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ABSTRACT

The early 1990s marked the beginning of a period of drastic socio-political transformations for the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its respective member states. In the case of Croatia, with the disintegration of the unifying supra-national Yugoslav identity and the eruption of armed conflicts along ethno-territorial lines, notions of national belonging radically shifted. The political, social and cultural elites who gained power in 1990 began shaping a distinctive Croatian national identity according to the ruling exclusive nationalistic agenda.

This ‘imagined’ communal identity was constructed upon those thematic notions and mythical concepts that were found to validate Croatia’s national distinctiveness and historical quest for independence. Moreover, with the war being fought in its territories, these claims of a distinctive and historically continuous national identity additionally served as justifications for participating in the ethnic conflict. Besides being produced and disseminated by different socio-political structures, as this dissertation argues, nationalist visions of communal belonging were propagated by the institutional theatre system as well.

In this work, I examine the ways in which the Croatian institutional theatre represented and actively developed a specific vision of a national community during the wartime period.

Employing an empirical research design based on selected theatrical productions, I expose the ways in which national theatre conformed to dominant ideological processes of that time and how it replicated official concepts of nation and national affiliation fabricated by the political elites in line with their nationalist agenda. Moreover, I indicate how, like the ruling political discourse, the theatre system presented these narratives of national importance as arguments for the ongoing war effort and its nationalistic interpretations.

In addition, by introducing theatrical examples of staging Croatianhood under the socialist regime, this dissertation outlines the referential representational strategies in the overall evolution of this phenomenon.

ZUSSAMENFASSUNG

Die frühen 1990er Jahre markierten für die Sozialistische Föderative Republik Jugoslawien und ihrer jeweiligen Mitgliedsstaaten den Beginn einer Periode drastischer sozio-politischer Transformationen. Im Falle Kroatiens verschoben sich die Ideen von nationaler Zugehörigkeit mit dem Zerfall der einigenden supranationalen jugoslawischen Identität sowie dem Ausbruch bewaffneter Konflikte entlang ethno-territorialer Linien radikal. Die politischen, sozialen und kulturellen Eliten, die 1990 an die Macht gelangten, begannen, eine eigenständige kroatische Identität gemäß der herrschenden, dezidiert nationalistischen Agenda zu formen.

Diese „imaginierte“ Identität eines Kollektivs wurde auf jenen einschlägigen Begriffen und mythischen Konzepten aufgebaut, welche die nationale Besonderheit Kroatiens und dessen historisches Streben nach Unabhängigkeit legitimierten. Da der Krieg auf kroatischen Territorien ausgetragen wurde, dienten die Ansprüche auf eine eigenständige und historisch beglaubigte nationale Identität als zusätzliche Rechtfertigung für die Teilnahme an dem ethnischen Konflikt. Die nationalistischen Visionen der Gemeinschaftszugehörigkeit wurden aber nicht nur von verschiedenen sozio-politischen Strukturen produziert und verbreitet; vielmehr argumentiert diese Dissertation, dass auch das institutionelle Theatersystem sie maßgeblich propagierte.

Dementsprechend untersucht diese Arbeit die Art und Weise, wie das kroatische institutionelle Theater während der Kriegszeit spezifische Visionen einer nationalen Gemeinschaft repräsentierte und aktiv entwickelte. Anhand empirischer Forschungen sowie auf der Basis ausgewählter Theaterproduktionen wird analysiert, wie das Nationaltheater die vorherrschende ideologische Agenda mit hervorbrachte, indem es jene Konzepte von Nation und nationaler Zugehörigkeit reproduzierte, die im Einklang mit der nationalistischen Agenda der politischen Eliten standen. Darüber hinaus zeigt die Dissertation auf, wie das Theatersystem—parallel zum herrschenden politischen Diskurs—diese Narrative zur Hervorbringung nationalen Selbstbewusstseins als Argumente für die anhaltenden Kriegsanstrengungen sowie für die nationalistische Rechtfertigung derselben präsentierte. Durch den Rückgriff auf Theaterbeispiele, die das ‘Kroatentum’ bereits unter dem sozialistischen Regime (1945–1991) inszeniert haben, situiert diese Forschungsarbeit entsprechende Repräsentationsstrategien zudem in der längerfristigen Entwicklung des Phänomens.

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1. INTRODUCTORY NOTE

1.1. Key Concepts

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a highly transformative period in the case of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and successor states progressively taking shape on its territory. Although there were many different, mutually contingent reasons that prompted the final political dissolution of this supra-national state entity, one of the most pronounced ones explained it with the fact that federative republics started to openly demand a less centralised and more democratic state-structure, along with openly discussing forms of political and national independence. While arguing for autonomous nation-states defined along ethnic lines, these visions of specific nationhood were featured by overt nationalism which thoroughly penetrated the political discourse of that time, eventually propelling the country's collapse into civil wars. Bearing in mind the ethnically diversified structure of the Yugoslav population, the ethnic element of these agendas occurring in the political discourse of the early 1990s proved to be especially troubling for ethnic minorities living on territories of different republics. Parallel to growing nationalistic ambitions, they consequently became regarded as 'alien elements' of the proposed nationhood.

The described ethnic frictions were much present in the case of the Socialist Republic of Croatia where, according to the population census of 1991, the Serbian minority comprised some 12% of its total population. Due to the nationalistic agenda of the Croatian political elites arguing for an exclusively ethnic national identity as of 1990, the Serb minority living in Croatia became more and more concerned about its political status in this novel nation-state. In an attempt to express such concerns, these communities started to openly contest the administrative decisions of the new Croatian government, resorting to various actions ranging from political organising to executing road blockages and other forms of civil disobedience. In the summer of 1990, these frictions between the Serb 'rebels' and the Croatian authorities intensified, eventually leading to the creation of the Republic of Serbian Krajina, an unrecognised Serbian state entity formed in December of 1990 that aimed at nominally securing the sovereignty of Croatian Serbs. When Krajina started to gain political, military, and other support from the SFRY and the Socialist Republic of Serbia in the scope of its own nationalistic project, these conflicts transferred from the local to the state level, gaining a more general significance for all sides included. Once the still-active and military superior Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) actively engaged in defending the political agendas of the Serb communities in Krajina as of summer 1991, the earlier sporadic conflicts between Serb

‘rebels’ and Croatian police (or its proto-army forces), started to gain a more ‘warlike’ form. With YPA’s armed engagement extending to other Croatian territories featuring Serb population, the war, which soon became known as ‘the Croatian homeland war’, was set in full motion.

As one could imagine, intense war activities and the overall atmosphere of insecurity that continued until November 1995 profusely affected the overall political, social, economic, as well as cultural life of Croatia. In addition, concurrently to the wartime actuality marked by the destruction and the state of utter precarity, the new nation-state promoting very specific notions of national belonging was beginning to take shape. It is exactly these two interdependent processes that will provide the main analytical and conceptual orientation for the following dissertation aimed at detecting idiosyncrasies of the Croatian institutional theatre system of the early 1990s.

Moving towards more concrete questions of this research, if we consider theatre as potentially existing simultaneously both in and in-between the mentioned dominant socio-political phenomena, how did the Croatian national theatre system of that time approach all these unique challenges and paradoxes of its actuality? How was it influenced by these complex conditions, and how did it reflect them? How did it represent the more specific conditions/consequences of these processes, such as the ‘fabrication’ of a Croatian nation? More precisely, did it question, negate, subvert, or even generate categories of national belonging? Following these and adjunct topics, one could say that the main objective of my dissertation is to analyse referential relations between the national theatre system and an existing idea of a nation, considering both reflective and constructive strategies of its theatrical representation.

As I am going to establish throughout my work, both of these highly inter-dependant phenomena (the armed conflict and the process of defining the Croatian nation) thoroughly reformulated the notions of nation, national identity or national culture, as well as the definitions of community or belonging that were promoted and applied in the analysed period. In order to better understand the scope and methods of these conceptual redefinitions that will be detected in the production of Croatian national theatre during early 1990s (as well as to secure theoretical distinctness of this work), I will proceed with outlining the main theoretical interpretations relevant for the research presented here.

What is a Nation?

The main concept of this dissertation in need of a more detailed contextualisation is the one referring to the term of the nation. Although extensively researched, as relevant studies testify, there is no one valid definition on what nation actually is—as Benedict Anderson pointed out, despite the intensity of examining the concept of nation or the lengthy history of nationalism, no one exclusively operating definition of these concepts exists. Nevertheless, what one could present as the basic understanding of a nation explains it as a group constellation marking the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and is, as such, understood as one of the most particular markers of group identity and belonging. Actually, in its most common definition, nation refers to a certain territorial community. However, being subjects of historical and political changes, these communities sometimes transcend geographical borders or are formed on the basis of sharing a communal ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, or other characteristics.

Referring to the question of how nations ‘appear’, theoretical approaches such as perennialism or primordialism define them as entities that have actually always existed, in one form or another. In fact, the primordial (or ethnic) approach¹ considers nations as being a somewhat organic and ‘natural’ phenomenon, as well as the basic organisational element of the natural order. When applied in political practice, these doctrines proved themselves to be severely problematic as they either ignored the colonialist genesis of certain nations or, moreover, presupposed a sense of superiority of one nation towards the other, often leading to open conflicts. Although one would think that these theories would be subdued to some extent, they have actually not lost their practical effect throughout modern or contemporary history. As I am going to outline in the course of my dissertation, these kinds of interpretations were dominating the ruling political discourse of the early 1990s in Croatia, not only providing ‘natural’, i.e. ‘self-explanatory’ arguments for attaining national autonomy but also justifying the ongoing war.

On the other hand, the ruling modernist or ‘civic’ theories consider the nation as a relatively recent phenomenon created in the specific context of modern political, social, or economic projects. Representatives of this school of thought (such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony D. Smith, Ernest Gellner, or David McCrone) argued that different conditions of modern times have been crucial for the construction of the concept of a nation.

¹ Generally associated with the German Romantic nationalism and the works of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814).

Out of all these different theoretical positions, several have been chosen to guide my research due to their relevance for the specific content discussed hereafter. For instance, Gellner defended the understanding that it was in fact the people who inhabited a certain national culture (i.e. sharing a certain national language) that defined the nation itself. As I will demonstrate in the ensuing thesis, this aspect of understanding language as the core value of nationhood will prove itself to be of great referential importance, especially in the context of the national language-policies executed in Croatia throughout the 1990s.

Another exponent of this school of thought, whose position will prove as pertinent for my research to some extent, was Eric Hobsbawm. He saw the nation as being constructed around invented traditions, originally created to serve different interests of the ruling elite.² Put differently, he defined nation as an ‘invention’ forged by those wanting to exploit it to a certain cause. As I will prove, political elites in Croatia in the early 1990s extensively dedicated their nationalist agendas to a very specific purpose as well—that of constituting a distinctive and autonomous political entity. On the other hand, Hobsbawm identified the process of reinventing and reactivating collective traditions and rituals as the connective fabric of this communality, a phenomenon that will also be considerably implemented during the period in focus.

In outlining the modernist theories of nations, Nadine Holdsworth articulated the main limitations of these stated modernists approaches. Principally, she argued that while explaining the practical purposes of a nation, these theories failed to elaborate how “people relate to their nation on a deep emotional level of national consciousness and cultural sentiment.”³ In other words, these dominant doctrines did not focus so much on the affective function of these processes. However, she found these modernist theories of nation to be referring to a linear, progressive version of history, neglecting the fact that, rather than being ‘authentic’, many of these elements of specific nationhood were being renewed following already existing models. By introducing comparative historical levels to my research, I intend to exhibit how one of the main features of national narratives employed in the political discourse in Croatia of the late 1980s and early 1990s was precisely their reoccurrence and repetitiveness.

On a similar note, the ethno-symbolic approach to the concept of nation, as articulated by Anthony D. Smith, offered some additional relevant theoretical context for the above-

² For more see Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³ Nadine Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 14.

explained positions. Defining the nation not only as a demarcated territory but also as a “shared political community with common institutions, laws, language and citizenship,”⁴ Smith saw this community being activated through different ethnic elements such as the tradition and culture expressed in the form of histories, myths, or memories. Otherwise stated, he detected the specificity of ethnic collectives in their “myth-symbol complex”⁵ functioning as some sort of ‘building blocks’ of a national community. As I am going to establish in the continuation of this dissertation, the category of nation, as understood in Croatia throughout its history, was also based on ethnic premises, meaning that the ethnicity was very often presented as the determining factor of this nationhood. Furthermore, it heavily relied on historical and national myths that were used, reused, or even misused by the political elites in order to provide a platform for unification of this national community. Due to the fact that he emphasised both the ethnic affiliation and the national myths as constructive material of a nation, Smith’s elaboration will serve as one of the most relevant conceptual frameworks for this dissertation, defining its valuable referential theoretic points and navigating my research.

Besides defining a nation as both political and social reality, there were those authors who found its conceptual core elsewhere. For instance, Benedict Anderson went forward and introduced the concept of nation as an ‘imagined community’, arguing that although members of a nation will never know most of their fellow members, “in the minds of each lives the image of their community.”⁶ More precisely, Anderson claimed that it is the individual that actually imagines a massive form of common kinship and that the relations between members of the nation are “mediated by their mutual recognition that they belong to the same nation.”⁷ Although his definition neglects the idea of nation as being a socio-political reality, the horizontal citizenship that it implies proves to be important, especially when thinking of a nation in a war or a conflict, explaining to some extent the motivational reasons to fight a war or even being prepared to die in a battle. Furthermore, the importance of Anderson’s arguments should be seen in him locating “the lived, social effects of national change not in the major acts of nations’ political institutions (...) but in the various cultural activities and structures people engage in.”⁸ Pointing out how a nation is an object of a

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ The notion was developed by Anthony D. Smith in Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1988).

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6–7.

⁷ Ross Pool, *Nation and Identity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), 10.

⁸ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 4.

creative imagination, some of Anderson's judgements will prove as highly operational for my overall analysis, especially with understanding theatre as a cultural structure where individuals could actively engage in imagining their own national affiliation.

National Identity

Besides outlining theoretical interpretations of the concept of a nation, another notion that needs to be historically as well as conceptually defined before being used as an analytical referential point is the one concerning national identity. Taking into account that a national theatrical system not only holds the potential of representing a nation but also epitomises a certain platform addressing or even generating a sense of communal belonging, the mentioned concept will be addressed rather often in the course of the work that follows.

Although the concept of identity itself is extremely vague but has been extensively elaborated by many theoretical disciplines, I have once again selected those positions that were found to be helpful in executing my research in a theoretically more focused manner.

It was the infamously controversial Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) who first articulated the idea of *Volkgeist* or 'national spirit', explaining the generalised feeling of belonging to one specific nation. Considering nation to be an organic as well as social-psychological entity, Herder understood this 'spirit' as the core of a nation whose unfolding manifested in its language, literature, art, music, law, religion, and customs. In sum, he did not consider the nation as a political category, rather declaring the *Volk* (the people) as its main constitutive element, with a certain 'cultural integrity' as its most important differential characteristic. In simpler terms, for Herder, language and culture were not just aspects of the social activities of certain people but were in fact essential constructive elements of their very common identity. This position proved itself relevant throughout history, especially in those cases where linguistic and other cultural resources have been mobilised in order to represent "the nation to which those who shared a language and culture belonged."⁹ As I am going to discuss, recruiting both language and cultural heritage in order to generate an idea of a national identity was amply carried out during the nation-defining processes during the 1990s in Croatia, hence securing contemporary executions of these theories often considered as 'outdated'.

⁹ Pool, *Nation and Identity*, 62.

Herder's theories were further developed by Ernest Renan who in 1882 explained the concept of nation as a "spiritual principle"¹⁰ constituted both in the past and the present. More precisely, Renan argued that this principle was to be found both "in common of a rich legacy of memories" as well as in "present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form."¹¹ On the one hand, he recognised the plethora of historical myths populated by glorious heroes as "the social capital upon which one bases a national idea."¹² This is an approach that will be richly used in the case of reclaiming nationhood in Croatia and will be determined as a strategy of creating national theatre repertoires as well. On the other hand, he insisted that these historical narratives were introduced as some sort of a motivation for establishing the nation-state in the present, also a very applicable concept for the here-proposed dissertation. In any case, as of the 19th century, the national identity became the most influential concept when regarding the self-determination of large social communities, translating into a comprehensive trans-European call for constitution of national states.

To briefly summarise, national identity could be understood as "the meeting point between the individual and collective conception of the nation,"¹³ although one must consider both as being variable. On a similar note, Anna Triandafyllidou concludes how one should expect that "national identity has no meaning *per se*" but rather "becomes meaningful in contrast to other nations."¹⁴ Considering her statement, national identity should be understood as a relationship that is both inward-looking (involving a certain degree of commonality within a distinguished group), as well as implying a difference towards 'the Others'. Just how and with what results this concept was activated in the case of Croatia during the early 1990s will be further discussed throughout this dissertation.

National Identity and War

As already stated, the analytical focus of this work will be framed by two processes that marked the socio-political reality of the early 1990s in Croatia and were found to be in an inter-dependant position of correlation—the defining of the nation-state and the complementary war activities. Besides understanding war as a comprehensive socio-political

¹⁰ Ernest Renan, "What is nation?," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 21.

¹⁴ Anna Triandafyllidou, *Negotiating Nationhood in a Changing Europe: Views from the Press* (Wales/Washington: Ceredigion, 2002), 26–27.

phenomenon that disrupts notions of ‘normal life’ and imposes a contextual frame that generates a plethora of political, social, economic, as well as cultural shifts, it also influences the notions of identity and nationhood. The armed conflicts occurring on the territory of Croatia from 1991 until 1995 that will form the central timeframe of this dissertation were no different in their impact on the overall functioning of everyday life, simultaneously generating transformative processes of communal identification.

As many elaborated and disciplinary diverse theories argue, the study of warfare is central to an understanding of nation-formation as the majority of the “nation-states that came into existence before the mid-20th century [were] created by war or had their boundaries defined by wars or internal violence.”¹⁵ Furthermore, many positions confirm that the nation comes under particular scrutiny during moments of social and political breakdown, i.e. when the idea of one homogenous nation comes to be questioned. In his seminal work *What is a nation?*, Renan emphasised the importance of crisis in establishing and maintaining the nation, stating how, for instance, “during and immediately after a riot, or series of riots, there is an overwhelming sense that a nation must be sick in some way for these festering sores to erupt throughout the body of a nation.”¹⁶ Namely, it is these riots or socio-political crises in general that “expose the fragility of the nation and the myth of a cohesive national symbolic community unified by a common goal and purpose.”¹⁷ Acknowledging war as a moment of overt social and political perturbation requiring certain national unification, in the here-presented work I will delineate the ways it influenced and shifted the notions of nation and national identity and in what way these transformations then manifested in the national theatre system. As one could presume, the war not only influenced the conditions of theatre production and reception but also penetrated the staged narratives. However, this dissertation will not be dedicated to investigating how the war itself was represented in the Croatian theatre of that time but will rather focus on theatre narratives that, in a specific manner, interpreted and defined the war context. Considering war as a crisis that not only establishes but also maintains a nation, these narratives of war will also be analysed in their function of

¹⁵ John Hutchinson, “Warfare and the Sacralisation of Nations: The Meanings, Rituals and Politics of National Remembrance,” *Millennium-Journal of International Studies* 38 (2009): 401.

¹⁶ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

securing a certain vision of ‘Croatianhood’,¹⁸ as well as its connections to the dominant political discourse.

As will be determined, one strategy of securing the consolidation of a specific national identity by providing a certain interpretation of the wartime was located in the narratives emphasising national myths of victimhood and suffering. As Renan suggests, “where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs,”¹⁹ meaning that the myths of sacrifice were to be found as more ‘effective’ when considering the attaining of a national homogeneity. However, as I am going to show, in terms of representing a crisis, the Croatian ‘homeland’ war generated and used both myths of griefs as well as triumphs—i.e. with the Yugoslav Federation starting to disintegrate, the notion of ‘Croatianhood’ was actually established and presented as a rather triumphant concept of national identity.

Furthermore, as John Hutchinson claimed, the “warfare constructs the nation as a sacred community of sacrifice,”²⁰ thus operating as some sort of motivation for individual sacrifice in the name of a ‘higher cause’. Hutchinson also depicted warfare as a “constituting myth in the historical consciousness of many populations, becoming an organising framework for explaining events and evaluating their place in the world,”²¹ meaning that it heavily influenced the already mentioned notions of national or other group affiliation. Accordingly, this dissertation will not only try to outline the interrelations between the wartime actuality and the occurring process of national consolidation but will also investigate the narrative of historical battles and other war conflicts exercised on the same territory used as operational national myths in the early 1990s. To summarise, the connection between the war as a socio-political phenomenon on the one and nationhood on the other side will be investigated in its elaborated multi-layered dimension, detecting the plethora of its potential functions as presented in the selected theatre narratives.

Staging the Nation, Performing the Identity

Moving away from the theoretical concepts tackling the idea of a nation, the initial question of this research is: How do the concepts of nation or national identity actually occur in

¹⁸ The term ‘Croatianhood’ refers to the concept of the specific Croatian nationhood and is frequently featured in different research that deals with the question of communal belonging. The term is also a direct translation of the Croatian word ‘hrvatstvo’, defined as the “feeling of belonging to the Croatian nation.” See http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=fVtmURI%253D, last accessed on May 20, 2020.

¹⁹ Renan, “What is a Nation?” 9.

²⁰ Hutchinson, “Warfare and the Sacralisation of Nations: The Meanings, Rituals and Politics of National Remembrance,” 402.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 402.

practice; where and how are they actually represented? There are numerous theories on the ways that both phenomena are produced, promoted, assimilated, exercised, and circulated. For instance, they could be performed in a private setting, they could be envisaged and then disseminated by various media outlets and/or educational methods, or they could be integrated to various processes “through which nation-states foster the integration of its inhabitants into the national community,”²² meaning different political insignia, public and political rituals, etc.

