nationalistic and other symbols being overwritten in a perpetual continuation of the "war by other means." Pictures from 2016 show graffiti writing in support of Ratko Mladić, the commanding officer of the Army of Republika Srpska, a war criminal convicted in 2017 as the main person responsible for the very genocide happening here. These graffiti symbols appeared before an annual memorial service, organized by the Udruženje porodica zarobljenih i nestalih lica općine Zvornik[10] [Association of the Families of Imprisoned and Missing Persons of the district of Zvornik], held to commemorate the imprisoned victims on May 31, 2016—the commemorating families stated that those symbols had not been present a year earlier.[11]

In 2018, the letters were covered by black graffiti, probably out of respect for the victims who are commemorated here each year by Bosnian Muslims and other visitors. The image chosen above is the most recent picture available—and, in contrast to pictures taken a year or two ago, it shows a new graffiti sign: on the right side of the stage we see the sign C-C-C-C, a Cyrillic abbreviation of *Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava*, meaning "only unity saves the Serbs."[12] As the above analysis proves, the stage and the auditorium of the Pilica cultural centre remain a place of post-war wounds and unresolved questions of historiography and responsibility.

3.

The arguments for assembling this volume became clear at the above-mentioned conference, where, for the first time since the wars, such a number of acknowledged academics and theatre professionals discussed the wartime theatrical phenomena of a once mutual state, bringing their research and experiences to direct communication. This comparative presentation of knowledge thus simultaneously addressed the position of "the others" (or the former enemies during the conflicts), opening up the discussions to new forms of understanding. The outcomes of the conference were incredibly valuable, as we learned that most theatre theoreticians in the Yugoslav successor states—with few exceptions—deal with related topics in the context of their respective national framework, while their research does not necessarily transcend the boundaries of the new nation states. It is self-evident that each successor state has experienced its own peculiar political and social transformations, and thus requires specific analysis, but by assembling this volume, we wanted to further stimulate present and future research challenging transferrable levels and correlations. As stated above, the contextualization of different forms of theatre with different war experiences could be considered as a first methodological approach to the research field under construction. Out of the individual contributions, one can depict a first map of specific constellations; yet of course, the following way to outline correlations is only one possibility of reading through this volume.

The first section of the volume concerns institutionalized theatre under the influence of economic transition, warmongering politics, state control and the rise of nationalism in a relationship of mutual dependence with the Yugoslav wars. The eminent intellectual, dramaturge and activist Borka Pavićević introduces the section with an analysis of the transition period in retrospect ("…privatization. That was the basis: nationalism was an upgrade"), and points out the extent to which a theatre institution mirrors the governmental system. As the artistic director of the Belgrade Drama Theatre, she witnessed the dissemination of jingoistic mindsets until she was dismissed in 1993, amid her struggles to keep the theatre repertoire relevant to the acute reality. Reacting to the uniform official cultural policy concentrated on producing national narratives and presenting its harsh consequences, which she describes in detail. In 1994, she founded the Centre for Cultural Decontamination,

which very quickly became an important hub for intellectual and artistic resistance in Belgrade. Pavićević's experiences of being actively engaged in both institutional and non-institutional realms of creative production in Belgrade during the wars provide a unique comparative perspective. As her testimony shows, while the independent theatre scene almost immediately and overtly critically reacted to the horrors of reality (its most prominent agents being the DAH Theatre group[13]), the state-funded theatres continued their activities in a certain oblivion, pretending that the war was happening to others. Managed mostly by appointed supporters of the regime, and thus under the direct influence of the government, most of the state theatres concentrated on creating repertoires either based on historical narratives (stirring up national sentiments of unity), or providing their audiences with the possibility to "escape" the violent reality.

This position is exactly the starting point of Irena Šentevska's contribution, which discusses official Serbian theatre presenting "spectacles of forgetfulness" during wartime, staging repertoires producing certain amnesia towards the perturbed reality. Furthermore, Šentevska shows how a paradoxical situation, where the state subsidized culture by the highest ever percentage of its budget[14] in the midst of one of the harshest economic and social crises in modern European history, resonated on the stages of official theatre institutions, departing from the visual aspects of the staged material. After analyzing examples of lavish productions manifesting the state of denial, she introduces examples of those productions staged in state-funded theatres that expressed an attempt to criticize the positions of power responsible for their own functioning.[15]

Šentevska shares some part of her main analytical focus with Ksenija Radulović, who also deals with noteworthy productions of state-funded theatre in Belgrade during the wars, such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Last Days of Mankind*, which were staged in the Yugoslav Drama Theatre (JDP) in 1994. But, while Šentevska, focusing on visual aspects, underscores that theatre remained quite "undramatic" or trapped in aesthetics compared to everyday life, and that observably the institutions generally remained caught in the warmongering system that funded them, Radulović focuses on dramaturgical aspects and criticism, emphasizing how important the discussed performances were for the "minority of citizens who consistently struggled against official policies." By providing deeper analysis of the productions such as *Powder Keg* by Dejan Dukovski (1995) or *Tamna je noć* [Dark Is the Night] by Aleksandar