Actually, in the case of Croatia, as these “experiences in constructing a national identity were “linked to the history of peoples that have consciousness of nation but no state of their own,”²³ national identity was not built around “pragmatic elements of a modern state such is the army, the laws, paying taxes or awareness of national interests.”²⁴ Instead, it was predominantly built on the basis of “symbolic, ritual, mythical and cultural elements of the homeland (the flag, the national anthem, cultural heritage, historical myths and legend, etc.).”²⁵ In other words, Croatian national identity was not only represented by but also formed around a repertory of national emblems administered by political structures.

Referring to the potential functions of theatre in the scope of these strategies of representing the nation, Jen Harvie duly asserts that the “national identities are neither biologically or territorially given; rather, they are creatively produced or staged.”²⁶ According to Manfred Pfister and Ralf Hertel, national identity is something which is not “some naturally given or metaphysically sanctioned racial or territorial essence that only needs to be conceptualised or spelt out in discursive texts”²⁷ but is rather seen as emerging from, taking shape and being constantly “defined and redefined in individual and collective performances.”²⁸ In their view, these performances, which include “everyday interactions, ‘cultural performances such as pageants, festivals, political manifestations, or sports, (...) artistic performances of music, dance, theatre, literature, or more recent media,” actually prove that the “sense of nationhood

²² Dennis Zuev and Fabian Virchow, “Performing National Identity: the Many Logics of Producing National Belongings in Public Rituals and Events,” *Nations and Nationalism*, 20, no. 2 (2014):191.

²³ Slaven Letica, “Tko smo što smo,” in *Hrvatski identitet*, ed. Romana Horvat (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2011), 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁶ Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 2.

²⁷ Manfred Pfister and Ralf Hertel, eds., *Performing National Identity: Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2008), 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

is fashioned.”²⁹ Accordingly, they concluded that the “national identity is not an essence one is born with but something acquired in and through performances.”³⁰

Apart from considering these performances to be “active and *interactive*”³¹ when representing a certain national identity, they also emphasised the importance of “performances of difference”³² for the same processes. More specifically, they argued that performing other national identities was also crucial when considering the stated tactics of representation. Recognising theatre as a mode of representation apt for delivering visions of national identity, this conclusion somewhat signalled the relevance of representing ‘the other’, a phenomenon which will, as already mentioned, be featured in the dominant theatre production of the early 1990s in Croatia. Pursuing the presented concepts and notions, this dissertation will provide examples of national theatrical productions which aimed at performing a certain vision of nation, parallelly administering the concept of national identity as argued above.

Influenced by the outlined theoretical interpretations, the general question that this dissertation tends to answer is: How did the national theatre system of the early 1990s in Croatia articulate the above-elaborated concepts in their complex interrelatedness? In other terms, how did it deal with this process of defining a nation in-the-making shaped by wartime? How did it address its actuality, to what extent did it follow, contest, or echo the contextual political discourse immersed in nationalist ideology? And moreover, did it generate some specific concepts of nationhood?

As Holdsworth explains, theatre could be understood as “something intrinsically connected to the nation” as it “enhances ‘national’ life by providing a space for shared civil discourse, entertainment, creativity, pleasure and intellectual stimulation.”³³ Put differently, besides providing audiences with focused leisure or artistic expression, theatre also functions as a platform in which a certain communal body could discuss the principles of its communality established in its socio-political context. However, echoing other theoretical positions declaring theatre’s ability to form the nations, generate “national mimesis,”³⁴ or to lend “the

²⁹ Ibid., 9.

³⁰ Ibid., 9.

³¹ Ibid., 10.

³² Ibid., 10.

³³ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 6.

³⁴ Erin Hurley, *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Céline Dion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 24. Coined by Hurley, the term of ‘national mimesis’ defines the activity of representing the nation as well as its result (an image of a nation).

material existence to the ruling ideology,”³⁵ Holdsworth also draws attention to theatre being one of the main generators of this nation, constructing it “through the imaginable realm.”³⁶ Similar to Helen Gilbert, who found theatre as a means by which “communities register, reiterate, and/or contest modes and models of national belonging”³⁷ in moments of acute socio-political friction, Holdsworth also emphasised the idea of theatres dealing with the concept of nations in times of certain rupture, crisis, or conflict. Nevertheless, her research focused on theatres presenting a “creative dialogue with tensions in national fabric,”³⁸ a specific intention that will prove itself as not applicable for the conceptual goals of this dissertation. To be more precise, the following paper will move in the opposite direction, questioning not how theatre structures could engage in securing a creative dialogue but, moreover, how and under what circumstances they functioned as an ‘echo-chamber’ made to transmit the *soliloquy* ‘authored’ by the ruling political system.

On a similar note to Holdsworth, Jill Dolan argued that theatre and performance have the capacity to move beyond the national paradigm to inspire audience members to feel “allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public” that can promote “a more abstracted notion of ‘community’, or (...) an even more intangible idea of ‘humankind.’”³⁹ In effect, Dolan understood theatre to have the potential not only to reflect what is happening in a nation at any given time but, via its discursive, imaginative, and communal realm, “to contribute to the creation of the nation”⁴⁰ through the cultural discourses it generates, the representations it offers, and the narratives or myths it chooses to stage. It is exactly this potent capacity of a national theatre in creating and representing the nation that will serve as conceptual guidance of the here-proposed dissertation.

National Theatre

Intending to investigate how theatre approached the concept of nation in comparison to the dominant political discourse, I chose to focus my research on the national, i.e. institutional theatre system due to its representational significance to investigate how theatre approached

³⁵ Lada Čale Feldman, “Within and Beyond Theatre: President Tuđman’s Birthday Celebration at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb,” in *Theatre in the Context of Yugoslav Wars*, eds. Jana Dolečki, Senad Halilbašić and Stefan Hulfeld (Basingstoke/London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 152.

³⁶ Holdsworth, *Theatre & Nation*, 6.

³⁷ Helen Gilbert, foreword to Jacqueline Lo, *Staging Nation: English Language Theatre in Malaysia and Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), vii.

³⁸ Holdsworth, *Theatre & Nation*, 7.

³⁹ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

the concept of nation in comparison to the dominant political discourse. More exactly, as they usually rely upon the ruling political system (financially, administratively, materially, etc.), the national theatres promote a specific relationship with the governing structures. For instance, throughout history, they were often used as an ‘outlet’ for disseminating certain political agendas and positions advocated by those in power. These functions of the national theatre system as well as its associations with the ruling political authorities will be researched throughout my dissertation, allowing me to reveal the more detailed strategies of promoting dominant political values of that time. Nevertheless, few examples stemming from the non-institutional realm of theatre production will also be investigated, mostly to prove how the dominant political discourse was not ‘distributed’ exclusively through channels of administrative powers that an institutional theatre system implies.

Considering the Croatian national theatre system as the central point of my research, a brief theoretical and historical contextualisation of the term felt needed. Although the most general definitions consider national theatre as being a “high-profile building in a capital city brimming with civic pride and cultural prominence, producing works by national playwrights and theatre-makers in show that exude high production values because of their sizable government subsidies,”⁴¹ more elaborated research in the field of theatre historiography introduced by authors such as Marvin Carlson or Steve E. Wilmer has showed that “each National Theatre was unique in that it reflected a specific originating moment, location, set of goals, language, history, and mythology, as well as idiosyncratic beliefs of its individual founding members.”⁴² This means that different national theatres have, throughout history, manifested specific features and functions, responding to various political, social, and cultural circumstances and transformations, hence escaping a more general explanation.

Nevertheless, I still found the general historical evolution of national theatre as the highest representative structure in one national culture intriguingly relevant for the specific topic I will tackle throughout this dissertation. As the processes of national unification taking form in Croatia throughout the early 1990s were more or less modelled after selected historical templates of national identity, one aim of this work is to see to what extent this was also true for the national theatre system in the making.

The history of national theatre places its origins in the European court systems of the 17th and 18th centuries, with these stages being used mostly to propagate the interests as well as the

⁴¹ Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 27.

⁴² Steve E. Wilmer, *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9.

values of those in power. It was not until the founding of the Hamburger National Theatre in 1767 that a new form of municipal theatre was inaugurated, extending its stage to bourgeois audiences. However, the national theatre was still being imagined as a cultural institution focused on disseminating national values. An important stage in the history of national theatre was most famously articulated by Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) who first established the concept of national theatre being not only a result but also the condition of a nation.⁴³ The most precise critique of Schiller's thesis came from Loren Kruger who claimed that Schiller actually presupposed that this “nation-to-be-created is already present, singular, remarkable.”⁴⁴ This is an argument that, in a way, promoted the primordial understanding of nation and nationality and which was, as I will show, overtly employed in the case of national theatre in Croatia in the early 1990s.

As of the late 20th century and in the context of postmodern theories, a comprehensive theoretical approach to the notion of national theatre became very difficult to execute, and the concept was mostly investigated by departing from specific national perspectives. However, a question of its ‘national function’ that included theatre audiences as representants of the nation became an important one. On this note, Loren Kruger posited a very relevant argument in regard to the audiences of the national theatre considered as the representative of the people, stating how “the idea of representing the nation in theatre, of summoning a representative audience that will in turn recognise itself as nation on stage, offers a compelling if ambiguous image of national unity.”⁴⁵ Although this is very much true (the combination of individual identities assembled in a theatre audiences escapes any kind of generalisation), the focus of the here-proposed dissertation will be on the active potential of the theatre system itself to generate a nationally heterogeneous public. Following Kruger's positions on the representative function of theatre audiences, my work will concentrate on detecting the strategies of this national function of institutional theatres, analysing both how this was defined as such ‘from within’ (by repertory choices of theatres and their officials) as well as ‘from above’ (i.e. by administrative laws, proclamations, official cultural policy, etc.).

⁴³ “If we had a national stage, we would also become a nation.” Schiller, as quoted in *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, eds. Bruce McConachie, Tobin Nellhaus, Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, Tamara Underiner (New York: Routledge, 2016), 37.

⁴⁴ Loren Kruger, as quoted in Holdsworth, *Theatre and Nation*, 32.

⁴⁵ Loren Kruger, *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France and America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 3.

Holdsworth argued how “it is a grandiose claim to suggest that theatre has the power to bring the nation into being literally or metaphorically,”⁴⁶ it should instead be understood as “either directly or indirectly (...) questioning, re-assessing and challenging national politics, values and priorities.” Throughout this dissertation, I will try to show in what way the national theatre in Croatia during the early 1990s *de facto* failed to evolve as a platform for a public debate on these concepts. The here-proposed theories of national theatre will therefore serve me in order to show whether and how the theatrical system in the analytical focus of my work was linked to “a utopian figuration of the nation united in the theatre.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Nadine Holdsworth, *Theatre and National Identity: Re-Imagining Conceptions of Nation* (New York/London: Routledge, 2014), 2.

⁴⁷ Kruger, *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France and America*, 3.

1.2. Analytical Framework and Methodology

The organisational framework of this dissertation was determined by the findings of the discourse analysis of the material extensively consulted over several years of my research. This material, consisting of both primary and secondary sources, was collected from available public archives (such is the National University Library in Zagreb), various media-outlets, specific institutional archives (such is the archive at the Institute for History of Theatre at the Croatian Academy of Science), as well as from archives of respective national theatre institutions. On the one hand, primary sources of this work consist of the video recordings of performances, accompanying visual material, texts of plays, pamphlets and program leaflets of selected productions, interviews, newspapers articles, and relevant data from other periodicals dealing with the designated topics. On the other hand, the secondary sources featured in this research include selected scholar articles or volumes both from local as well as international authors dealing with the most relevant contextual notions. In a general attempt to dedicate my research to what Marvin Carlson calls “the entire theatre experience,”⁴⁸ I have opted to form my methodological agenda on positions by Ric Knowles who saw the “meaning in theatre [being] produced at the intersection of three shifting and mutually constitutive poles: conditions of production, performance, and conditions of reception.”⁴⁹ In other words, this dissertation will include and analyse all available material testifying to these processes and elements of theatre creation. The main challenges of my methodological approach (such as the overt lack of video documentation, etc.) will be duly declared and discussed.

The primary temporal framework of this dissertation will be framed by the wartime activities executed on the territory of Croatia, i.e. the period between the first armed conflicts in 1991 and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. This timeline was chosen because it coincided with different processes of national consolidation important for the planned contextual analysis. Furthermore, as one of the main aims of this dissertation is to show the interdependent relation of wartime and procedures of defining and presenting nationhood, the determined timeframe was found to be highly pertinent and operative. Nevertheless, pursuing the assumption that these theatrical ‘visions of Croatianhood’ staged in the Croatian institutional theatre in the early 1990s did not occur ‘out of thin air’, I decided to extend the initial timescale to the preceding period of Croatian history. The decision to include the

⁴⁸ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: the Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2.

⁴⁹ Ric Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

period between 1945 and 1991 in this dissertation will allow me to engage in a comparative research of the phenomena proposed in the main section of the dissertation, hence determining their relevant distinctiveness.

As for the ‘locality’ of the envisaged research, although pertinent productions from other Croatian cities such as Split, Rijeka, and Dubrovnik were included, most of the here-analysed productions were in fact executed in institutional theatres of Zagreb, the Croatian capital city, as well as its political and administrative centre. Although I am aware of the perils of generalisation (meaning that these productions could only partially represent the general national theatre production executed throughout the country), I still considered this core of examples to be of high relevance for the main conceptual outcomes of this work due to the central political, social, and national position of the city.

As for the choice of the productions that will be analysed throughout my dissertation, they were selected based on repertoire research and were introduced in the analytical core according to the main conceptual questions outlined in this introduction. In the process of investigating the above-mentioned acquired material, I have engaged in its systematisation according to the topics they address and their functional features, a process that simultaneously generated the organisational form of my dissertation.

Organisational Overview

As explained, the research process executed throughout this paper was influenced by the preliminary body of data dealing with theatre production of the most important institutional theatres in Croatia between 1991 and 1995. The systemic approach to organising this available content led me to identify several thematic concepts that indicated the main strategies of the institutional theatre system in representing nationhood in the wartime context. During this investigative process and according to the detected specifics of researched productions, three main segments of this dissertation have been formed, preceded by the already mentioned prelude section.

The prelude focuses on analysing different socio-political and cultural phenomena of nationalistic character that sporadically occurred in the national theatre system during the period of 1945–1991 when Croatia existed as a part of a supra-national and socialist Yugoslav Federation project. By detecting different models of ‘expressing’ ethnic national affiliation both in the socio-political discourse of that time as well as in the scope of national theatre, I wanted to detect the main ‘referential points’ of similar manifestations that occurred

as of 1991. More precisely, in addition to outlining the most relevant mythical positions of ‘Croatianhood’ (such as the historical wish for attaining an autonomous national state, the significance of the myth propagating the eternal national suffering, the symbolical power of national language, historical narratives, national figures, or the Croatian Catholic Church, etc.), I detected those theatrical examples that reflected or initiated them. A special emphasis in analysing these theatrical performances and texts will be given to those examples that were re-staged on national theatre stages as of 1991, hence testifying to a certain ‘recirculating’ nature of these mythical concepts of nationhood. Resorting to a rather substantial body of theatre examples (productions from the Zrinski-Frankopan opus such as *Zrinski*, *In Wiener-Neustadt*, *The Wolves*, *Katarina Zrinska*, etc.), I will detect and elaborate the specific mythical concepts of ‘Croatianhood’ that they articulated. Moreover, the mentioned chapter will serve to identify how the theatre system of that time detected and represented the main ‘enemies’ of the Croatian political autonomy, hence opening the comparative field towards the notion of delineating a nationhood by defining those existing outside its borders.

The first sub-chapter of the chapter dedicated to the modes of theatrical representation of the nation in the Croatian institutional theatre during the wartime will deal with staging of different historical narratives. As the concept of a nation cannot be “sustained without a suitable past,”⁵⁰ the focus of this section will be to detect how a “worthy and distinctive past [was] rediscovered and appropriated” in order to “create a convincing representation of the ‘nation’.”⁵¹ More precisely, I will outline the main topics and mythical narratives from the national history that were instituted as ‘formative’ for the nation in the making.

Another important segment of this chapter will include the staging of nation and nationhood located in the myth of an autonomous national culture defined by specific ethnic features such as the authorship, language, or territorial provenance of the selected relevant productions. Simultaneously to the dominant political discourse that presented the Croatian national culture as a historically continuous concept suppressed by different ‘extranational’ political concepts, I will outline to what extent the theatre production of that time reflected and, moreover, generated these and similar notions. By including the examples of productions such as *Osman*, *Hekuba*, or *Teuta*, I will also investigate how certain historical narratives were ‘nationalised’ in order to fit the overall strategies of securing distinctive cultural heritage used to justify the project of attaining an autonomous national state.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey A. Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds., *Myths and Nationhood* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

Furthermore, as done throughout the whole dissertation, the noted examples will be compared to their direct wartime actuality, hence initialising potential conclusions on the function of the presented narratives in interpreting the ongoing conflict.

The third section of this chapter will be dedicated to one production specifically, namely *The Hearth* staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1991, serving as a very effective example of how some national myths reoccurring on national stages in Croatian theatre as of 1991 featured undeniably controversial content. More precisely, I will focus on the political revival of the openly nationalistic heritage stemming from the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945), providing examples of its manifestations both in the socio-political discourse as well as in theatre repertoires of the wartime. In the context of this section and the example it features, a special emphasis will be given to the concepts of nationhood as developed by the Croatian diaspora, a distinguished political entity that gained additional relevance during the early 1990s. Representing an important (and in the scope of Croatian national theatre historiography often neglected) segment in the history of continuous existence of Croatian national identity, the notion of émigré communities as ‘preserving’ this nationhood will be contextually analysed. In addition, the theatrical rehabilitation of nationalistic controversies represented in the named production occurred without distinct public condemnation both from the general public as well as from theatre professionals. As a result, this segment will also deal with the responsibility of theatre community in securing national relevance to a content that featured direct exclusive implications, defining those who do not fit the promoted concept of national identity in the reality of its staging.

The third chapter of my dissertation addresses the representation of the nation in Croatian wartime theatre by resorting to different symbols and ‘embodiments’ of nationhood, ranging from historical figures, such as medieval rulers, to existing figures from modern history whose political views and trajectories were recognised as metaphors of the Croatian nation. Serving as a means of direct identification with the concept of nationhood, as I am going to argue, these figures simultaneously functioned as expressions of certain national values promoted in the political discourse of that time. While engaging in the contextual analysis of the concept of a national hero and its potent relevance in defining a communal identity, I will also determine to what extent these factual narratives were adapted from national history and tailored to suit contemporary political agendas as reproduced by the political authorities of that time. The productions introduced in this section (*The Death of Stjepan Radić*, *Andrija Hebrang* and *Domagojada*) will also serve to outline the evolution of the concept of a nation as it occurred from 1991 until 1995, thereby showing how it was adapted to fit particular

political constraints. Furthermore, I will specify how these productions offered unambiguous interpretations of the wartime context, not only disclosing recurrent mythical positions of ‘Croatianhood’ but also identifying and historicising the actual enemy fought on the battlefields.

In another segment of this chapter dedicated to symbols of the nation, I will analyse three productions from the designated period that featured women as central figures (*The Hearth*, *Hecuba*, and *Teuta*), hence dealing with the question in what way they were ‘used’ to represent and generate a specific and overtly gendered concept of nationhood and national unity. As done throughout this dissertation, these examples will also be contextualised by different relevant socio-political phenomena as well as the dominant media discourse of that time, leading to valuable intersectional conclusions. In addition, I will examine theoretical assertions dealing with the relationship between wartime and gender, inspecting if and how gender roles became simplified or ‘naturalised’ in this context, hence setting grounds for a more specific analysis of the stated productions.

The last chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to another strategy of representing nationhood that gained much popularity on national theatre stages in Croatia during wartime, namely the productions affirming Catholic religion as a differential trait of national identity. Considering the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s being fought along ethnic as well as religious borders, I will investigate the topic of religious affirmation and its significance for the nationhood in this segment, as well as how the national theatre system of that time addressed these specific phenomena. After providing a more general analysis of ethnoclericism that prevailed in most of the Yugoslav successor countries, I will first try to detect examples of ‘performing’ religious belonging in the socio-political discourse by identifying the most relevant events and political performances of this kind (for instance, the official public ceremony of proclaiming the Republic of Croatia in 1991 executed on the main Zagreb square). Furthermore, prompted by a certain theatrical ‘revival’ of religious topics in the early 1990s, I will introduce and analyse the most pertinent examples (*The Torment of Our Saviour*, *The Star of Bethlehem*, *The Stealing of the Statue of Holy Mary*, and *A Voice in the Desert-Stepinac*) that will answer the question why religion became such a prominent topic on theatre stages of wartime Croatia and how this relates to the wartime context, as well as to identify the main consequences of such a theatrical tendency.

The conclusion chapter will provide an overview of the theatrical phenomena occurring in the proposed context marked by both processes of defining a nation and the national identity as well as wartime. More importantly, these phenomena from the early 1990s will then be

compared to the context detailed in the prelude section, hence providing relevant conclusions on their specific socio-political and other functions. In other terms, I will aim to extract and concretise different positions of institutional theatre production that both reflected the already existing concepts of representing the nation, as well as those that detect their distinctive 'purpose' in the given setting. Following this agenda, my dissertation aims to contribute to the overall research dealing with the national tendencies of the theatre system in Croatia during early 1990s, which has, up to this date, been extremely scarce and sporadic. Reasons for this lack of academic research might be found in the fact that the topic of the national theatre's role in the context of the nationalist political agendas was (and still is) treated as a certain 'blind spot' of Croatian theatre history due to the rather reactionary aspects it featured. Detecting the ways in which the national theatre system somewhat 'regressed' to its primary function of promoting nationalist agendas of that time proved itself to be of lesser priority for the national theatre historiography mostly dealing with more 'affirmative' theatrical phenomena of the period. Moreover, the topic was somehow 'overshadowed' by the study of how the Croatian theatre system related to the concrete conditions of war, i.e. detecting the influence of conflict on the functioning as well as the production of theatres in that period.

In conclusion, the here-proposed outline of my dissertation should, by all means, be considered as just one organisational possibility of the analysed content. As I will point out, many of the suggested productions featured concepts that could have easily positioned them in several chapters. In addition, I am quite aware of the 'limitations' of this work that at the same time present possibilities for additional future research. For instance, the already mentioned focus on theatre production originating from Zagreb institutional theatres could have been extended to other national institutions from other parts of Croatia. However, due to the lack of archival material and the impossibility to engage in more detailed field research, this was not included in the final version of my work. Moreover, although the topic dealing with the representation of nationhood and national identity offers valuable conclusions in the context of affective theories, they were not chosen to form a more general reference point but were, nevertheless, applied in specific cases throughout the paper.⁵² Likewise, although

⁵² For an introduction to the affective theories considering theatre as disseminating an emotional pull towards its audiences, see Hurley, *National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Céline Dion*. However, Hurley also makes productive space in her analysis for 'emotional labours' and, as such, pinpoints how particular works cannot only be read as national exclusively through their subject and aesthetic qualities. Moreover, she claims that one of the key characteristics that define national theatre productions is the way they activate a pre-existing sense of nationhood, which can also result in a powerful, affective experience.

initially planned to be included in the dissertation, a separate chapter dedicated to a more systematic analysis of strategies of staging ‘the other’ could not be executed due to a simple lack of space and time. As it presents an important element of constructing a national identity, it will also be contextually employed only in specific cases and will, hopefully, form an important segment of my future research.⁵³

⁵³ The concept of representing ‘the Other’ i.e. the enemy of ‘Croatianhood’ as well as the wartime enemy was to some extent discussed in my article “Theatre on the Front Lines: *Ad Hoc* Cabaret in Croatia, 1991–1992,” published in *Theatre in the Context of Yugoslav Wars*, eds. Jana Dolečki, Senad Halilbašić, and Stefan Hulfeld (Basingstoke/London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

2. PRELUDE: ANNOUNCING THE CROATIAN NATION IN INSTITUTIONAL THEATRE (1945–1991)

2.1. Theatre and its Socio-Political Context: Overview and Main Phenomena

This chapter will consider theatre texts and events that, seen from the perspective of the main topic of my work, have manifested and, to some extent, announced different phenomena of nation-building processes that will be fully activated in the Croatian wartime theatre.

Although posited as introductory, this chapter will still openly communicate the analytical outcomes presented in the following central segments of this paper. By detecting and outlining the relevant theatre productions presenting the concept of nation in the pre-war period Croatia, I intend to bring the central arguments of my research to a broader comparative perspective, pursuing those theoretical interpretations of national theatre constructed around the notions of “recycled national narratives,”⁵⁴ the reaffirmation of the nationhood by resorting to different elements of cultural heritage and tradition, etc. As “historical, national and cultural continuity”⁵⁵ is considered to be one of the main characteristics of national theatre, the importance of positioning the examples of (re)constructing national theatre in a wider historical perspective proved to be inevitable.

When trying to describe the overall theatre history of Croatia in the period between 1945 and 1991, one is faced with a very dispersive and elaborated material of research. In addition, the fact that the named period witnessed some of the most complex socio-political and ideological shifts that directly influenced the theatre system makes this task even more challenging to execute. The main analytical focus of this chapter will be directed at productions staged or produced by national or state-funded theatres, hence disclosing specific interdependent relations between these institutions and the state apparatus that governed or conditioned them. Nevertheless, due to the specific conditions of theatre making of the mentioned period—and, most notably, that of the state-censorship—significant productions by several non-institutional and amateur theatres of that time will also be incorporated into this study. As done with other chapters, the focus of this one will also remain on the plays and dramatic texts written by domestic authors. Although there were few well documented cases of plays authored by foreign authors bringing certain political significance to the local

⁵⁴ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 2.

⁵⁵ Steve E. Wilmer, “Reifying Imagined Communities: Nationalism, Post-Colonialism and Theatre Historiography,” *Nordic Theatre Studies* 12 (1999): 94–103.

context,⁵⁶ native authorship simply manifests more relevance in the context of dealing with the research categories of nationhood, national identity, and artistic reaction to a specific ideological setting.

As the focal point of my work is the concept of nation as produced or reflected in the institutional theatre of the wartime, I find it necessary to introduce this notion in the context of socialist Yugoslavia in order to conclude whether there had been some shifts in its apprehension and ensuing usage. With the end of WWII and the establishing of the Yugoslav communist movement as the key political power, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was officially declared, composed of six People's Republics—namely Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Formed as a one-party political system with very clear ideological objectives that very much transformed the previously formed concepts of state and nation, the supra-ethnic and supra-national term of 'Yugoslav nation'⁵⁷ gained a priority position in the overall socio-political structure of the state. Although throughout the time the administrative position of different nations living on the territory of Yugoslavia shifted slightly throughout that time, in general, they were not considered to be political subjects but were considered as cultural elements of this Yugoslav nation. Understanding this newly established identity not only as a result of but also as a condition for the success of the Yugoslav unification project, any 'occurrence' of nationalist endeavours other to the one declaring superiority of the Yugoslav nation as such, was controlled, and to some extent even administratively prohibited. This control was not only employed in the case of politics but was also very much used in the case of cultural production—and, as I am going to show, with the theatre system not being treated different in this regard.

Controlling the Representations of the Nation: The Question of Censorship

When discussing the theatre as a state-funded cultural system in the scope of socialist Yugoslavia, the most relevant topic one needs to include in this discussion is that of the state-

⁵⁶ Most notable case would be the production of *Plebejci vježbaju ustanak* [The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising] by Günther Gras, performed in 1971 in Zagreb Theatre &TD. For more on the play, the conditions and the repercussions of its staging, see Rikard Puh, "Uspjela neuspjela revolucija 1971 u Zagrebu," *Krležini dani u Osijeku 2013: Supostojanja i suprotstavljanja u hrvatskoj drami i kazalištu* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/ Filozofski Fakultet/Zavod za povijest hrvatske književnosti, kazališta i glazbe HAZU, Odsjek za povijest hrvatskog kazališta, 2014).

⁵⁷ First articulate ideas concerning one unified nation of South Slavs were actually generated back in the 1830s. The Yugoslav nation as a notion thus holds (at least) two connotations—one referring to all South Slavs (more a supra-ethnic term), and the other referring to the citizens of socialist Yugoslavia.

censorship. As this chapter will show, different levels of censorship (and auto-censorship)⁵⁸ were actually the main factor according to or against which theatre was taking shape during the socialist period. Although Croatian theatre historiography as well as other related cultural sciences perceived it as a formative element, a factual overview of the executed censorship in Croatian theatre is difficult to find, mostly due to the fact that it was never administrated via official systems, meaning that it is extremely rarely detectable in any official documents. Just like in most socialist countries, the censorship in Yugoslavia did not officially exist but was nevertheless “the major part of the political and cultural life (...) manifesting itself through existence of numerous commissions, committees, directorates and offices”⁵⁹ that administrated a certain control over cultural and artistic production.

In fact, the main rules of what ‘could’ or ‘could not’ be represented in an artistic form were already indirectly defined by the ideological values of the socialist government, and these rules were not administrated by means of direct censorship mechanisms⁶⁰ but rather by means of auto-censorship. For instance, in the case of theatrical production, this would mean that in line with the concept of the supra-national Yugoslav identity initiated and executed by the state apparatus, topics affirming ethically exclusive nationhood were not staged in official theatres, and theatre authors rarely engaged in writing texts with openly positive national statements. This theatrical auto-censorship, favoured by the state due to its ‘untraceable’ modes of implementation, was probably also quite directly influenced by the institution of the “verbal offence” and the harsh repercussions it implied. According the criminal law of socialist Yugoslavia,

“whosoever by means of writing, leaflet, drawing, spoken word, or in some other way calls for or incites the abolition of the rule of the working class and working people, unconstitutional changes to the socialist self-management system, the breakdown of brotherhood and unity and equality of nations and nationalities, the abolition of self-management organs or their executive bodies,

⁵⁸ Playwright Fadil Hadžić described this as actually being a system made of several layers of auto-censorship administrated by the writer, the dramaturg, the director, the director of the theatre, etc. Fadil Hadžić, as quoted in Boris Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, (Zagreb: Disput 2001), 314.

⁵⁹ Radina Vučetić, *Monopol na istinu. Partija, kultura i cenzura u Srbiji šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina XX veka* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2016), 264.

⁶⁰ Unlike theatre, the media/film/print/music industry produced in the socialist Yugoslavia suffered more direct and harsher censorship measures of the state. Due to their capacity of dissemination of potentially subversive ideas to wider audiences, different laws and prohibitions were administrated to confine the production of film, music or books that were not in line with socialist values. However, one must distinguish the state censorship of the 1945–1950 that was conducted by the Agitprop office formed exactly for this purpose, and the censorship after 1950s and the law on self-management that positioned the mentioned industries—as well as the control over them—in the hands of workers’ collectives.

resistance against the decisions of the appropriate organs of government and self-management relations, the security or defence of the country, or with ill intent and false representation of social and political circumstances in the country, will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of one to ten years.”⁶¹

Apart from sporadic imprisonments, annumerated delicts also led to punishments such as dismissals from work, prohibition of public activities, social isolation, etc. As numerous examples of banishing plays after a few performances, expulsion of theatre authors from certain theatres, or prevention of some theatre texts to even reach the stage prove, the theatrical system in Croatia from 1945 was evidently not spared from these consequences. However, in all of these cases, the anonymity of those who executed these orders was left preserved, hence directing this part of the research to an “unmapped territory of *hidden* theatre history,”⁶² leaving one to resort to a considerable number of ostensible claims and conclusions.⁶³

Regardless of how under-researched this topic is due to its factual elusiveness, the mainstream Croatian theatre historiography positions censorship as one of the central conditions of the Croatian theatre in the period of the socialist rule. In his extensive volume that compiles the most important theatre plays between 1945 and 1991, one of the leading Croatian theatre historians, Boris Senker, detects several examples of active censorship in theatre, and subsequently develops a certain typology of Croatian drama according to their position towards this suppression. While, on one side, there were theatre productions that were created and produced following and propagating the ideological prescriptions and thus not challenging the censorship mechanisms at all, there were those productions that criticised their socio-political context, but out of fear from activating the censorship, they opted for different aesthetical methods of ‘hiding’ this criticism. More precisely, political positions of these productions were often cautiously encrypted in metaphors and parables, concealed in farce or comedies, camouflaged behind intertextuality or historical, meta-historical, and even religious metaphors.

The political theatre—defined as a theatre critically positioned against its political context—actually became the most prominent genre of this period and, despite a certain conditionality,

⁶¹ As quoted in Jovičević, “Censorship and Ingenious Dramatic Strategies in Yugoslav Theatre (1945–1991),” *Primerjalna književnost*, no. 31 (2008): 239.

⁶² Jovičević argues that there is a parallel theatre history that consists of all the texts and dramas that could not be staged due to different forms of censorship in the mentioned period. *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶³ More precisely, one could never really know if a certain play has been banned from the stage because of its hidden political criticism, lack of audiences, or else.

confirmed theatre as “the only space in which people could talk and think politically, where they could practice the politics (...) with theatre community serving as the model of the society or the state.”⁶⁴ This “dissident theatre”⁶⁵ appearing in the 1960s and 1970s that was, paradoxically, both the “only space of political thinking”⁶⁶ and the space defined by concrete manifestations of political will, is going to serve as the main focus in this chapter. However, following the main analytical frame of my research devoted to the theatre of the wartime 1990s and its practices of presenting nation and nationhood, in this introductory overview, I will focus on those ‘dissident’ productions or theatrical events that overtly exhibited the affirmative notions of ‘Croatianhood’, leaving aside those productions whose central aim was to criticise or question the socialist government or its ideological concepts.

Historical Shifts

In the first decade following the foundation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,⁶⁷ theatres throughout the country were marked by a certain ‘artistic obedience’ to the ideological discourse of socialism. Theatre in Socialist Republic of Croatia followed the general ‘trend’, with most staged productions answering the need to “realistically reflect our socialist reality,”⁶⁸ i.e. presenting the socialist revolution and the national liberation war, human sacrifice, and emancipatory consequences of the Yugoslav socialist movement. The large majority of these productions glorifying the outcomes of the socialist revolution were conservative in their form, enthroning ‘new realism’ as the main formative characteristic of the national theatre production, and were often found to function as legitimising the socialist ideology or political authorities.⁶⁹

In Croatian theatre, first detachments from this kind of politically compliant theatre poetics began to arise in the late 1950s, mostly via those productions and performances that

⁶⁴ Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 25–26.

⁶⁵ Jovičević, “Censorship and Ingenious Dramatic Strategies in Yugoslav Theatre (1945–1991),” 238.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 238.

⁶⁷ Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was founded on November 29, 1945. On April 7, 1963, it changed its name to Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. In order to avoid further confusion, throughout this work I will use the term of socialist Yugoslavia as a unifying term referring to the overall period of 1945–1991.

⁶⁸ Augustin Stipčević, as quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 7.

⁶⁹ However, Senker implies that these plays written right after the WWII should rather be considered as a specific form of scenic ‘conscience-cleaning’ and relieving the pain or the guilt of its actual participants. In other words, he argued that these texts were not purely cold and rational political statements, but were resonating a certain emotional and affective level with the audiences that largely were involved, in one way or another, in the realities of the WWII itself.

established the individual as the main activator of the dramatic narrative.⁷⁰ This period was also marked by a significant rise in the number of contemporary Croatian authors represented on national theatre stages, initiating a trend that would mark the decades to follow. As for the period between 1960 and 1971, theatre in the Socialist Republic of Croatia was recognised as being more or less ‘political’, either promoting the features of socialism already formed in the previous decade or hiding the political critique aimed at the ruling system. This was also a period when the productions that featured or initiated discussions on nationalism and ‘Croatianhood’ slowly started to appear on and extend beyond the national stages. This was partly due to the overall liberalisation of the federative political system and the easement of the censorship, and partly due to other socio-political events of the period which I am about to discuss in more detail.

The gradual liberalisation of socialist Yugoslavia, which will have important repercussions on the question of censorship as well, started in 1966.⁷¹ With the administrative reorganisation and decentralisation of the state power that year, the political, social, and cultural life in Yugoslavia began to flourish in its diversity, ensuring larger freedom of the press and an openness of the political and cultural system, etc. Subsequently, a decentralisation of the Yugoslav theatre system occurred as well, with new theatres being opened throughout the country. In the case of Croatia, several new theatres appeared starting in 1970, showing new authors and plays, with some of the already existing theatres gaining the attribute of ‘national’ in their designation.⁷² More importantly, an abundance of independent theatre groups and associations appeared,⁷³ declaring a more experimental approach to theatre, and, more importantly, demonstrating an elaborated interest in contemporary Croatian drama. In addition, Zagreb and other Croatian cities such as Split and Dubrovnik became susceptible to different theatre aesthetics by means of organising

⁷⁰ Most famous theatrical examples of this being *Glorija* by Ranko Marinković (1955), *Heraklo* by Marijan Matković (1958) and *Aretej* by Miroslav Krleža (1959). Furthermore, these and other plays that soon followed, established a new typology of protagonists populating the Croatian drama of that time. Namely, they introduced or renewed four types of central figures in drama—the model of a “loner or a dreamer” denying the society in total; the “outcast” excluded from the society; the “victim” and the “rebel.” Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 23.

⁷¹ During the plenary session of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia held in 1966, the head of the Secret Service Agency, Aleksandar Ranković, was expelled from the Party and removed from his position due to some intraparty conflicts. By removing him and his sympathisers from the positions of power, the Party formally stated its ‘new direction’, moving towards the decentralisation of power and gradual liberalisation.

⁷² In 1970, theatres in Split, Osijek and Rijeka had the adjective of national added to their official appellations. This decision could also be seen from the perspective of the government’s ‘compromising’ treatment of the national topics—while the national appellation was allowed, nationalist repertoire was not.

⁷³ To name just a few: theatre workshop “Rade Končar,” travelling theatre “Osamljena srca,” theatre workshop “Pozdravi,” “Teatar u gostima,” “Teatar SOS,” “Teatar Rinoceros,” theatre group “Histrioni,” theatre group “Akter,” etc.

international theatre festivals with guest performances of relevant theatre companies from around the world.⁷⁴ In short, “this controlled space [the Socialist Republic of Croatia] gradually transformed into a place of dialogue between art and politics or/and ideology, morality.”⁷⁵

However, this liberalisation also resulted in the more open discussion on the topic of the Yugoslav identity, and moreover, the display of national sentiments and first ‘confrontations’ between different Yugoslav republics—most prominently in the field of *realpolitik* but also in the historical, cultural, as well as linguistical realm. For instance, the topic of language became a strongly debated topic that not only indicated the highly problematic position that different national languages had in the context of the ‘unifying’ political project of Yugoslavia but also had a major influence on the national theatre system. At that time, the Croatian national identity in its cultural, political, linguistic, and all other features became more and more present in theatre as well, pointing directly to the topics that will be relevant for my research considering the institutional theatre of the early 1990s. This is why an overview exhibiting the evolution of national language policies is crucial for the overall topic of this dissertation.

Nation and Language: “the Declaration” of 1967

The Serbo-Croatian (or Croato-Serbian) language was actually already standardised in 1850 when some of the most prominent Serbian and Croatian writers and linguists such as Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski,⁷⁶ Ivan Mažuranić,⁷⁷ Dimtrija Demeter,⁷⁸ or Vuk Karadžić,⁷⁹ deeply influenced by the principles of the Illyrian movement,⁸⁰ signed the “Vienna Literary Agreement,” thereby declaring their intention to create a unified linguistic standard. The base of this joint language was the Shtokavian dialect, although the language had, in fact, two

⁷⁴ International Festival of Student theatre, Zagreb; EUROKAZ Theatre Festival, Zagreb; Dubrovnik Summer Festival; Split Summer Festival, etc.

⁷⁵ Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 23.

⁷⁶ Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski (1816–1889), Croatian politician and writer, most known as the author of the first speech in Croatian language ever to be delivered in the Croatian Parliament in 1843.

⁷⁷ Ivan Mažuranić (1814–1890), a Croatian poet, linguist and politician, one of the most important figures of Croatian cultural heritage.

⁷⁸ Dimitrije Demeter (1811–1872), a Greek-Croatian poet and playwrights, best known for his play *Teuta*, analysed in subchapters 3.2. and 5.2. of this dissertation.

⁷⁹ Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864), Serbian linguist, philologist, and reformer of the Serbian language. He wrote the first Serbian dictionary in standardised Cyrillic alphabet, distinguishing this language from both Serbian and Russian church Slavonic versions.

⁸⁰ The main objective of this movement was to pursue an ethnic and linguistic unity of Croats in order to lay the foundation for cultural and linguistic unification of all South Slavs under the revived umbrella term ‘Illyrian’. For more detailed description of the movement and its national significance, see pages 150–151 and 170–173 of this dissertation.

equally important standard versions—one systematised in Cyrillic (featuring Ekavian subdialect) and the other in the Latin alphabet (featuring Ijekavian subdialect). During the 20th century, this language served as the official language of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and was also one of the official languages of socialist Yugoslavia, alongside Slovenian and Macedonian. In 1954, the Yugoslav Government declared that both literary variants of Serbo-Croatian (the Serbian and the Croatian) should be considered as equal in their everyday use but that the official language of the Federation should be the joint variant of these two. In the attempt to further solidify and administratively unify the two languages, the socialist government went on to publish a joint Serbo-Croatian dictionary. The project of creating this dictionary was entrusted to national cultural institutions of both Croatia (“Matica Hrvatska”)⁸¹ and Serbia (“Matica Srpska”), and the committee was composed of the most renowned Yugoslav linguists.

However, on March 13, 1967, the Yugoslav daily newspaper *Telegram* published a document named “The Declaration on the Name and Position of the Croatian Literary Language,” written and signed by the most influential cultural and scientific institutions in Croatia.⁸² In the document, the authors claimed that the Serbian and Croatian language were linguistically the same but nevertheless demanded separate language standards as well as the right to call them distinctive national languages. By accusing the planned project of publishing joint Serbo-Croatian dictionaries of imposing the Serbian speech model and ultimately withdrawing from the working group, the authors of the Declaration claimed that the Croats, just as any other ethnic group in socialist Yugoslavia, had a constitutional right to their own language.⁸³

Following the publication of the Declaration and the very intense public discussion that followed, the Yugoslav Government decided in 1968 to officially condemn “certain tendencies that attempt to plant nationalist ideas (...) in the public via scientific discussions of language”⁸⁴ and stated that this language question could not be solved outside of the given

⁸¹ Created in 1842 “Matica Hrvatska” is the oldest non-governmental national institution that focuses on the promotion of Croatian national culture in Croatia as well as internationally (today, “Matica” has more than 122 offices around the world). As its activities include extensive publishing, in 1971 “Matica” decided to print books and magazines exclusively in Croatian linguistic variation of the Serbo-Croatian. Because of this and other programs of strong national character, “Matica” was banned by the Yugoslav authorities in 1971.

⁸² Among others, it was signed by “Matica Hrvatska,” several research centres of different Croatian Universities, Old Church Slavonic Institute, as well as by some prominent individuals (for example, Miroslav Krleža, one of the most important figures of Yugoslav cultural scene at that time).

⁸³ However, the Declaration itself did not call for political secession of Croatia but rather argued for equal treatment of all languages spoken in different Yugoslav republics.

⁸⁴ Ronelle Alexander, *Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, a Grammar: With Sociolinguistic Commentary* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 414.

socio-political context. Or, put differently, the state apparatus identified the ‘independent’ Croatian language advocated by the Declaration as one of the main elements of Croatian nationalism, thus again revealing its position towards declarations of nationhood other than the Yugoslav one.

Nevertheless, the initiators and defenders of the Declaration ignored this official disapproval and continued to actively promote the Croatian language, the result of which was to be the announced publishing of the new “Croatian Orthography.” This decision not only further provoked the Yugoslav government, which then forbade its publication,⁸⁵ but also prompted serious arguments from the Serbian linguists and politicians who expressed their concern how, in the case of an ‘imposed’ Croatian language, the Serb minority in Croatia would find itself somewhat ‘unprotected’. With this rising tension between Croatian and Serbian cultural and scientific institutions threatening to overgrow its linguistic setting, the government approached the issue in a somewhat compromising manner—while those active in these movements and initiatives were dispatched from their professional positions or even arrested, some of the expressed claims of the Declaration eventually did find their way into the new Yugoslav Constitution of 1974 that guaranteed the people in Yugoslavia “the right to opt for a nation or nationality, to express their national culture, and to use their language and alphabet freely.”⁸⁶

Besides linguistic relevance, the “Declaration” held a very strong symbolic significance for those political options that advocated for Croatia’s independence and started to appear in the late 1960s. Furthermore, it marked the initial act of stating a specific national identity in the scope of the Yugoslav federative project. In the continuation of this chapter, I will outline in which way did this call for the recognition of national language influence and penetrate the Croatian theatre landscape of that time and what socio-political consequences did it provoke.

Stages of Complicity: “The Croatian Spring” and the Croatian Theatre

Without a doubt, different student movements that took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s throughout Yugoslavia also represented far-reaching events of political, social, and cultural significance. More precisely, the political situation of the 1960s in Yugoslavia was heavily marked by the student protests of 1968 that occurred in Belgrade, Zagreb, and

⁸⁵ *The Orthography of Croatian Language* was actually published in 1971 but this edition was destroyed soon after it was printed. The association “Nova Hrvatska” managed to print one edition in 1972 in London, but this version was forbidden for sale and public use in Yugoslavia. Its first official issue was available only as of 1990.

⁸⁶ György Szerbhorváth, “Language Politics and Language Rights on the Territory of Former Yugoslavia the Today’s Serbia/Vojvodina,” *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies*, no. 8 (2015): 58.

Sarajevo, which were originally influenced by similar protests happening throughout Europe and the world in that time. However, the political demands of the Yugoslav students were somewhat different, as these protests called for the “introduction of eminently communist solutions in all our social processes and relations” as well as the “economic liberation of the working class,” “banning all privileges of personal enrichment and ideological monopolism,” as well as “providing the full freedom of press, meetings, manifesting and demonstrating.”⁸⁷ The most important Belgrade protests did not last for more than a few weeks, ending with a televised speech on June 9, 1968, by the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito. Commenting on the ongoing situation, Tito famously declared that “the students were right,”⁸⁸ accused the bureaucratisation of the government as the main reason for alienating them from the main socialist values, and announced that he would accept some of the students’ demands which were subsequently incorporated into the Constitution of 1974.

However, in the context of Croatia, these student protests were more important as an event that actually initiated and strengthened the claim for national independence that, in the years that followed, gradually transformed into a political and cultural movement called “the Croatian Spring.” The political arguments of “the Croatian Spring,” also known as the MASPOK⁸⁹ movement, were articulated by the ‘liberal’ section of the Croatian Communist Party, demanding a more liberal and independent political, economic, and cultural position of the Socialist Republic of Croatia. As summed up by Ranko Bugarski, their mutual outcry—that the revenue of the Croatian Republic was being drained by the centralised government based in Belgrade, that Serbs penetrated Croatia’s most profitable tourism industry, and that “an effort was under way to ‘serbianise’ the Croatian language”⁹⁰—seemed to create an overall concern in Croatia that the Republic was being financially exploited and, moreover, that its citizens were being discredited exclusively “for being Croats.”⁹¹

In 1971, the movement composed of dissident communist politicians, intellectuals, and representatives of different cultural and scientific institutions organised gatherings, discussions, and public protests despite the prohibitions imposed by the Yugoslav

⁸⁷ These protests that occurred in biggest student cities of Yugoslavia such as Belgrade, Zagreb or Sarajevo were actually characterised by certain differences. For instance, Zagreb protests were not so violent as those in Belgrade. More importantly, beside the more general demand for social equality, Croatian protesters were actually advocating for Croatian national emancipation.

⁸⁸ Excerpts from Tito’s speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nne2feNUEu8>. Last accessed on May 13, 2019.

⁸⁹ Abbreviation from “**mas**ovni **pokret**” [massive movement].

⁹⁰ See Ranko Bugarski, “Govor skrivenih namera,” *Republika* 7, no. 118 (1995): xii. See also Ranko Bugarski, *Jezik od rata do mira* (Beograd: Beogradski krug, 1994).

⁹¹ Bugarski, “Govor skrivenih namera,” xii.

government. In the same time, the students closed down the Zagreb University by organising a strike that was suspended later that year. Although mostly focusing on political and economic reforms, the leaders of the movement also advocated for the reassertion of Croatian linguistic and cultural identity, with the claims expressed in the “Declaration” being simply incorporated into their frame of interests.

Just what position theatre was supposed to have in these times of overt expression of national awareness was best described by theatre director Petar Selem in the scope of the annual session of “Matica Hrvatska” in 1970. Discussing the significance of Croatian theatre in its political context, Selem argued that “the Croatian theatre should again find its own national identity” and, furthermore, that “in this space, those directors or actors carrying characteristics of foreign mentality and language idiom should not prevail.”⁹² In addition, he advocated for a “systematic nurture of our own theatre heritage in the same time promoting contemporary creation.”⁹³

On the other side, some theatre makers and thinkers of that time advocated for an emancipated national theatre but in the form of more cautious demands for greater artistic freedom, meaning the right to be critical. Such proclamations were best addressed in the theatre magazine *Prolog* founded in 1968. In its first issue, the editors summoned the main aspects of this new theatrical movement initiated by Croatian dramaturges and intellectuals claiming their “fight for own beliefs, aesthetic platform and orientation in today’s unusually complex historical and cultural moment,” emphasising their wish to be seen “as a unique group with a clear and uncompromised critical attitude (...) and critical engagement in the crucial ethic, social, political, moral and existential questions.”⁹⁴ They also insisted that, in their vision of contemporary Croatian theatre, “it would be necessary to publish and stage those texts that couldn’t satisfy rigid aesthetical criteria (...) with the aim of stylistically and linguistically construct a national theatre.”⁹⁵

Alongside advocating for a more relevant theatre production, the editorial board that signed this opening Manifesto of *Prolog* also introduced the question of language as the fundamental feature of a national theatre, stating in addition that “the basic condition for a real, healthy and creative life of any society is the existence of the local autochthonous dramatic word and

⁹² Petar Selem, “Prema prijelomnici,” *Vijenac*, April 10, 2008.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ As quoted in Lada Čale Feldman, “Kazalište šezdesetih i ‘hrvatska mlada Kritika’,” *Zagrebačka slavistička škola. Prostor u jeziku; Književnost i kultura šezdesetih: zbornik radova 37. seminara Zagrebačke slavističke škole* (2009): 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

its constant presentation to the audiences.”⁹⁶ Said differently, this notion of artistic freedom in fact meant preferring the use of national language on national stages, hence echoing some of Selem’s demands as well as those political controversies provoked by the discussion on Serbo-Croatian dictionary and language.⁹⁷ In the next few years,⁹⁸ *Prolog* existed as the most important platform for publishing dramatic texts of Croatian authors, hence contributing to the process of ‘Croatisation’ or, as Igor Mrduljaš names it, “re-Croatisation” of the theatre in Croatia, aiming at restoring “its Croatian spirit that was systematically suffocated with the brotherhood-and-unity yugoslavism.”⁹⁹ As I will argue, it was these programmatic instructions expressed in Selem’s demand and activities of *Prolog* magazine that actually slowly but profusely started to be implemented or echoed in the national theatre in Croatia in the 1960s and 1970s.

As for “The Croatian Spring,” the movement’s demands were finally overruled during the 1971 session of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the Serbian town of Karadorđevo. The consequences of this decision were significant—Tito declared the movement to be contra-revolutionary, identifying it as an attempt to restore Croatian nationalism; more than 2,000 people active within the movement were criminally prosecuted for crimes against “the state and people”;¹⁰⁰ some 25,000 people were expelled from the League of Communist of Croatia; some of the high-ranking Croatian generals in the Yugoslav Army were fired; the complete leadership of the Communist Party of Croatia was dismissed and banned from any social activities; with many of the prominent leaders or sympathisers of the movement leaving Yugoslavia under political pressure, hence initiating the biggest exodus from Croatia after 1945. The overall suppression of this rebellion overtook different levels of social and cultural life in form of “trials against the student rebels and prominent intellectuals, the dissolution of ‘Matica Hrvatska,’ the ban of ‘Croatian Orthography’; withdrawal of some TV series, films,

⁹⁶ Darko Gašparović, as quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 28.

⁹⁷ One needs to know that from 1945 until 1991 there were not many plays written in Serbian that were staged on Croatian national stages, although this kind of ‘cultural’ presentation was strongly promoted by the Yugoslav government. However, some of the plays by Serbian writers (like those authored by the famous Serbian playwright Branislav Nušić) were even performed in Serbian idiom. Plays in other Yugoslav idioms (Slovenian and Macedonian) were always translated to Croatian.

⁹⁸ *Prolog* was published from 1968 until 1984. However, in 1973 it did not get published due to the ‘financial difficulties’ that were later interpreted as the execution of the state censorship. Much of its content was dedicated to the position of Croatian theatre, offering transcripts of different theatre panels, surveys, interviews with domestic and foreign dramaturges, directors, actors, etc. Actually, its main focus was placed on publishing contemporary Croatian drama and, until 1984, they managed to publish 51 of them. The magazine also promoted the history of Croatian national theatre, reprinting older plays and dedicating issues to figures of national importance. In addition, it featured (extremely sporadic) reports on theatre activities in other parts of Yugoslavia.

⁹⁹ Igor Mrduljaš, *O hrvatskome glumištu* (Zagreb: Hrvatska kulturna zaklada HKZ, 1999), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Among other prominent convicts was Franjo Tuđman, the future president of Croatia.

and documentaries from public television, withdrawal of ‘inappropriate’ theatre productions or cancelling premieres,”¹⁰¹ etc. In 1971, with the drastic repercussions of the state apparatus against the manifestations of Croatian nationalism on different levels of political, social, and cultural life, the period of what was known to be the “Years of Lead” or “the Croatian silence” followed.

¹⁰¹ Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 25.

2.2. Staging National Myths

The Zrinski-Frankopan Opus

Departing from the above-explained position that the Croatian theatre formed along or against the official censorship during the 1960s as well as the political declarations of the “Croatian Spring,” most theatre scholars in Croatia detected few ‘genres’ in which theatre productions of that time tried to avoid the more or less strict censorship while still directly criticising the state apparatus. The general belief is that, in order to disguise their political engagement and the critique towards the political system, quite a few of these productions resorted to mythical, historical, or para-historical forms. However, as I am going to show, this ‘historical disguise’ of the theatrical critique also very often employed different historical or mythical narratives taken from the Croatian national history which, in turn, significantly influenced this approach and its outcomes. Staging topics from Croatian history could not only be seen as a method of criticising the supra-national Yugoslav project but also as a way of reaffirming certain historical myths as nationally formative—as my further analysis will prove, many of them will be ultimately set in full action in the Croatian theatre of the early 1990s.

As already explained, productions presenting an ‘affirmative’ version of Croatian national history were not often staged in the Croatian theatre during the socialist Yugoslavia as the ideology of that time forbade any kind of open manifestations of distinctive nationalistic concepts.¹⁰² However, parallel to the “the Croatian Spring” and the more public political manifestations of ‘Croatianhood’, several productions of this type did manage to be staged. When analysing theatre repertoires of the mentioned period, one could understand that one of the most popular historical national myths that made the stages of that time was the one delivering the topics belonging to the Zrinski-Frankopan myth. Presented as the essential myth of the Croatian nation throughout history and especially of the late 19th century,¹⁰³ the stories from the Zrinski-Frankopan historical repository were extensively depicted in epic

¹⁰² The only exception being the story of Matija Gubec (1548–1573), Croatian revolutionary and the leader of the Croatian-Slovene peasant revolt of 1573. Although being part of national heroic registry, his peasant origins and his fight against the feudal oppressors were seen as an archetype of socialist struggle, and he was thus celebrated as a symbol of Yugoslav socialist struggle. A theatre play about Gubec written by Milan Begović was often staged as of 1945 in different theatres throughout Yugoslavia, but the most popular artistic rendition of the story was the musical *Gubec-beg* first performed in 1975.

¹⁰³ “For almost two centuries the Conspiracy was almost forgotten in the Croatian culture. Its transformation into a historical myth occurred in the second half of the 19th century. This interpretative turn began at the time of the 300th anniversary celebration of the Siege of Szigetvár in 1566.” Davor Dukić, “The Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy as a national sacrificial narrative,” *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 148.

poems,¹⁰⁴ novels,¹⁰⁵ opera,¹⁰⁶ and a significant number of theatre plays.¹⁰⁷ Throughout history, the stories of both Zrinski and Frankopan noble families proved themselves to be “highly functional in the creation of a coherent national history”¹⁰⁸ for several reasons. First of all, both of these noble families stemmed from the “heart of the medieval Croatian Kingdom,”¹⁰⁹ hence marking this period as an ‘entry point’ of a certain national longevity and continuity. Furthermore, they represented a long-lasting kinship found to be “surviving successfully for centuries in a highly contested military zone;” they also held decisive economic, military, and social power in the region and, more importantly, “they never lost their sense of origin or forgot their Croatian language or their Croatian background.”¹¹⁰ Serving as a strong metaphor for national self-determination, Croatian theatre historiography almost unanimously saw the Zrinski-Frankopan narratives as bearing major cultural, social, and ultimately political significance. Representing such an important national myth, one could say that staging of the stories from this opus actually indicated the level of ‘permissiveness’ of different systems towards the manifestations of nationalism (or, to quote Sanja Nikčević, they were considered to be “the barometer of Croatian freedom.”¹¹¹) As these and similar productions referring to same historical source were greatly featured in Croatian theatres during the early 1990s and the context of re-building the concept of ‘Croatianhood’, detecting previous occurrences of these phenomena and analysing their circumstances and consequences proves to be pertinent for my overall research.

The Zrinski-Frankopan myth actually consists of different stories from the history of these families, two of which were (and still are) extensively used in overall cultural as well as theatre production in Croatia —one being the story of the Szigeth battle and the other of the magnate conspiracy. Although the Siege of Szigetvár or the Battle of Szigeth¹¹² (1566) did

¹⁰⁴ *Vazetje Sigeta grada* [The Conquest of the City of Sziget] by Brne Karnautić in 1573; *Opsida Sigetka* [the Siege of Szigeth] by Petar Zrinski in 1647; *Odiljenje sigetsko* [The Sziget Farewell] by Pavao Ritter Vitezović in 1684.

¹⁰⁵ *Urota zrinsko-frankopanska* [The Zrinski-Frankopan Conspiracy] by Eugen Kumičić, written in 1893.

¹⁰⁶ *Nikola Šubić Zrinski* by Ivan Zajc, first opera written in Croatian, in 1876.

¹⁰⁷ *Zriny*, by Theodor Körner in 1812, first performed in Zagreb in 1832; *Frankopan* written by Mirko Bogović in 1856; *Knez Nikola Zrinski* by Matija Ban in 1888; *Posljednji Zrinjski* [the Last Zrinski] by Higin Dragošić in 1893; *Siget* [Szigeth] by Higin Dragošić in 1895; *Katarina Zrinjska* written by Ante Tresić Pavičić in 1899; *Petar Zrinski* by Eugen Kumičić in 1900; *U Bečkom Novom mjestu* [In Wiener Neustadt] by Milan Ogrizović in 1921; *Urotnici* [Conspirators] by Tito Strozzi in 1924; *Navik on zgine ko živi pošteno* by Ivan Raos in 1971; *Urotnici* by Miro Gavran in 1984; *Katarina Zrinska od Frankopana* by Vladimir Stojisavljević in 1993; etc.

¹⁰⁸ Nataša Štefanec, “Zrinski Family in the Croatian Historiographic Discourse,” in *Frühe Neuzeit: Studien und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur und Kultur im europäischen Kontext*, eds. Achim Aurahammer, Wilhelm Kühlmann, Jan-Dirk Müller et al. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2009), 393.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 393.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹¹¹ Sanja Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2008), 38.

¹¹² Transcribed also as Szigeth or in Croatian, Siget.

not occur on the territory of Croatia due to the fact that the combat itself was led by some of the most prominent Croatian noblemen fighting for the Habsburg Monarchy, the event became one of the most important and most used myths of Croatian national history. More accurately, the leader of the army trapped in the Hungarian fortress of Szigeth by the Ottoman army and its commander Suleiman the Magnificent was a certain Nikola Šubić Zrinski (1508 or 1518–1566), a nobleman and a former Croatian Ban [viceroy]. He was appointed to this post by the Habsburg Monarchy due to his heroic deeds and, more precisely, the fact that he brought victory to the Imperial forces in the battle of Pest in 1542. He married Katarina Frankopan, a member of another noble Croatian family, thus forming one of the most prominent aristocratic dynasties that possessed significant wealth both in Croatia and Hungary. Nikola Šubić Zrinski's heroic significance was mostly explained by the fact that, despite the outnumbered enemy encircling the city of Szigeth,¹¹³ he did not surrender to his persecutors but rather followed his men in a suicidal breakthrough from the besieged fortress. Although the imperial army was eventually defeated, and Šubić Zrinski and his men died in the battle, the Croatian historiography interpreted this clash as having rather comprehensive positive outcomes, i.e. that it postponed the advancement of the Ottoman army towards Vienna.

The other story from the mentioned opus that was determined as a formative national myth, known as the “magnate conspiracy,” follows a series of political actions spanning from 1664 until 1671, envisaged to overthrow the rule of the Habsburg Monarchy over Croatia and Hungary. Its main protagonists—the brothers Petar and Nikola Zrinski and their brother-in-law Fran Krsto Frankopan—happened to be direct descendants of Nikola Šubić Zrinski, hence securing a certain ‘genetic’ continuation to the symbolic significance of these families. Opposing the centralistic system of the Habsburg Monarchy during the wars with the Ottoman Empire and advocating for an independent proto-Croatian state, Petar Zrinski and Krsto Frankopan engaged in several secret diplomatic negotiations to secure international support for their cause. After consultations with the Ottoman diplomats, their plans and actions were exposed to the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I, who, after summoning them to Vienna under false pretences of making peace, arrested and accused them for conspiracy against the state. In 1671, both Zrinski and Frankopan were decapitated in Wiener

¹¹³ Zrinski had some 2,300 soldiers under his command, and Suleiman some 102,000.

Neustadt,¹¹⁴ with both of their bodies thrown into a common tomb. Right after their execution, all of their possessions and land were confiscated by the Empire, making sure that both families were punished for their rebellion against the Emperor. Recognised as true symbols of the fight for national independence, in 1909, a fraternity order “Brethren of Croatian Dragon” set out to find the remains of their bodies in the Wiener Neustadt tomb and, upon finding them, organised their ceremonial relocation to the main repository of the Zagreb Cathedral in 1971, in the midst of the “Croatian Spring” movement.

As mentioned, both offshoots of the described Zrinski-Frankopan heroic narrative (the Szigeth siege and the magnate conspiracy story) became constitutive elements of the Croatia’s national cultural cannon. Besides bearing all elements of a true national myth such as heroism, sacrifice in the name of homeland, etc., the fact that most of the protagonists of these histories were actually poets, translators, or chroniclers¹¹⁵ undoubtedly boosted their cultural and subsequently their national importance. Still, the main mediators of the myth were the authors who, throughout history, created numerous works and artistic renditions, predominately reflecting on narrative’s national potential and symbolic relevance. In the case of theatre, most of the total twelve plays concerning the topic were written as tragedies in a highly romantic modus, with accentuated and prioritised metaphorical features. Even when focusing exclusively on the tragic individual destinies of the main protagonists, according to different sources, many of these artistic renditions still ignited outbursts of national sentiments in the audiences. For instance, in Theodor Körner’s dramatic adaptation of the Szigeth tale from 1812, Nikola Šubić Zrinski “never claimed to be a Croat (...) and was speaking German, but [he] could still evoke certain patriotic feelings in the consciousness of the audiences.”¹¹⁶

With new political developments in Croatia in the second half of the 19th century and the national independence becoming the central argument of Croatian politicians, the myth of the Szigeth battle was revisited but featured some telling adaptations. This was namely due to the fact that he fought for the Habsburg Empire and not for an autonomous Croatia, the national

¹¹⁴ Petar’s brother and one of the main conspirators, Nikola Zrinski, was killed in a hunting accident by a wounded wild boar in 1664. Although lacking documented details on this event, contemporary Croatian historiography still often describes his death as a probable result of the Habsburg Court order.

¹¹⁵ For instance, besides being the most important military figure in 17th century Croatia and Croatian Viceroy, Petar Zrinski was also a poet, and has translated two epic poems by his brother Nikola Zrinski originally written in Hungarian and depicting the battle of Szigeth; Fran Krsto Frankopan was a prolific poet himself, writing in *kajkavian* dialect of Croatian language; his sister and Petar’s wife Katarina Frankopan also wrote poems prior to her imprisonment.

¹¹⁶ Nikola Batušić, “Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami,” in *Umjetnost riječi* no. 3/4 (1993): 153.

significance of Nikola Šubić Zrinski was, in a certain way, put on hold.¹¹⁷ This sort of distancing from the Szigeth myth was additionally explained by the fact that it was somewhat ‘shared’ with the Hungarians—not being exclusively Croatian, the myth was found too difficult to serve as building material of a specific national identity. This is why, in the years and decades that would follow, the narrative was greatly adapted to appropriate the nationalist political agendas. Out of reasons which will be explained in this chapter, the myth of the Szigeth battle eventually became somehow overshadowed by the already mentioned conspiracy myth which started to gain growing popularity as a formative myth of ‘Croatianhood’ both in political and historical discourse as well on theatre stages.

When analysing the repertoires of the national theatres in Croatia from 1945 until 1970, one can understand that there were, in fact, hardly any productions that dealt with either the conspiracy myth or the siege of Szigeth¹¹⁸—the only one that was sporadically being shown in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb was the Opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinski*, “timidly but still explicitly supporting the collective format of expressing national emotions.”¹¹⁹ However, in the wake of “the Croatian spring” and almost 50 years after the last play about the Zrinski-Frankopan topic has been written, new plays tackling these historical episodes appeared on national stages, reflecting the socio-political phenomena of their context and signalling a cautious but crucial ‘return’ of these Croatian national symbols to theatre stages.

General i njegov lakrdijaš: The Nation on the Balcony

Although one should think that theatre performances celebrating a distinct national history would be missing from the theatre repertoires in the context of socialist Yugoslavia and its hostile position towards artistic representations of openly nationalistic topics, the following research shows that these were not in fact entirely omitted from the stages. Nevertheless, not

¹¹⁷ In his speech in Croatian parliament in 1866, the politician Ante Starčević (1823–1896) fiercely opposed the planned celebration marking the 300th year of the Szigeth battle that was about to take place throughout Croatia. Serving as the president of the Croatian Party of Rights and known as “father of the Nation,” Starčević saw Šubić Zrinski as a symbol of subjugation to Austrians and Hungarians, stating that “the Croatian people has no reason to celebrate the memory of this man who was born and enriched in Croatia, but still handed it over to foreigners. Leonidas died defending his homeland while this Zrinski died defending the enemies of his homeland.” Željko Karaula, “Nikola Šubić Zrinski u pravaškoj ideologiji 19. Stoljeća,” in *III. kroatistički kongres*, ed. Stjepan Blažetin (Pečuh: Zavod Hrvata u Mađarskoj, 2018), 239.

¹¹⁸ The play *Posljednji Zrinjski* [The Last Zrinjski] written by Higin Dragošić in 1893 was staged 15 times between 1894 and 1952 in different theatres in Croatia (Zagreb, Osijek, Split, Zadar, Karlovac, Varaždin, etc.), also touring north America (Chicago and Pittsburgh). The play *Zrinjski* by Tito Strozzi, written in, was staged five times between 1924 and 1971 also in different theatres in Croatia. See Batušić, “Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami,” 153.

¹¹⁹ Ana Lederer, “Raosova drama ‘Navik on živi ki zgine pošteno’ i zrinski-frankopanska tema,” in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 1992: Hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište i hrvatska povijest* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/ Pedagoški Fakultet/Zavod za književnost i teatrologiju, 1993), 94.

all outlined performances portrayed the protagonists from a perspective that aimed at affirming their national significance. For instance, as I am going to demonstrate, one of the most important plays dealing with the Zrinsko-Frankopan story was initially envisaged as a ‘deconstruction’ of this myth—however, as it managed to provoke and mobilise nationalistic reactions in the context of its staging, it will still serve as a relevant example for my research. Situated in the epicentre of the political atmosphere soon to culminate in the form of “the Croatian Spring,” the play *General i njegov lakrdijaš* [General and His Jester] and, more importantly, its reception, not only “brought the dynamic of the national upheaval that was happening in Croatia,”¹²⁰ but also indicated what kind of theatrical treatment of national histories was or was not ‘allowed’ in national theatres of that time. The distinction of the mentioned play staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in February 1970 was the way its author, Marijan Matković,¹²¹ decided to approach the well-known national myth of the battle of Szigeth. Distancing himself from the poetic styles of his literary predecessors tackling the same subject in predominately romantic modus, Matković wrote his play as a “persiflage of a national myth.”¹²² More precisely, Matković wanted to examine and question the myth of the battle of Szigeth, removing the national pathos from the story and its heroes in search of the dramatic plot ‘behind’ the legend. The play itself did not focus on Šubić Zrinski as the main activator of the dramatic tension but rather introduced a plethora of side-characters shown to have an important influence on the significance and perception of the myth. The main protagonist of the play was the dramatic duo composed of general Gašo Alapić, a real protagonist of the Szigeth siege, and the jester Miho, an invented character of a Dubrovnik actor from the theatre group of the famous playwright Marin Držić.¹²³ In the play, both of them eventually manage to survive the suicidal breach from the castle under siege and, in the second act of the play situated seven years after the battle of Szigeth, are found to be arguing about the nature of fighting for liberation of their respective native lands. While Miho argues for liberating one’s country by resorting to diplomatic measures, Alepić argues that there can be no liberation of any sort without bloody battles. The play ends with Miho

¹²⁰ Selem, “Prema prijelomnici.”

¹²¹ Marijan Matković (1915–1985) was a prolific playwright, poet and novelist, director of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb between 1949 and 1953, director of the Institute for Theatre History of Yugoslavia, etc.

¹²² Gordana Muzaferija, “Zum Problem der Destruktion nationaler Mythen im neueren Kroatischen Drama. Paradigmatische Beispiele,” in *Geschichte (ge-)brauchen. Literatur und Geschichtskultur im Staatssozialismus: Jugoslawien und Bulgarien*, eds. Angela Richter and Barbara Beyer (Berlin: Frank&Timme, 2006), 286.

¹²³ Marin Držić (1508–1567) is considered to be one of the most important figures of Croatian cultural heritage. His opus consists of lyrical poetry, pastorals, pamphlets, political letters, and comedies of highest artistic quality. Born in Dubrovnik, he wrote in different idioms of Croatian language.

explaining to Alepić that, due to not having a personal chronicler, he will never succeed to be canonised as a national hero.

Another two prominent characters introduced in the play were the peasant soldier Veliki Tomaš (echoing the historical figure of Matija Gubec) and a girl called Magdalena (depicted as a servile companion of the General Alepić). While all these characters were presented as ‘operating’ subjects in the context of the representation of the battle of Szigeth, Šubić Zrinski was depicted as a very ‘simple’ person concerned exclusively with the problem of fulfilling his given mythical purpose. Rendered ‘human’ and stripped from heroic characteristics, in the first scene of the play, he is introduced as preparing himself for the most courageous version of the defeat, literary practising his own death, and somewhat grotesquely testing different ‘emblematic’ death poses in front of the mirror, while dictating a noble vision of his certain defeat to his personal chronicler Črnjko. By portraying a national hero in this manner, the author Matković aimed not so much at criticising Šubić Zrinski as a historical figure but, moreover, wished to reveal the different processes of myth-making and their manipulative nature. This intention was confirmed by the character of Šubić Zrinski himself—when addressing his chronicler, he states that “Črnjko will send his memories to the world, to the future, and in the story of our breach from the siege will be shaped exactly like this.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, he even provides him with detailed instructions on how to write the story of his fall by claiming that he will have to “unite your recount with your story of the last days of Szigeth, meaning you will have to embellish it a bit, leave something out, add something, stylistically improve it.”¹²⁵

Although revealing a very interesting and rather critical approach to the question of national mythology, it was exactly this method of ‘de-mythologisation’ of the Szigeth story as well as Šubić Zrinski that provoked significant and direct public reaction. More precisely, on the day of its first rerun in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb on February 18, 1970, as soon as Zrinski entered the stage wearing only slippers and underwear,¹²⁶ the audiences on the balcony started shouting and booing the actors, ultimately stopping the performance. Upon the arrival of the police, the detected eight ‘agitators’ were expelled from the theatre and summoned to the police station. The next day, it was made known that the protesters were actually students who were openly disappointed with the manner in which Zrinski was

¹²⁴ Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 303.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹²⁶ The actual stage direction for this scene stated: “The former Croatian ban [count] steps out on the stage wearing his underpants, undershirt and slippers.” As quoted in *ibid.*, 300.

represented in the play, considering his historical and, above all, national significance to be diminished by different ironizing elements of the production. Simply put, they advocated for the portrayal of the main character that would render him as they saw him: a national hero displaying god-like features in his personal sacrifice for his people.¹²⁷ As all of the protesting students were already active in the ranks of “the Croatian Spring” movement,¹²⁸ it is viable to believe that this kind of ‘preserving’ national history from ‘artistic degradation’ presented an important segment of their political ambitions.

The discussion on the ways of representing national heroes in theatre initiated by the production of *The General and his Jester* continued, as Matković, the author of the play, published a public letter just a few days after the incident.¹²⁹ In it, he expressed his regret that the protestors had not understood him as a “Croatian playwright (...) writing about the destiny of, what he considers to be the real protagonists of the play (...) the peasant Veliki Tomaš, the Držić’s actor Miho, an unfortunate poet with constantly endangered humanity, or Magdalena, the girl that is unfortunate as is the Croatian history.”¹³⁰ More exactly, Matković tried to explain that his poetic procedure when dealing with the national myth of Szigeth was not ‘anti-national’ but quite the opposite (notice the extensive addition of the adjective Croatian), bringing forth the characters that, for him, would stand out and serve as active and more relevant national symbols. In the open letter, Matković specifically pointed to the character of Miho, an actor from Marin Držić’s theatre troupe and “a dreamer with superior sense of humour,”¹³¹ envisaged as a link between the national culture of Dubrovnik and the national myth surrounding the story of Szigeth. By bringing together Miho and Zrinski, the former speaking in “pure Dubrovnik dialect”¹³² and constantly quoting different texts by Držić, the latter expressing himself in the northern-Croatian dialect, “Matković actually tried to unify the northernmost and the southernmost Croatian regions, thus rendering them a part of a national culture in the making.”¹³³

¹²⁷ This claim was partly echoed in the sphere of the theatre criticism of that time. Namely, in his review of the play, Vojmil Rabadan resents Matković for not thinking what kind of provocation would this dramatic strategy of rendering Zrinski ‘more human’ initiate. See Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 310–311.

¹²⁸ Some of them, like Ivan Gabelica, one of the co-founders of the Croatian Democratic Union, became actively involved in nationalistic politics as of 1991.

¹²⁹ Although the letter was sent to numerous newspapers in the country, it was published only by *Telegram*.

¹³⁰ Marijan Matković, *General i njegov lakrdijaš* (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2001), 378.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 307.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 307.

¹³³ For more, see Selem, “Prema prijelomnici.”

Although a part of the audience obviously did not recognise their own version of the myth in Matković's drama, theatre critics almost unanimously considered his deconstruction of the national myth to resonate with the political atmosphere of that time. Recognising that he "did not write a historical drama, but a drama of History,"¹³⁴ they also claimed that the play was "so valuable (...) in the fact that it's conscious of its own historical moment (...) penetrating all the way to some of the constants of our national destiny,"¹³⁵ or that "this production actually brings the national maturity and emancipation in temptation (...) in the times of national hypersensitivity."¹³⁶ Namely, this deconstruction of national myth was seen as one step in the process of finding the method to actually construct and represent a certain national identity. In addition, Matković's detachment from following the "trivial interpretation of Croatian history," executed by other authors dealing with the Zrinsko-Frankopan topics in the past, was identified as his "additional consolidation of the Croatian literary cannon in a unified geopolitical space of Croatia."¹³⁷ Defending his play and his collaborators from any future political misinterpretations, Matković's open letter ended with a plea towards the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb to take down the play from its repertoire, which was not respected and the play ran until May of that year.¹³⁸ In sum, this production very pertinently demonstrated how different strategies of nationalising a theatre production also included the process of its reception or direct communication with its audiences. Actually, the public protests that occurred in the context of this staging were one of the first public renderings of the nationalist agendas actively campaigning for an autonomous Republic of Croatia, thus confirming theatre as a platform apt for provoking acute and much relevant political discussions.

¹³⁴ Jozo Puljizević in 1970, as quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 309.

¹³⁵ Marija Grgičević in 1970, as quoted in *ibid.*, 310.

¹³⁶ Branko Hećimović, "Režiranje vlastite smrti," *Telegram*, February 20, 1970.

¹³⁷ Viktorija Franić Tomić, *Tko je bio Marin Držić–Matkovićeva drama Držićeva glumca* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2011), 320.

¹³⁸ Based on the proposal by the director of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Theatre Committee of the City Assembly wanted to publicly denounce the acts of the student group as being "fascist" and "nationalistic," but the proposal was eventually overruled. Subsequently, Matković openly insisted that the arrested agitators be released, arguing that all expression of opinion should be allowed. After they served their prison sentence of 50 to 60 days, Matković even met and discussed with the agitators in person. For more see Selem, "Prema prijelomnici."

Obsidio Szigetiana carmen heroicum Croatia iliti Zriniada; Navik on živi ki zgine

pošteno: Rehabilitation of the Myth

Just a few months after Matković's play and in the context of commemorative actions remembering the 300th anniversary of the death of Zrinski and Frankopan, there were several plays dealing with the myth that were staged throughout Croatia. But, in contrast to the *General and his Jester* and parallel to the political atmosphere of 1971, these productions were predominately focused on the affirmation of the national significance of the Zrinski-Frankopan myth.

One of these texts dealing with the Zrinski-Frankopan myth was staged in the Zagreb Youth Theatre, namely the play *Obsidio Szigetiana carmen heroicum Croatia iliti Zriniada*, directed by Miroslav Međimorec.¹³⁹ Although not much material documenting or referring to this play is available, one can learn that the main narrative of the play, describing the battle for Szigeth, was composed of different historical sources and was presented "in ludic (...) and unconventional scenic form."¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the fact that the character of Šubić Zrinski spent most of his stage time on a pedestal was detected as being "the expression of the national consciousness of the young people of that time,"¹⁴¹ i.e. the need for restoring the national 'value' of this national myth. In her own way, Sanja Nikčević only confirmed this presumption, stating that *Zriniana* came out from the "feeling of hurt" left by Matković's play, concluding that with this play, "the Szigeth hero was returned to his place in the romantic modus."¹⁴²

Besides Matković's *General and His Jester* and *Zriniada*, another plays from this repository were brought to the national theatre, this time dealing with the conspiracy myth.¹⁴³ One of them, called *Zrinski: Tragedy of Croats in 9 Acts*, premiered in Varaždin theatre "August Cesarec" on April 3, 1971. Although lacking research material that would allow me a more detailed analysis of this production, departing from the original text of this play written by Tito Strozzi in 1924 one could presume that it featured a highly romanticized approach to its

¹³⁹ Miroslav Međimorec (1942), theatre director, novelist, politician and diplomat. He started his career directing student theatre plays and received numerous national awards for these productions. In 1991 he volunteered for army duty and joined the ranks of the Croatian Army.

¹⁴⁰ Vida Flaker, "Hrvatska povijesna dramatika i hrvatska književna povijest," in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 1992: Hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište i hrvatska povijest* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/ Pedagoški Fakultet/Zavod za književnost i teatrologiju, 1993), 44.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴² Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 31. Whose feelings were hurt exactly is however not further explained.

¹⁴³ Actually, a radio-play *Vječni preludij* [Eternal Prelude] dealing with the story of the conspirators was broadcasted on the Croatian Radio in 1971. Authored by Nikola Šop, the text was, however, never staged in theatre.

main historical content.¹⁴⁴ The production was seemingly popular (78 performances in six months), but was, nevertheless, taken down from the repertoire without detailed explanation. Interestingly enough, one could learn that its audience consisted mostly of students and pupils coming from all over the Croatia,¹⁴⁵ thus proving in what way theatre in the socialist Yugoslavia could have been used as a platform for providing ‘alternative’ education concerning national history.

The text of another play itself was in fact commissioned by the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, most probably to mark the 300th anniversary of the execution of Zrinski and Frankopan that was throughout 1971. The relation between this repertory decision and the jubilee, although not formally expressed, was somewhat confirmed by the choice of its first staging that took place in the small city of Ozalj near Zagreb, home to one of the oldest Zrinski-Frankopan castles. The play *Navik on živi ki zgine pošteno* [Forever He Lives Who Dies Honourably]¹⁴⁶ written by Ivan Raos¹⁴⁷ formally moved away from depicting the tragical destinies of Zrinski and Frankopan in the romantic modus and rather chose to present what was a well-known narrative in a form of an ‘investigative’ drama. The dramatic tension of the play was thus built with the help of the almost filmic montage of the short scenes in which the conspiracy was explained by its main protagonists. In addition, the characters of the play were given psychological motivations, an approach that rendered them less symbolic and more ‘realistic’ in their decisions. However, the most significant modification of the plot occurred in the fourth scene of the play composed as a dream by the imprisoned Nikola Zrinski. In it, Raos opted to re-imagine the situation of the trial by reversing the roles of the main protagonists, i.e. positioning the main conspirators as the judges deciding on the faith of the Viennese schemers. In this way, by introducing this inverted trial, Raos wanted to enable a situation for a “moral satisfaction of the legendary noblemen,”¹⁴⁸ allowing the ‘corrected’

¹⁴⁴ As the same play was staged in 1991, a more detailed analysis of the text will follow on the pages 232–237 of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁵ “There is almost not a day when several hundreds, if not thousands students from all over Croatia come to see the production. (...) Until now, some 30 of these caravans visited Varaždin, each of them consisting of some 800 participants. (...) These caravans come mostly from Zagreb, but also from Koprivnica, Bjelovar, Krapina, Đakovo, etc. The organizers of these caravans are the Childrens’ Theatre “Trešnja” from Zagreb, Generalturist, National Theatre Varaždin, and cultural society ‘Zrinski’ from Čakovec.” *Varaždinske Vijesti*, May 15, 1971. <http://library.foi.hr/novine/broj1.aspx?v=1&t=1&C=3&godina=1971&broj=000018&stranica=014&u=zrinski>, last accessed April 17, 2019.

¹⁴⁶ A verse from the poem *Pozvanje na vojsku* [Army Calling] by Fran Krsto Frankopan inscribed on the tombstone of Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan in the Zagreb Cathedral is still being used in different official army ceremonies in Croatia, either as a greeting or as a motto for the fallen soldiers.

¹⁴⁷ Ivan Raos (1921–1987) was a poet, novelist and a playwright, mostly known for depicting folk mythologies of his native region, Imotska Krajina. Prior to this one, another play called *Dvije kristalne čaše* [Two Christal Glasses] was also staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

¹⁴⁸ Lederer, “Raosova drama ‘Navik živi onaj ki zgine pošteno’ i Zrinski-Frankopanska tema,” 97.

version of the historical event to take place and providing its protagonists with due historical relevance.

At the end of this scene, after waking up from the dream, Zrinski becomes aware of his tragic destiny but understands the significance of the sacrifice he is about to endure. Proclaiming that his “blood is poisoned with ‘Croatianhood’ to the last drop,”¹⁴⁹ Zrinski ends his monologue by saying that dying was a better option “because I would probably die if I live, but I will live if I die... and [my] death will become this shimmering light of hope leading into final redemption.”¹⁵⁰ Although the play nominally focused on the personal motivations and destinies of the conspirators, Raos ended it by bringing back Zrinski to the level of a national symbol, thus only further affirming the “mythic symbolic of the Zrinski-Frankopan story.”¹⁵¹ In conclusion, as these two examples testify, the Croatian national theatre system followed the open affirmation of national significance expressed by the “Croatian Spring” movement, thereby re-establishing the stories from the Zrinski-Frankopan opus as the most relevant national myths. As I am going to argue, similar strategies of staging these national symbols will reoccur during the early 1990s, hence solidifying the conceptual connection between these two periods in recent Croatian history.

Urotnici: The Myth in the 1980s

As of 1971 and the described harsh political reaction of the government towards those advocating the demands of the “Croatian Spring,” the protagonists of the Zrinski-Frankopan mythical repository seemed to ‘retire’ from theatre stages in Croatia. After the death of Tito in 1980 and with both the nominal decentralisation of the Yugoslav Federation and the weakening of the control over cultural production, it was thought that national theatres in the region would start to function without restraint. However, despite the fact that the gradual lessening of the state control caused sporadic outbursts of national sentiments during the 1980s, there were still some ideological guidelines that were inflicted on the cultural production in Croatia, thereby effecting the presentations of national narratives in theatres as well. A most telling example of this was the document “Bijela knjiga” [the White Book] published in 1984¹⁵² under the title “O nekim idejnim i političkim tendencijama u

¹⁴⁹ Ivan Raos, *Navik on živi ki zgine pošteno. Ljetopis tjeskobe u pet slika* (Zagreb: Naklada Matice Hrvatske, 1971), 329.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 330.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁵² According to several historical sources, immediately after Tito’s death in 1980, the number of political prisoners rose by 84%. A large majority of them were incarcerated on charges for ‘verbal delict’, meaning that they voiced oppositional political views either orally or in writing.

umjetničkom stvaralaštvu, književnoj, kazališnoj i filmskoj kritici, te o javnim istupima jednog broja kulturnih stvaralaca u kojima su sadržane politički neprihvatljive poruke” [On some conceptual and political tendencies in artistic creation, literary, theatre, and film criticism, and the public acts of a number of cultural workers that contain politically unacceptable messages]. Issued by the Centre for Information and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist League of Croatia, the main message of the “White Book” was to warn against acts of nationalism happening in the sphere of culture and art in Yugoslavia. As explained by Stipe Šuvar, its main initiator,

there should be no divisions into ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, like foreign territories. We are all interlinked by our destiny, and any nationalism should be of equal concern to all of us, because they are all against us, they all work to head us of.”¹⁵³

Once again, nationalism in all its forms of manifestation was detected as the main risk element of the endurance of the Yugoslav union. Extensively specifying different anti-Yugoslav acts detected in poems, novels, films, and some theatre productions, the most concrete consequence of this document was the initiation of a certain ‘witch hunt’ directed against dissident intellectuals and artists from all Yugoslav Republics who were enlisted as ‘state enemies’ by their names. Although most of the denounced persons in the document were active in Serbian cultural and social space, the list functioned as a sort of warning for artists in all Yugoslav Republics who either were or planned to engage in similar activities featuring open national elements. It is exactly in this context of “the White Book” and the overall discussions about it that one of the rare, newly written texts tackling the Zrinski-Frankopan myth managed to appear on a theatre stage in Croatia.

Some theatre historians explained this absence of Zrinski-Frankopan topics from the national stages from 1971 onwards as the repercussion of the newly established control over any eventual outbursts of nationalism in Croatia. Others, however, explained it as a result of the fact that the romantic modus of presenting historical national drama was considered to be outdated and obsolete in the context of post-dramatic theatre penetrating Croatian theatres in this period. In addition, some saw this reluctance to stage dramas dealing with national

¹⁵³ Stipe Šuvar, as cited in Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State That Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 237.

history as a result of a socio-political escapist tendency of young Croatian drama authors during the 1980s.¹⁵⁴

Still, in 1985, a play dealing with the narrative of the Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy emerged on the stage of Zagreb theatre &TD, written by the still young but already well established and distinguished author Miro Gavran.¹⁵⁵ The play was meant to be published in a volume of Gavran's selected plays under the title *Zatočenici* [Prisoners], but when the publisher found out who were the protagonists of the play *Urotnici* [Conspirators] were, a meeting was held in which "they tried to persuade the author to remove this play from the book."¹⁵⁶ However, Gavran refused this proposition, and the play was published and eventually staged.

The play itself belongs to Gavran's general dramatical corpus that usually neither criticises nor idealises historical events and figures but rather "freely questions their emotional potential."¹⁵⁷ Wanting to bring historical characters closer to the contemporary audiences, Gavran chose to present them as "vulnerable"¹⁵⁸ and "weak"¹⁵⁹ human beings. As I am going to argue, just as Matković did some 15 years before, Gavran's dramaturgical strategy of 'humanising' national heroes also rendered them more identifiable to larger audiences.

Once again, *Conspirators* depicted the story of the last days of Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan, awaiting their execution in the Wiener Neustadt prison. While Zrinski believes that both should accept their responsibilities and death with dignity, Frankopan thinks of asking for forgiveness by kissing the Emperor's hand and burning the conspiracy flag in order to save their lives. Wanting to go back to his regular life with his family and expressing his disgust towards any kind of armed conflict, Frankopan questions his and Zrinski's acts in the context of the conspiracy and even proposes to Zrinski to imagine and 're-enact' their normal lives in the dungeon to rouse the feeling of regret. Zrinski, however, refuses to play this game as he firmly stands by his position of prioritising freedom above all else.

As the play progresses, upon Frankopan's insistence, Zrinski reluctantly agrees to seek forgiveness from the King but under the condition that Frankopan kills Zrinski right after

¹⁵⁴ For more see Ana Lederer, *Vrijeme osobne povijesti* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2004).

¹⁵⁵ Miro Gavran (1941), playwright and novelist, known as the most staged Croatian playwright in the world (as of 2013 there is even an international theatre festival in Slovakia called "Gavranfest," dedicated exclusively to his dramatic oeuvre). From 1989 to 1992 he served the artistic director of the Theatre &TD in Zagreb where he initiated the program called "Contemporary Croatian Drama," devoted exclusively to staging and publishing dramatic text written by young Croatian authors.

¹⁵⁶ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 37.

¹⁵⁷ ¹⁵⁷ Ozana Iveković, "Pristup hrvatskim dramama s povijesnom tematikom u drugoj polovici dvadesetog stoljeća," *Dani Hvarskoga kazališta: Građa i rasprave o hrvatskoj književnosti i kazalištu* 37, no. 1 (2011): 227.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 227.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 228.

doing so. However, after seeing the scope of his humiliation caused with this decision, Frankopan changes his mind, and Zrinski thus manages to “bring back the strayed Frankopan on the path of bravery and sacrifice by the virtue of his moral firmness.”¹⁶⁰ In this way, the tragedy of the conspirators is depicted not by “the pathetic declarative message, but by meaningfulness of this sacrifice,”¹⁶¹ and was thus seen to be communicating more easily with the actuality of its staging. In fact, the years following the crash of “the Croatian Spring” movement were marked by a rising political emigration, political trials, as well as imprisonments. The decade until 1989 was colloquially named “the years of Croatian silence,” hinting at the significant suppression of any expression of national affiliation. Staged in this context, Gavran’s play was interpreted as directly referring to this socio-political backdrop. Following one of the interpretations, “the play, at least when it comes to the conception of the characters, reminds us of two avid supporters of the ‘Croatian Spring’ waiting for their trial and punishment in prison.”¹⁶² The main discussion between Zrinski and Frankopan concerning the methods of gaining national independence could have reflected the same discussions among Croatian national dissidents of that time. Nevertheless, the production did not just reflect its own socio-political discourse but, seen from a subsequent perspective, functioned as a sort of warning or instruction for the future. When discussing the ways of liberation, the protagonists engaged into the following exchange of thoughts:

Frankopan: Isn’t it smarter to stay on his own land and then to simply split from the empire and to claim the independence of Croatia and... we will finally be on our own.

Zrinski: No, it’s not. If we do it like this, they will engage in a long and exhausting war with us, and with time, will outfight us. If we don’t immediately go to the imperial court, we will only postpone the final combat. We need to go for all or nothing.¹⁶³

Just by replacing these original ‘them’ with other ‘them’ which will be defined in and beyond national theatre stages of the early 1990s, one could easily understand the immediate resonance of this and similar messages encrypted in the play.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 228.

¹⁶¹ Batušić, “Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami,” 67.

¹⁶² Iveković, “Pristup hrvatskim dramama s povijesnom tematikom u drugoj polovici dvadesetog stoljeća,” 234.

¹⁶³ Miro Gavran, *Zatočenici* (Zagreb: Quorum, 1984), 65.

2.3. Staging the National Symbols

Smrt Stjepana Radića: National Personification

Besides the mentioned productions focusing on the topics from the Zrinski and Frankopan narrative, there were plays that introduced other national historical figures that provided material for reclaiming nationhood and parallelly provoked the ruling authorities in the context of SFRY. Among figures from Croatian national history that were staged between 1945 and 1991, there were also those presenting politicians as significant representatives and metaphors of nationhood, an occurrence that, as I will demonstrate in the main chapter of this paper, was also a prominent feature of wartime theatre production. One of such plays not only demonstrated in what way the historical narratives were used in defining national identity during the socialist Yugoslavia but also introduced the ‘Us vs. Them’ approach which would also become one of the main features of wartime theatre exactly 20 years later. The play *Smrt Stjepana Radića* [The Death of Stjepan Radić], written by Tomislav Bakarić¹⁶⁴ and directed by Petar Veček, was staged in the National Theatre August Cesarec in Varaždin on September 25, 1971, in the midst of the political turmoil marked by the “Croatian Spring.” Stjepan Radić (1871–1928) was a Croatian politician and the founder of the Croatian People’s Peasant Party, considered as the key figure of the Croatian independence movement in the context of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. He vocally opposed the idea of Croatia being part of any kind of Yugoslav union (be it in the form of a Kingdom or a Republic), mostly because he interpreted it as a plan of establishing Serbian political predominance. Due to his oppositional political opinions and the growing influence he had over the Croatian peasantry and working class, he was eventually shot in the Yugoslavian parliament by the Serbian radical politician Puniša Račić and died from his severe wounds several weeks after the attack. Following the political crisis triggered by the assassination, in January 1929, the Yugoslav King Aleksandar Karađorđević eventually abolished the constitution, dissolved the federal parliament, and declared a royal dictatorship, thereby oppressing any manifestations of national sentiments.

Radić’s violent death not only made him into a martyr and a national symbol of political struggle for Croatia’s state-autonomy but also constituted one of the most relevant political arguments employed by Croatian nationalists: That of discovering the continuity of Serbian hegemonic aspirations. As of 1970 and in connection with “the Croatian Spring,” Stjepan

¹⁶⁴ Tomislav Bakarić (1940–2003) was a Croatian playwright and a novelist, author of several important theatre texts staged throughout the 1970s. From 1990 until 1997 he was the director of the Croatian Radio.

Radić was resurrected as the national symbol—in the context of celebrating his 100th birthday, there were numerous events and occasions in 1971 that commemorated his life and work: from lectures and panel discussions presenting Radić's legacy, erecting his monuments, to printing commemorative coins with his portrait, etc.¹⁶⁵

It was in this commemorative context that Bakarić initially wrote his play, depicting the historical and political events leading to Radić's death. However, linked to the author's own socio-political context, the historical plotline was actually presented as a backdrop of staging Radić as a symbol of nationhood, something very much reflected in the socio-political reality of that time.

The dramatic text itself comprises of three acts, each happening in a different location (the King Aleksandar's court, the King's summerhouse in Croatia, the Yugoslav Parliament in Belgrade), and features most of the real historical characters connected to the story of Radić—the plot is thus populated with figures such as the Yugoslav King Aleksandar and his wife, Queen Marija; Radić's killer Puniša Račić and other prominent politicians of that time; as well as fictionalised figures of servants and a maid. The only character that is missing from the stage throughout the whole play is Stjepan Radić himself—not only is he deprived of scenic existence, he is also very rarely mentioned by his name, and is mostly referred to as “he.”

The actual narrative of the play aimed at deconstructing the events leading to Radić's assassination. In a sort of ‘behind-the-scenes’ approach focused mostly on the ‘Serbian side’ of the political conflict, Bakarić wanted to deconstruct the circumstances of this political crisis, adapting or even adding fictional material in the process of doing so. For instance, while placing the main motives for Radić's assassination in the historical event of the Treaty in Nettuno,¹⁶⁶ he also showed how this relationship of distrust between Serbian and Croatian politicians was actually initiated by Queen Mary recklessly recounting her visions of bloody conflicts.

Bakarić stated that he wanted to write a play about a historical national figure like Radić and not “common people” as, for him, “writing about ‘the common people’ means to shatter the

¹⁶⁵ One of the most eager promoters of Radić's political oeuvre was Franjo Tuđman, the future Croatian president, who held numerous lectures throughout Croatia on the mentioned topic throughout 1970s and 1980s. These events were probably ‘allowed’ by the ruling Communist party due to the fact that Radić was considered to be the defender of worker's and peasant's rights, an approach that corresponded to socialist political concepts.

¹⁶⁶ The Treaty signed in the Italian city of Nettuno in 1925 regulated some unresolved elements of the Roman Contracts between Mussolini's Italy and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and resulted in large parts of Croatian Dalmatia being handed over to Italians. The Nettuno Treaty and its conventions were ratified by the Yugoslav Parliament right after Radić's assassination in 1928, hence marking the beginning of the dictatorial regime of King Aleksandar.

public, to take out of the focus that level of community that rises above the privacy and in which the spirit of this community is condensed.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, his intention was to tell a story of the nation and the nationhood, using Radić as its most apt symbol. Still, Bakarić decided to actually eliminate Radić as a dramatic protagonist, as if, “by doing so, [he] managed to save Radić as an intact hero, with mythical connotations,”¹⁶⁸ leaving him to be ‘shaped’ and canonised as a mythical figure by the audiences themselves.

Bakarić’s position of recounting the story of Radić via acts and thoughts of his adversaries poses the question of how exactly he then proceeded with generating an affirmative perception of nationhood. First of all, throughout the play, Croatian people are being depicted by their adversaries equally negatively and affirmatively—negatively as to confirm the range of hatred Serbian politicians feel towards them and positively as to express a sort of secret admiration.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, the conceptual treatment of the Serbian politicians was much more constructed around pejorative notions—King Aleksandar was portrayed as a ruthless ruler who overcame any type of obstacle by force; as the decisive authority concerning the death of Radić; and also as secretly cheating on his wife with the Minister of the Interior, Petar Živković.¹⁷⁰ Puniša Račić was portrayed as a drunkard inclined to using weapons and declaring how he considers “the gun and the knife as [his] brother and sister;”¹⁷¹ Petar Živković was described as a manipulative brute; Dragan Janković as a cheater and a rapist; etc. Although they were all shown as Radić’s critics and opponents,¹⁷² Nikčević still considers that Radić’s physical appearance was needed in the play as a sort of balance to these characters who, when left alone on the stage, were prone to gain the audience’s sympathies and not the ‘demanded’ condemnation.¹⁷³

In the case of the play, once again, the personal trajectory of one person (regardless of his scenic absence) was being elevated to the level of national, a shift determined by the commentators as well, naming it a “play in whose destiny one could read the Croatian history

¹⁶⁷ Tomislav Bakarić, *Hrvatski triptih* (Zagreb: CEKADE, 1988).

¹⁶⁸ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 24. In addition, Nikčević argues that, by not being represented as a character, Radić actually succeeded to escape the travesty of this play written as a political farce.

¹⁶⁹ Queen Marija, after spending the night at the King’s summer house in Croatia, observes that “the frogs don’t croak so unanimously and harmoniously as here,” continuing how “Croatia is a noble county. And beautiful.” Bakarić, *Hrvatski triptih*, 28.

¹⁷⁰ The rumours of their homosexual relationship have been widely known but were never officially confirmed.

¹⁷¹ Bakarić, *Hrvatski triptih*, 33.

¹⁷² Except the character of the Queen Mary who, probably due to the fact that she was Romanian, was not exposed to this approach.

¹⁷³ See Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 24.

itself.”¹⁷⁴ According to other reviews, the play obviously corresponded with the expectations of its audiences as it was accepted with open and emotional reactions—for instance, every time the actors playing Serbian politicians and rulers would come onto the stage, it was reported that they were booed by the public, “demonstrating what they thought of the Great Serbia by refusing to applaud.”¹⁷⁵ Regardless of the immanent success with the audiences, the production was taken down from the repertoire after only eleven performances, parallel to the decline of the “Croatian Spring” movement and the purges that succeeded. It was not until 1989 and a very different socio-political climate that the play was staged again, this time remaining on the repertoire of the Zagreb Youth Theatre for more than 20 performances.

Priobalni triptih ili Domagojada: Myth of the Eternal Victim

Besides the analysed Zrinski-Frankopan topics, when investigating theatre production in Croatia between 1945–1990, one detects other ‘usages’ of national history that opened a possibility for supporting or creating affirmative national narratives. The play *Priobalni Triptih ili Domagojada* [Coastal Triptych or Domagojada] serves not only as evidence of this but also testifies to the claim how these performances affirming different national myths were at one point initiated and produced by alternative theatres and independent troops, thus somewhat escaping the grip of direct censorship. Furthermore, as the same production (although with very telling alternations that will be analysed in detail) was restaged in 1995, this play will prove to hold a truly relevant comparative significance in the scope of the main topic.

Considering the overall theatrical landscape of the 1970s in Croatia, this period actually witnessed a creation of numerous theatrical workshops, informal acting groups or travelling theatres consisting of professional actors, directors and writers that, for different reasons, could not get work or did so sporadically in the institutional theatres. One such group was a travelling acting ensemble called “Histrioni” that was founded in Zagreb in 1975. In the same year, this group that was composed mostly by acting students toured the small villages and towns on the Croatian Adriatic coast with *Domagojada*, a play written especially for the collective by the dramatic trio Kemal Mujičić, Ninoslav Škrabe, and Boris Senker.¹⁷⁶ Their

¹⁷⁴ Branka Brlenić-Vujić in 1993, as quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 335.

¹⁷⁵ Mrduljaš, *O hrvatskome glumištu*, 16.

¹⁷⁶ A writer trio composed of Tahir Mujičić (1947), Boris Senker (1947) and Nino Škrabe (1947). They started to write together in 1971, predominately producing witty farces and comedies featuring poetics of parody, montage and persiflage. Mujičić was actually one of the co-founders of the “Histrioni” theatre group as well.

nomadic method of staging plays was created along the lines of popular community theatre, with the idea, on the one hand, of providing artistic content to small and remote communities in Croatia. On the other hand, one could presume that presenting these plays far from the centres of political power also meant that their critical position could have been expressed in a more open manner.

The here-mentioned play consisted of three short “farces”¹⁷⁷ situated in different times of “Croatian historical every day,”¹⁷⁸ interconnected by the character of Domagoj serving as its main protagonist. In the first part of the play that takes place somewhere in the coastal region of Croatia during the rule of the Venetian Republic, Domagoj is a shrewd servant of an empty-headed master who decides to fight the three-headed dragon in order to win the hand of a daughter of the Venetian doge; in the second part situated during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he is an exploited worker of a fish trader captured and sent to serve in the ranks of the imperial Army for fifteen years; in the third part, which depicts the actual time of the performance, Domagoj returns to his Croatian home after having worked in Germany, only to be confronted with what appears to be the gloomy reality of a socialist government managed by the local boss, comrade Mate.

In brief, the plot of the three-part play develops as a narrative depicting Domagoj’s degradation as an active subject. Starting as an ‘operating’ figure that, upon the death of his master, manages to kill the three-headed dragon himself; in the second part of the play, he is found to be fully conscious of his destitute position towards his boss but still tries to work around it. In the third part of the play, however, he ends up as a morally defeated figure lacking any will to actively fight the ruling bureaucratic system. Nevertheless, his decline is described as not being the fault of Domagoj himself but of his context—starting as a potential astute hero, he is gradually transformed into a victim of different economic or political systems such as capitalism (in the 2nd part) or socialism (in the 3rd part). For instance, in the third part of the play, after returning to his small island from his seasonal work in Germany, Domagoj is instructed by the comrade Mate that he should invest his hard-earned savings following the decision of the community. If he refused to do so, he would always be allowed to go back to Germany. Since his wish to stay in his homeland was so strong, Domagoj reluctantly accepts the compromise and surrenders his faith to comrade Mate as the representative of the socialist government. Accordingly, this descent and subsequent

¹⁷⁷ This genre definition was given by the authors themselves.

¹⁷⁸ Dubravka Vrgoč, “‘Domagojada’ u oslobođenome Kninu,” *Vjesnik*, August 26, 1995.

victimisation of Domagoj could be detected as the main result and goal of the overall dramatic narrative, with the authors of the play only confirming this—for example, in the final song of the play, the choir composed of all the characters populating the play declares to the public: “Dear people, now quietly go to your homes / And be troubled by the destiny of Domagoj.”¹⁷⁹

Although naming him after one of the most famous dukes ruling Dalmatian Croatia in the 9th century,¹⁸⁰ considered to be the initiator of Croatia’s later claim for autonomy, in this play, Domagoj was not depicted as a historical figure whatsoever. Still, paradoxically, as he has not been stripped of all historical characteristics (all three parts of the play have fairly precise historical settings), he does, however, seem to figure as some kind of a historical symbol. Although not depicting the historical national hero entrenched in defined historical contexts¹⁸¹ and with the help of the play’s narrative, Domagoj could still be very easily interpreted to symbolise different historical stages of Croatian statehood.

For instance, back in the days of its first staging, the critics outlined (or perhaps wanted to recognise) national significance of the play by depicting Domagoj as a “a national synonym,”¹⁸² “a proud son of the nation, fighting the evil and the injustice,”¹⁸³ or “a small Croatian man (...) who is always being tricked but nevertheless walks through life stoically calm.”¹⁸⁴ However, confronted with these assertions that Domagoj was created in an act of reclaiming national history, one of the authors of the mentioned play, Boris Senker, explained how this was not true and that he was envisaged as a “theatrical answer to glorification of the national history and that type of ideologised historical stories.”¹⁸⁵ To some extent, this is true as the character of Domagoj—cursing, manifesting brutality, gluttony, blasphemy, and his overall indifference towards what happens around him—is far from known romanticised depictions of national heroes, some of which are and will be outlined in this chapter as well. However, it seems that the authors did not so much focus on deconstructing the problematics of creating national myths (as was the case of the above-mentioned play *General and his*

¹⁷⁹ “Mirno, puče, svojoj pođi kući / Sudbina Domagoja nek te muči,” in Tahir Mujičić, Boris Senker and Nino Škrabe, *3jada* (Zagreb: MD Naklada, 1995), 114.

¹⁸⁰ Duke Domagoj (ruled Dalmatian Croatia from 864 till 876) was known and celebrated as a mighty warrior, fighting sea battles against Venetians, Arabs and Phoenicians. Although not much is known of his life, it’s assumed that he was not a member of any noble family, and that he took the power from his predecessor by force. In 1995, the order of Duke Domagoj was founded as the nation’s highest award for bravery.

¹⁸¹ Such would be the mentioning of the Venetian doge, the Austro-Hungarian empire as well as Croatian nation throughout the whole play.

¹⁸² Miro Lasić, “Predstava bez vjerodostojnosti,” *Odjek*, April 15, 1976.

¹⁸³ Mirjana Šigir, “‘Histrion’ usidren,” *Vjesnik*, September 6, 1975.

¹⁸⁴ Dalibor Foretić, “Dobar vjetar, ‘Histrioni’,” *Vjesnik*, April 4, 1976.

¹⁸⁵ Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 379.

Jester), as they did in depicting different oppressive political and economic systems, and then creating Domagoj as a sort of ‘manifestation’ or the recipient of these contextual conditions, bearing clear traits of national affiliation. In other terms, although *Domagoj* could be seen as a play dedicated to the dismantling of a national heroic narrative, by introducing Domagoj as a communal symbol, it seems that it helped to reinstate another national myth instead, that of enduring national sacrifice and the victimhood of the Croatian nation. A concept which, as I am going to show, was very much used to represent the nationhood on institutional theatre stages in Croatia during the early 1990s.

Svrha od slobode: Staging the Difference

Apart from different historical material from the national past that was used or interpreted to position national topics in theatre, as I am going to demonstrate, another possibility of staging a specific national identification was carried out by resorting to different elements of the national cultural heritage and, most precisely, the national language. One of the most important and discussed productions that dealt with this type of material and that was actually sanctioned because of it was the play *Svrha od slobode* [The Purpose/End of Freedom], first performed in the summer of 1971 in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival.

The Festival, consisting of a musical and drama program, was founded in 1950 with the main goal to activate the city as an open, ambient stage for theatre and musical productions.

Scheduled in the middle of the summer touristic season, it was also envisioned as a demonstration of the rich cultural production to the international audiences. Over the years, the festival gained a wider international reputation (with sporadic international guest directors such as Giorgio Strehler, Eimuntas Nekrošius, or Peter Brooke) but was also under the direct patronage of Tito, hence placing it under close supervision of the highest political authority in the country.¹⁸⁶ The festival’s repertoire was mostly focused on producing theatre classics but with a strong emphasis on local Dubrovnik authors such as Marin Držić, Ivan Gundulić, Ivo Vojnović, etc. Although it predominately featured professional productions from all Yugoslav Republics, from time to time, there were productions by amateur theatre groups or drama students, mostly belonging to the off or workshop programs. In the summer of 1971, while the protagonists of “the Croatian Spring” were still actively and openly advocating

¹⁸⁶ Tito saw the Dubrovnik Festival as “the most important cultural manifestation of all Yugoslav people” and a cultural trademark of Yugoslavia. He very often attended the Festival along with high-profile guests. <https://www.dubrovnikpress.hr/impressum/item/27230-kako-je-tito-govorio-o-igrama-posebno-znakovite-njegove-rijeci-o-dubrovniku-i-ulozi-igara-u-zimskim-mjesecima.html>; last accessed February 17, 2019.

their mentioned political and social demands, the repertoire of the Dubrovnik Festival was scheduled to feature six new theatre productions, five of them written by Croatian authors (*Dundo Maroje* [Dundo Maroje] and *Skup* [Skup] by Marin Držić, *Pavlimir ljeta 1971* [Pavlimir in the year of 1971] by Junije Palmotić, *Allons enfants* by Ivo Vojnović), among which the play *Svrha od slobode* [The Purpose/End of Freedom] by Ivan Kušan¹⁸⁷ was actually chosen as a text for a “student exercise.”¹⁸⁸ While other productions were executed by professional ensembles of different institutional theatres, *The Purpose/End of Freedom* was performed by the students from the Zagreb Dramatic Academy, directed by the same director who had led the production of *Zriniada* the previous year, Miro Međimorec. Remembering this 1971 edition of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, Petar Selem stated that these productions would not be produced if the overall “atmosphere of freedom” was not brought about by “the Croatian spring.” He further identified the production of *Svrha od slobode* as “the representative production of the Croatian Spring”¹⁸⁹ and, above all else, “a call for freedom. Even more, although not explicitly, it was a call for Croatia.”¹⁹⁰ Echoing these claims, Igor Mrduljaš stated how in this play, “the theatre merged with the group consciousness and spoke out in the same breath with its audiences”¹⁹¹ and how this was a “genuine folk theatre of utter efficiency: theatre as the mouth through which the consciousness of community speaks.”¹⁹² It is as if the mentioned authors saw the performance functioning as some sort of the rarely allowed public manifestation of the political ideas climaxing in that year—the conception that was best confirmed by the fact that, after being shown once in Dubrovnik and once in Zagreb¹⁹³ later that year, the play was ‘banned’ from the Croatian stages.

Written as a vaudeville with elements of slapstick dramaturgical dynamics, the play opens with a scene depicting what turns out to be an amusement fair, offering attractions such as “love for a *dinar*,”¹⁹⁴ taking photographs as different heroes, holding speeches in the manner

¹⁸⁷ Ivan Kušan (1933–2012), a Croatian painter, poet and author of extremely popular novels for children and young adults. He wrote several theatre plays most of which were performed between 1969 and 1971. In his dramaturgical work he was often critical of his socio-political context, and showed poetic inclinations towards satire, parody and travesty.

¹⁸⁸ Miro Međimorec, *Suradnja u vrtlogu političkih promjena*, <http://www.hkv.hr/izdvojeno/komentari/mmedimorec/13554-m-medimorec-moja-suradnja-s-piscem-ivanom-kusanom-ii.html>; last accessed February 12, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Selem, “Prema prijelomnici.”

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Igor Mrduljaš, “Riječ koja se čuje—o dramatici Ivana Kušana,” in *Svrha od slobode*, Ivan Kušan, (Zagreb: AGM/Hrvatsko društvo kazališnih kritičara i teatrologa, 1995), 400.

¹⁹² Ibid., 400.

¹⁹³ In the theatre hall of the Student Centre in Zagreb.

¹⁹⁴ Ivan Kušan, *Svrha od slobode* (Zagreb: AGM, 1995), 11.

of Speakers Corner, shooting at “former big leaders,”¹⁹⁵ the possibility to experience the inside of a prison, or the visit to the historical museum displaying “weapons from which the patriots were shooting at your enemies and assassins for thousands of years.”¹⁹⁶ After this introduction, an auction of the history and the freedom of Dubrovnik begins, addressed at all those “who have some money and patriotism left”¹⁹⁷ and who would want to buy “the destiny”¹⁹⁸ of the city. The auction is actually comprised of narrating different stages of Dubrovnik’s history in the context of which its freedom is then ‘offered’ to the potential buyers by the character of the Bidder.

Following the main premise, the presented historical periods referred to armies and rulers who actually ruled over the city of Dubrovnik, such as the Byzantium Empire (personified in the character of the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenites), the Venetians, Turks, French, Austrians, the Axis Powers, and, finally, the socialist government with which the narrative was brought to the actuality of its staging. Some of the mentioned periods were represented by short skits with several characters, some were staged as a pantomime (WWI and WWII, for example), or were indicated in other ways (for instance, the socialist rule was represented by group chants of several adapted socialist slogans).¹⁹⁹ Throughout the play, the Dubrovnik government, embodied in the group characters of the Small and the Big Council, was being depicted as wanting to preserve the freedom of the City even if this meant accepting the rule of the intruders, hence elaborating on the overall success of the city’s diplomatic heritage.²⁰⁰ After this digest and rather frantic historical reminiscing, the plot abruptly shifts into depicting a dream by the Dubrovnik Prince in which Porphyrogenites, the already introduced symbol of the Byzantium, comes back to haunt him. Explaining his return to the confused Prince, Porphyrogenites declares: “But I am not new, I am forever. I told you I will come back.”²⁰¹ This time, he is depicted as a functionary imposing the socialist ideology to the representatives of the city, who, under his instructions, then abolish the ancient ruling

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 13. However, this introductory part of the play was removed from the staged versions out of undefined reasons.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹⁹ For instance, echoing the famous “Workers of the world, unite!” they chant “Starved of the world, dare!,” etc. Ibid., 50.

²⁰⁰ Foreign diplomacy is thought to be the key element of the perseverance of the Dubrovnik Republic for more than four centuries. Engaging in different international political as well as economic and trade relations, Dubrovnik was able to assess and utilise these connections in defending its independence, sovereignty and economic growth. The Dubrovnik Republic’s foreign policy was based on the principle of remaining neutral in international conflicts, simultaneously stressing its position of the last Christian enclave in south-eastern Europe.

²⁰¹ Kušan, *Svrha od slobode*, 50.

institutions of the Big Council. After a short discussion, the representatives decide to install the former Dubrovnik Prince as the president of the newly established People's Council. As he thanks his subjects for choosing him as a new ruler in Croatian idiom, the ghost of Porphyrogenites suddenly appears "on the walls of the city"²⁰² as a threatening reminder, after which the Prince restarts his public address but this time in Serbian.

Openly expressing his discontent with the Prince's election and submission to the Porphyrogenites' orders because it occurred "in the moment when our city is celebrating 1000 years' anniversary of its freedom,"²⁰³ Ljubomir, one of the main characters of the play, is shot by unknown perpetrators. The assassination is then immediately followed by the scene in which all the previously appearing conquerors of Dubrovnik are now shown as tourists, with the city itself being symbolised by the figure of Sofija who performs a "dress-tease" for them. More precisely, one after another, the tourists dress her in layers of different ethnic costumes of the people of Yugoslavia, admiring her beauty. While the locals complain that the city has been sold not only to tourist but also to companies such as "Porphyrogenites" or "Byzantium," one of the characters, Dživan, interrupts the discussion with a warning of new enemies approaching the walls of the city. When asked "what language do they speak," he answers "ours, as always."²⁰⁴ All the characters then voluntarily run to the prison, unanimously declaring that they do not want to get out of there, choosing the imprisonment over dying in direct combat with the new rulers approaching.

As one could presume, the initial position of *The Purpose/End of Freedom*²⁰⁵ carried criticism towards its socio-political context, advocating for the freedom of speech and critical thinking. In the program booklet of the play, Kušan wrote how "in order for us to publicly display and proclaim our immaculate freedom, often we need to give up this freedom: in order for us to be able to dream aloud about freedom, one needs to allow to be blindfolded and muzzled."²⁰⁶ As I have mentioned, this concept was accomplished to its full meaning at the end of the play when the people of Dubrovnik voluntarily enter the prison as the perfect location to dream about their freedom. Nevertheless, as confirmed exactly by the last scene, this freedom was believed to be a concept practiced communally. Simply put, their freedom

²⁰² Ibid., 55.

²⁰³ Ibid., 55.

²⁰⁴ Kušan, *Svrha od slobode*, 65.

²⁰⁵ In Croatian language "svrha" means "purpose," but in its archaic version it could also be understood as "the end."

²⁰⁶ Ivan Kušan, as cited in Giga Gračan, "Casus Kušan," *Krležini dani u Osijeku 1992: Hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište i hrvatska povijest* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/ Pedagoški Fakultet/Zavod za književnost i teatrologiju, 1993): 200.

was depicted as a communal notion, hence directly referring to the national, cultural, and other autonomy ‘dreamed’ by the Croatian nation of that time.

This transfer from individual to a group subject was given importance in the reviews of that time, with commentators detecting the story of Dubrovnik being elevated to the level of a more general national symbol, defining the play as speaking not only “about ill-fated destiny of their people and the unquenchable thirst for freedom”²⁰⁷ but also serving “as a warning to us that some segments of history are still lasting as a sad echo of Croatian destinies in this region.”²⁰⁸ This means that the destiny of Dubrovnik was interpreted as a symbol of the suffering and victimisation of Croatia in its call for national autonomy, thus positioning the play as further endorsing and transmitting one of the central national myths of that time. Needless to say, this kind of interpretation was heavily influenced by the events of 1971 and their socio-political consequences. Written and produced in the same year, the play openly corresponded with its actuality and with the concepts and demands of “the Croatian Spring.” Kušan himself considered the play to simply articulate the ideas that were ‘in the air’, staging “the words that could be heard”²⁰⁹ in the public discourse of that time. These connections as well as the political significance of *The Purpose/End of Freedom* were further fixed by the political leaders of the “Croatian Spring” who recognised the production as some sort of scenic proclamation of their ideas. More specifically, Kušan himself stated how prominent political figures of the movement, Ivan Šibl and Miko Tripalo, met him in Dubrovnik prior to the premiere, expressing both their support of for the performance as well as their apologies for not being able to attend the premiere as this sort of public support would cause serious political turmoil.²¹⁰

Unlike some other similar plays, which masked their critical position towards the social government under layers of parody or resorted to very elaborated intellectual and linguistical metaphors (such as the case of *Domagojada*), the message of *Svrha* was extremely concrete, direct, and utterly understandable. When asked what he wanted to accomplish by writing a play in such direct and simple language, Kušan stated that he wrote the play to “speak at a somewhat simplified level, wishing that these words will resonate with specific

²⁰⁷ Igor Mrduljaš in 1995, as quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 350.

²⁰⁸ Nikola Batušić in 1971, as quoted in *ibid.*, 349.

²⁰⁹ Igor Mrduljaš paraphrasing the author Ivan Kušan, “Igra skrivača duga 35 godina ili od Herakla do Cica i Marinka,” *Kazalište* no. 9/10 (2002): 173–174.

²¹⁰ “Kindly, they’ve told me that they will not attend the premiere because it would be bad for the Festival and for me if Belgrade newspapers would publish photos of them applauding to the production on the next day. They did not come, but instead watched the whole play through the shutters of a nearby building, while their wives attended the staging.” Igor Mrduljaš, *Glumište u stupcu: Kolumne iz Hrvatskog slova* (Zagreb: Hrvatska kulturna zaklada, 2007), 216.

audiences.”²¹¹ To paraphrase, he rendered the political message of the play as understandable as possible, something what one could probably say he succeeded in as the “audiences greeted our performance with enormous enthusiasm, with final applause lasting for more than 20 minutes.”²¹²

In addition, besides reaffirming the national narrative constructed around the everlasting aspiration of the Croatian nation for freedom and autonomy, the narrative of the play was equally dedicated to depicting those who were identified as preventing this from happening, namely the historical as well as the ‘actual enemies’. As the phenomenon of presenting the other/the enemy will be featured in the main segment of my research dedicated to the Croatian wartime theatre, these precedent manifestations solicit further analytical dedication. For instance, in the case of the here-mentioned production, the others were depicted along their linguistic determination. Namely, by focusing his play on a very elaborated linguistic dramatic scheme, the enemies of the Dubrovnik independence were clearly distinguished by the language they used—the French speak French, Austrians speak German, Turks speak the Bosnian idiom of the Serbo-Croatian, with the Byzantines using a much-hyphenated Serbian version of Serbo-Croatian.

The most telling example of this conceptualisation of the enemy based on its linguistic expression considered the character of Porphyrogenites²¹³ who, as mentioned, represented the Byzantine invaders. The choice to portray him as speaking Serbian should not be seen as a simple stylistic decision, especially not in the context of acute politisation of the Serbo-Croatian language and the events around the publishing of the “Croatian Orthography” announced for September 1971. Kušan himself confirmed this—referring to the scene in which Porphyrogenites authoritatively corrects the language of the Dubrovnik Prince from Croatian into Serbian, he claimed that this was an “allusion to the endangerment of my language.”²¹⁴ Moreover, it seems that the premiere audiences also had similar understandings because, according to Kušan, once confronted with the Serbian idiom of the Byzantine characters, the “public that was loudly laughing at the satire suddenly went silent and serious,”²¹⁵ as if the register of the play abruptly shifted from parody to realistic drama.

²¹¹ Kušan, *Svrha od slobode*, 397.

²¹² Miro Međimorec, “Suradnja u vrtlogu političkih promjena,” <http://www.hkv.hr/izdvojeno/komentari/mmedimorec/13554-m-medimorec-moja-suradnja-s-piscem-ivanom-kusanom-ii.html>; last accessed February 12, 2019.

²¹³ Constantine VII Porphyrogenites or Porphyrogenites (905–959) was the fourth Emperor of the Macedonian dynasty of the Byzantine Empire.

²¹⁴ Ivan Kušan, as cited in Gračan, “Casus Kušan,” 202.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 202.

In addition, Porphyrogenites' 'second coming' in the form of a ghost and parallel to the establishment of the socialist government was followed by him declaring that the people of Dubrovnik would "now become Slavs" but that "Slavs are actually Byzantines, as the history, every tower in this village and every old song teaches us."²¹⁶ With this kind of statement, equating the Byzantines with the Slavs, Kušan seemingly wanted to move away from the historical rootedness of the potential enmity, thus rendering it more relatable and more 'condemning'.

In addition, by connecting the socialist ideology to the Serbian language, he somewhat echoed the existing claims of the "Croatian spring" protagonists who openly argued that the Serbs were the real benefitters of the Yugoslav federation, with Croats being the 'victims' of the same project. "In the caricature of Porphyrogenites the audiences effortlessly recognized the Serbian hegemony (...) and in the manipulated people they've recognised themselves."²¹⁷ Unlike the previously mentioned theatrical productions, which featured a critical political stance aimed mostly against the socialist regime and the propagated supra-national Yugoslav identity, this play disclosed the Serbian nation as the real opponent of the awaited Croatian national autonomy. This assessment was further corroborated during the discussion following the premiere of the play in Dubrovnik when then young actor Rade Šerbedžija expressed his worries that the "dramatic events in the play were too much concentrated around finger-pointing at these 'eastern winds'."²¹⁸ Moreover, according to Kušan himself, it was exactly this element of the play that provoked the mechanisms of censorship—when remembering how the production of *The Purpose/End of Freedom* was being handled by the representatives of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, he mentioned that

the artistic director of the Festival, who sent kisses to the young actor playing the part of Porphyrogenites in a Serbian dialect during the first rehearsals of the play (...) later asked the director to adapt the text, and demanded that the actor recites his text differently. (...) I advised the actor to tone down the Ekavian dialect (...) but after two days I saw this was not enough.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Excerpt from the drama, quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 346.

²¹⁷ Igor Mrduljaš, "Hrvatska komedija kao proturežimska djelatnost: nova farsa sedamdesetih i osamdesetih godina," *Kazalište* no. 576 (2001): 155.

²¹⁸ Meaning that the enemy was detected eastern of Croatia, namely in Serbia. Quoted in Ivan Kušan, *Svrha od slobode*, 399. Another example of this would be the title of the review written by Anatolij Kudravecjev that appeared in *Slobodna Dalmacija* following the premiere, proclaiming "Serbs, the occupiers of Dubrovnik!"

²¹⁹ Gračan, "Casus Kušan," 201.

In other words, although initially welcoming the use of Serbian idiom by the villain of the play, the direction of the Festival was apparently pressured to censure this decision out of fear of far-reaching consequences.

Despite its minimal number of performances, the play nevertheless still holds a prominent place in Croatia's cultural and theatre historiography, mostly as a symbol of harsh political censorship that was employed towards its production as well as towards its creators.²²⁰ From the perspective of Croatian theatre historiography after 1991, its importance was further detected in the fact that it featured a certain “non-simultaneous *simultaneity*,”²²¹ meaning that its main message was found to be adaptable and functional in different times and contexts. In fact, some even gave it some sort of a prophetic significance, identifying it as a proof of a theatre production being able to pinpoint those occurrences that would eventually lead to the phenomena of the wartime in decades to come. When referring to the play, Igor Mrduljaš claimed that “these ‘eastern winds’²²² mentioned by the actor Rade Šerbedžija actually brought Serbo-chetnik war hoards to the [Dubrovnik] city walls” and that “if it was not for these young men who recognised Kušan's human and dramatic courage to publicly unmask this ‘eastern wind’, Porphyrogenites' lines from the play would come true: ‘the shadow of Byzantium would forever hover over this city’.”²²³ Interestingly enough, the play's ‘adaptability’ was confirmed in the context of wartime—the adapted and modernised version of the production was staged again in 1995,²²⁴ in socio-political circumstances that corresponded to its interpretations in a much more direct manner.

²²⁰ “After the play, they haven't arrested Kušan and me, but our names ended up in the ‘White Book’ and our artistic engagement was hampered for years after this.” Miro Međimorec, *Suradnja u vrtlogu političkih promjena*.

²²¹ See Helena Peričić, “Raznodobna istodobnost Kušanove ‘Svrhe od slobode’,” in *Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti, zbornik radova XX. (Istodobnost raznodobnog. tekst i povijesni ritmovi)*, eds. Cvijeta Pavlović and Vinka Glunčić-Bužančić (Split/Zagreb: Književni krug Split / Odsjek za komparativnu književnost FF u Zagrebu, 2010), 346.

²²² See footnote 216.

²²³ Mrduljaš, “Hrvatska komedija kao proturežimska djelatnost: nova farsa sedamdesetih i osamdesetih godina,” 155.

²²⁴ It was staged in Zadar, in the scope of the Zadar Summer Festival, directed by Davor Žagar. The performance was dedicated to a theatre student Luka Skračić, killed as the Croatian soldier in the previous year.



Fig. 1: *Svrha od slobode* [The End/Purpose of Freedom], Dubrovnik Summer Festival, 1971. Photo credit: author unknown.

2.4. Staging Religion

Religion and the National Identity in SFRY

As I am going to show in the main corpus of this dissertation, one of the most prominent theatrical features of the wartime theatre in Croatia—besides the staging of national history, national cultural heritage, and symbols of nation—was the presence of religious topics on stage. Since the 1990s, religious narratives have been reintroduced into institutional theatre as part of an effort to (re)construct the national identity around specific ethnic, cultural, as well as religious characteristics that would distinguish the new state of Croatia from other federative states. Or, put differently, this “return to the nationalism or ethnicization of politics [that] goes hand in hand with a religious revival and an entry of religion into the naked public square”²²⁵ that would occur in the early 1990s, will, precisely due to its ‘revivalist’ nature, be further discussed in this introduction. Being such a significant element of the ‘Croatianhood’, whose narratives will be ‘recycled’ in the periods to come, I found it relevant for my overall research to investigate whether this phenomenon occurred in the context of the previous socio-political era, and if so, in what conditions and with which objectives and repercussions. Before engaging into a more detailed analysis of the examples, I will provide a very condensed overview of the position the religion and its subject held in the context of socialist Yugoslavia.

Conceived as a secular country and following the communist ideological concepts of religion, the Yugoslav Federation regarded it as not only being the exploitative “opium of the masses”²²⁶ but also as accommodating dangerous conflict potential. It was out of these reasons that the religion—meaning religious institutions and representatives—was in a way ‘stripped’ of its socio-political and other significance.²²⁷ In addition, the religious practice was relocated from the public into the private sphere, and thus, the liberty of practicing it

²²⁵ Srđan Vrcan, “Transition, War and Religion,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 43, no. 103 (1998): 153.

²²⁶ The full quote from Karl Marx translates as “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (London / New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 131.

²²⁷ As I’m going to outline in a separate chapter, the relationship between the socialist government and the religious affiliations in Yugoslavia could actually be divided into several periods. Between 1945 and 1953 the government and the party mounted an all-out attack on the churches despite a claim of religious liberty; from 1953 to 1965 there was a gradual reduction of the pressure against churches and religious individuals, though excesses such as torture, imprisonment on false charges, and even murder by the secret police were still practiced from time to time; from 1965 to 1971 the system had opened up to such a degree that many religious practices were unobstructed, and government’s interference in internal church matters was minimalised and in some instances was almost completely removed; from 1972 to 1983 the government aimed at installing more controls over church life; as of 1983 religion again saw expansion of new liberties. For more, see Paul Mojzes, “Religious Liberty in Yugoslavia: A Study in Ambiguity,” in *Religious Liberty and Human Rights in Nations and in Religions*, ed. Leonard W. Swindler (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 1986).

“was understood narrowly as the freedom to worship or not to worship”²²⁸ in private.

Nevertheless, socialist Yugoslavia recognised both religious affiliation and nationality in the census of 1953, thus in a way creating the “three ethnic nations”²²⁹ as identity elements of the socialist state.

As the religious institutions in Yugoslavia had very firm national definitions (notice the national constituent in the appellations of the representative institutions, such as the Croatian Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, etc.), pursuing the idea that any type of nationalism presented a threat to the main postulates of supra-national and supra-religious brotherhood and unity, the socialist government in Yugoslavia aimed at holding them under control. Nevertheless, the activities of religious institutions were not officially banished and hence enjoyed a rather high level of autonomy—this implied holding holy masses, publishing activities via church-owned publishing houses with an impressive rotation of different religious magazines and books, organisation of religious seminars, management of theological schools and university programs, etc.

As different academic research papers have argued, in the period of socialist Yugoslavia and especially after the death of Tito in 1980, the most important religious institutions were progressively creating the nations and nationalities “by means of mythmaking, linguistic efforts, commemorations, holidays (...) and calculations involving history and memory.”²³⁰ Taking into consideration this national myth-making potential of the religious narratives, the question whether and how this process occurred in institutional theatres in Croatia becomes even more relevant.

Croatia: Religion, Church, and Nationhood

As of 1970, the Catholic Church in Croatia organised several events that manifested its “national mission”²³¹ in reaffirming certain national myths—some of which would eventually find their way onto stages of Croatian theatres. To name just the few of the most important ones: In February 1970 the first public commemoration after 1945, dedicated to the controversial church leader Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac,²³² was held in the Zagreb Cathedral;

²²⁸ Ibid., 25.

²²⁹ Srđan Vrcan, “Religion, Nation and Class in Contemporary Yugoslavia,” in *The Influence of the Frankfurt School on Contemporary Theology—Critical Theory and the Future of Religion*, ed. James A. Reimer (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 1992), 92.

²³⁰ Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

²³¹ Ibid., 59.

²³² For more see pages 304–311 of this dissertation.

later that year, the first native Croat saint, Nikola Tavelić, was canonised by the Vatican; in April 1971, the remains of Zrinski and Frankopan were moved to the Zagreb Cathedral followed by a massive religious ceremony; in August 1971, the Church organised the international “Mariological and Marian Congress” in Zagreb and at the nearby shrine of Marija Bistrica; later that month, Marija Bistrica gained a special status of national shrine, and the event was celebrated with a public mass attended by more than 150,000 pilgrims;²³³ etc.

Although these and similar activities of the Church coincided with the occurrence and some demands of the “Croatian Spring,” the Catholic Church actually publicly avoided any connection to the movement as it did not want to further politicise its position of being exclusively the nation’s ‘spiritual guardian’. Although the Church leaders distinctively positioned themselves as not supporting the movement directly, they still sympathised with it—“even though the bishops abstained from direct involvement in politics, religious symbols were ubiquitous and churches were crowded,” with the period marked by an additional rise in organisation of “spiritual panels, catechism for adults, worship services for students and intellectuals, and Sunday sermons dedicated to the current social issues”²³⁴ which attracted massive audiences. As the political movement could not be ‘practised’ in public due to the government’s restrictions, these church gatherings actually served as a platform for public demonstration of nationalist aspirations.

In 1972 and with the dissolution of “the Croatian Spring,” the relationship between the Catholic Church and the central Government of Croatia worsened as well. However, a complete reversal of the concessions made during the previous period was not implemented. Certain church activities did not suffer at all but rather continued steadily, thereby nominally justifying the existence of religious freedoms.²³⁵ In 1975 and under the direct patronage of the Vatican, the Croatian Catholic Church engaged in the organisation of the nine-year-long jubilee named “the Great Novena,” marking the thirteen centuries of Christianity among Croats. The main event in the scope of the project was the first official visit of a Pope to a

²³³ As documented by different sources, most of the pilgrims were dressed in folk costumes and were carrying Croatia’s national flags. At one point, the crowd unanimously sang the Croatian anthem and other church songs in Croatian, thus transforming the event into a public manifestation of ‘Croatianhood’.

²³⁴ Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, 58.

²³⁵ For example, non-interference in the curricula and teaching staff of theological schools, easily obtained permissions for renovation of church buildings, etc.

Slavic country in 1977, as well as various religious events dedicated to different episodes and protagonists of Croatian national history.²³⁶

In 1984, the Croatian Catholic Church began to intensify its activities concerning its self-proclaimed mission of preserving the spirit of the Croatian people, done mostly in response to the similar activities executed by the Serbian Orthodox Church. In that year, at the final ceremony of “The Great Novena,” a crowd of some 200,000 pilgrims gathered at the shrine of Marija Bistrica where, encouraged by such a large congregation, the church leaders publicly called for certain political rights and liberties. Just few months later, the Serbian Orthodox Church organised a ceremony at the site of the Ustashe concentration camp in Jasenovac, Croatia, commemorating the Serbian victims of this Nazi regime. On that occasion, speaking to 20,000 people, the patriarch of the Serbian Church publicly accused the Croatian Catholic Church of denying the WWII genocide over Serb population and denounced it as chief aide to the Ustashe regime. The relationship between the two Churches was further complicated in 1987 when the Serbian Orthodox Church publicly announced that the two largest branches of Christianity in Yugoslavia were actually two incompatible worlds that could coexist peacefully only if separated into two different nation-states, one dominated by the Catholic Croats and the other by the Orthodox Church²³⁷—a statement that was basically a war manifesto and a blueprint for warmongering methods starting in 1990, testifying just in what way the Church in Yugoslavia managed to influence and manipulate the concepts of nation and state.

Affirmation of National Cultural Heritage

Understanding religion as carrying a dangerous potential towards the secular Yugoslav project, the socialist government aimed at reducing religion and religious practices to people’s private sphere. Bearing this in mind, one could presume that any type of affirmative public manifestations of religious nature not under the direct organisation of the church was monitored or prohibited. Nonetheless, as I will demonstrate, theatre plays endorsing religious

²³⁶ As one could understand, many of these happenings included in “The Novena” were consecrated to the Croatian medieval kings and princes such as King Zvonimir or Duke Branimir, thus further confirming their national significance and simultaneously connecting the national religion to what was considered to be the very origin of Croatian state and nationhood.

²³⁷ The article stating this appeared in the Church newspaper *Pravoslavlje* on October 1, 1987. Written by the patriarchate official Svetozar Dušanić, the article argued for the partition of Yugoslavia into an “Eastern Orthodox-Byzantine sphere of influence” and “western Roman Catholic sphere of influence,” because “the two incompatible worlds sharply differ from one another in religion, culture, historical development, ethics, psychology and mentality, and therefore, previous conflicts that culminated with massacres in the Second World War could be repeated.” See Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, 158.

affiliation as a trait of a specific national identity did manage to enter Croatian stages during socialist Yugoslavia but at a pace and under conditions that very much explain the changes and shifts in the socio-political context of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Croatia. As argued by Grgo Mišković and Helena Peričić, when presented on the Croatian theatre stages during the socialist Yugoslavia, “the church institutions or individuals were predominately presented as being negative.”²³⁸ In line with the ruling communist ideology seeing its practical purpose in emancipating individuals, this approach was used mostly to symbolise the ‘backwardness’ of the believers. However, as of the late 1960s and parallel to the ‘awakening of the Croatian national consciousness’, a more positive depiction of religion—and more precisely, of Catholic religion—started to sporadically penetrate repertoires of national theatres. Alongside the rise of biography drama in the late 1960s, the religious plays portraying “distinguished Croats from (church) history”²³⁹ also gained notable increase in theatre repertoires. Just to name a few: *Reformatori* [the Reformers] depicted the life of the Croatian protestant priest Matija Vlačić Ilirik (it was authored by Nedjeljko Fabrio and presented in the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka in 1968); *Heretik* [Heretic] illustrated the life of the Croatian scientist and archbishop Marko Antonije de Dominis (it was written by Ivan Supek and was performed in Zagreb Gavella Theatre in 1969); *Bojište i krijes* [The Battlefield and The Fire] dealt with the life of the Croatian saint Nikola Tavelić (written by Hrvoslav Ban in 1970),²⁴⁰ and *Legenda o sv. Muhli* [the Legend of St. Muhlo] presented the story of one of the seven siblings that allegedly founded the Croatian state (it was written by Mate Matišić and performed in 1988). Although not all of these plays presented exclusively positive aspects of religion and religious institutions (as was the case of *Heretik* or *The Legend of St. Muhlo*), the overall interpretation was that they were constructed as “allegories of the contemporary socialist society”²⁴¹ where “a personal story depicts the destiny and the defeat of the national being.”²⁴² More specifically, a certain political and national significance were added to the personal trajectories of these protagonists.

²³⁸ Grgo Mišković and Helena Peričić, “Hrvatska drama s religijskim elementima u razdoblju komunizma: književnost i društvo u drugoj polovici 20. Stoljeća,” in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 2009: Hrvatska drama i kazalište i društvo* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/Filozofski Fakultet/Zavod za povijest hrvatske književnosti, kazališta i glazbe HAZU, 2010), 175.

²³⁹ Ibid., 175.

²⁴⁰ There were no available data on its staging.

²⁴¹ Mišković and Peričić, “Hrvatska drama s religijskim elementima u razdoblju komunizma: književnost i društvo u drugoj polovici 20. stoljeća,” 164.

²⁴² Group of authors, *Leksikon hrvatske književnosti. Djela* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2008), 763–764. Interestingly, even when presenting the Catholic Church in a negative light (such was a case in Ivan Supek’s *Heretik*), this was still interpreted as a metaphorical critique of the socialist and not the church system itself.

On the other hand, some of these plays still represented religious affiliation in a much more positive manner. Recognised by some as “affirmative religious drama,”²⁴³ they mostly referred to the genre of liturgical drama. In most general terms, liturgical drama is used to describe or define a certain type of performance that formed as of 10th century throughout Europe, depicting different stories and legends from the Bible or portraying lives of certain saints. Most of the plays from this genre were written and performed in Latin. They often featured musical elements and were usually staged either in churches or in adjoining locations. If consulting general theatre theory, the liturgical drama served as an ‘additional’ part of the church mass, created with the goal to explain and elaborate the religious concepts to the congregation. Propagating church gospels and legends, these ecclesiastical plays were mostly constituted in a form of simply rhymed poems and were disseminated throughout Europe by means of transcription. In short, the most important characteristics of this genre were its use of religious topics, a certain didactic function, and the aim to engage audiences in a religious-theatrical event.

On the territory of today’s Croatia, there were two liturgic dramas (*Visitatio sepulchri* and *Tractus stellae*²⁴⁴) that were preserved in their totality by being written down in the oldest ceremonial book of the Zagreb Cathedral called *Missale antiquissimum*. These texts were originally written sometime in the latter part of the 11th century and were most probably brought to Zagreb on the occasion of the foundation of the Zagreb archdiocese in 1094. Although these liturgical dramas were written in Latin (and it is safe to assume they were performed in Latin as well), the mainstream Croatian theatre historiography defines them as “the origin of the national history, as well as an integrative part of its continuity.”²⁴⁵ Which means that, for local theatre historians and theoreticians, the liturgical drama attested not only to the continuity of cultural activities on the territory of Croatia (something extremely questionable, as the research shows that it is very difficult to know if any of these texts were actually performed and if so, when and to what extent)²⁴⁶ but was also identified as a primal

²⁴³ Nikčević, *Šta je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 44.

²⁴⁴ Other liturgical texts found on the territory of today’s Croatia were saved in fragments and include titles such as *Prophetæ Christi* and *Ideši že, milostivče, ka požrtiju*. Out of these four texts only one was written in old Church Slavic language which was, at the end of 11th Century, the official language of church ceremonies.

²⁴⁵ Nikola Batušić, “Scenska slika liturgijske drame iz obrednika zagrebačke stolne crkve,” *Dani hvarskog kazališta-Uvod* (1975), 59.

²⁴⁶ In case of the *Tractus Stellae*, Batušić argued that its execution was already inscribed in the title itself. Departing from the fact that the Latin verb *traho* defines the action of pulling, he claims that this text was more directed to its actual staging than similar texts in European culture of that time. In addition, as some parts of the text were additionally corrected with notes being added for singing parts, Batušić understands this as a proof that the text was actually performed. See Batušić, “Scenska slika liturgijske drame iz obrednika zagrebačke stolne crkve,” 59.

historical source of a particular national culture. Starting in the late 15th century, these and other newly written religious plays, which were progressively being scripted in Croatian, were known and played mostly throughout coastal Croatia, subsequently secluding to monasteries and no longer being performed in front of wider audiences. Still, they were sporadically showed in public throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in different religious centres in Croatia, and in some regions, they were occasionally staged even as late as the 19th century.

As Sanja Nikčević argues, during socialist Yugoslavia (from 1945 to 1991), only five of these “affirmative religious plays” were staged in Croatia and that only as of 1968. Among them, two were liturgical dramas: *Prikazanje života sv. Lovrinca mučenika* [the Presentation of the Life of St. Lawrence the Martyr] performed in 1968²⁴⁷ and 1969,²⁴⁸ and *Prikazanje i muka sv. Ciprijana i Justine* [the Presentation of the Life and Suffering of St. Cyprian and St. Justina] staged in 1968.²⁴⁹ Both of these productions were produced and staged in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival or the Split Summer Festival and were found to be following the repertory approach of “exploring the cultural heritage, linguistical as well as theatrical.”²⁵⁰ More exactly, their performances were nominally interpreted not only as promoting the Catholic religion as a constructive element of Croatian national identity but also as carrying out the revitalisation of national theatre heritage and attaining its continuation.

In addition to this reactivation of the national cultural tradition firmly embedded in religious heritage, the other main objective of these plays was actually seen in their revalidation of the Croatian language. More precisely, they confirmed its historical origins, thus articulating yet another argument in the context of the described discussions regarding the publication of Croatian Orthography and its wider political autonomy. Although the language of both plays was archaic²⁵¹ and thus not completely understandable to the contemporary audiences of the late 1960s, Selem still argued that

²⁴⁷ Based on a text from 15th century written by an unknown author, the play was staged in Split in 1968, under the direction of Marko Fotez.

²⁴⁸ Staged by the Popular Amateur Theatre of Hvar in a local church, adapted and directed by Marin Carić, one of the most long-running performances in Croatia.

²⁴⁹ Written in 17th century by Marin Gazarović, it premiered in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival.

²⁵⁰ Nikčević, *Šta je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 47.

²⁵¹ While *St. Lawrence* was written in archaic Čakavski dialect originating from the Dalmatian part of Croatia, *St. Cyprian* was written in *makaronika*, a mixture of ‘kitchen’ or corrupted Latin, Italian, and local dialects.

this element of recognition found in the language of the play immediately created a connection with a certain space, a certain mentality, with the tradition that summarises and expresses all of this. However naïve it was, this theatre immediately manifested its affiliation.²⁵²

Or, put differently, these plays outlining a certain linguistical evolution ultimately focused on “constructing what we could call the linguistic consciousness of a nation,”²⁵³ one of the most important elements of the national identity. Although the audiences could not fully understand the vocabulary of these plays, Selem thought that this ‘understanding’ actually happened on another, more abstract level of communication—it is as if the cultural tradition, by the use of this language, addressed the nation itself.

Nikčević detects two other examples of the “affirmative religious drama” during socialist Yugoslavia in the productions of *Judita* staged in Split in 1979²⁵⁴ and *Ecce Homo* in Dubrovnik in 1986.²⁵⁵ *Judita*, an epic poem written in 1501 by Marko Marulić²⁵⁶ and based on the Biblical tale from a Deuterocanonical *Book of Judith*, recounts the story of the widow Judith who, by attempting a heroic act (consisting of seducing and murdering the Assyrian general Holofernes) saves her city of Bethulia. The significance of this staging that took place in 1979 in Split could have once again been found in both the resuscitation of the national traditional culture as well as the theatrical heritage and Croatian language. In 1979, the director of the play, Marin Carić, confirmed this when stating how *Judita* “revisits all those forms of archaic, authentic popular theatre that still live on our coast and our islands, witnessing on the same history that is hidden by Marulić under a mask of biblical landscape.”²⁵⁷ Simply put, despite its biblical pattern, Carić saw the play as an authentic expression of the local cultural tradition. As for its contribution to the question of national language, *Judita* in fact represents the first literary work in Croatia’s history that was in totality written in what, from then on, started to be recognised as the Croatian language. By using this archaic Croatian idiom of the Čakavian dialect blended with the Church Slavonic

²⁵² Petar Selem, *Dodir Taliže* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2008), 190–191.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁵⁴ The play premiered in the scope of the Split Summer Festival in 1979, and was directed by Marin Carić.

²⁵⁵ Nikčević, *Šta je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 46. *Ecce Homo* was actually composed of different dramatised medieval texts from the depository of liturgical drama written in Croatian, chosen and adapted for the stage by Nikola Batušić and Slobodan Prosperov Novak. More information on the performance itself is very difficult to find.

²⁵⁶ Marko Marulić (1450–1524) was a Croatian renaissance poet and humanist, author of many poems, discussions on theology and Christian ethics, stories, and several epics. His vernacular verse marked the beginnings of a distinctive Croatian literature although he wrote in three languages: Latin, Croatian and Vulgar Latin.

²⁵⁷ Marin Carić, “Marulićeva *Judita* na Splitskom ljetu 79. kao ishodište jednog neostvarenog kazališnog programa,” *Dani Hvarškoga kazališta: Građa i rasprave o hrvatskoj književnosti i kazalištu*, no. 1 (1989): 316.

language, Marulić actually initiated the development of the Croatian literary language and thus gained the title of “the father of Croatian literature.” Although this has not been documented, it seems very plausible to assume that the staging of *Judita* in 1979 in Split, the hometown of Marko Marulić, at least provoked some discussion on his overall national symbolic in the socio-political context of that time.

Finally, another affirmative religious message of the play that Nikčević detects in the story of *Judita* but fails to support with further arguments, is the fact that, although refusing to follow the ten commandments, Judita is still depicted as a symbol of confidence in God, eternal justice, and the justification of the suffering endured for one’s community or people.

Interpreted from the perspective of the period in which the mentioned understanding was formed, Judita’s positioning of her love towards her people above any other (a decision for which she will ultimately not be punished by the religious authorities) probably resonated with Nikčević’s concept of affirmative religious theatre and its socio-political consequences that would be activated during the wartime in Croatian theatres. As I am going to demonstrate in the chapter dedicated to staging religion in the context of nation-building processes and wartime reality of the early 1990s, the employment of religious narratives served clear strategies of affirming both national distinctiveness as well as moral superiority, both bearing some potentially detrimental consequences.

Šimun Cirenac: Performing the Religion in Transition

As one could detect from the examples discussed here, a large majority of the performances dealing with religious motives were symptomatically staged in the period of the “Croatian Spring,” hence corresponding to the developments in their direct socio-political setting.

Parallel to the dissolution of the movement, these plays more or less disappeared from the Croatian stages, only to cautiously re-emerge in the late 1980s when the political suppression towards national cultural production started to loosen. One of the best examples of just how different socio-political contexts could have influenced or be reflected in both the presentation and interpretation of the Catholic religion in Croatian theatre will be presented by the theatrical example that follows.

The play *Šimun Cirenac* [Simon of Cyrene], originally written in 1977 by Ivan Bakmaz, was staged every summer between 1989 and 1991 within the scope of the Split Summer Festival, in the period of the most acute shifts and transitions in the socio-political system of Croatia—starting its theatrical life in the context of a socialist and ending it in the context of a

democratic political constellation.²⁵⁸ The plot of the play was built around the biblical character of Simon of Cyrene, a man compelled to help Jesus carry his cross on his way to the crucifixion site. In Bakmaz's dramatic adaptation positioned in a contemporary setting, Simon is ordered to help Jesus carrying his cross by the two characters, Justo and Parapuz, agents of Pontius Pilate, created as obvious allegories of socialist proxies or policemen.²⁵⁹ Once Simon refuses to execute the order under the excuse of scheduling a dinner with the mayor and Pontius Pilate, the two beat him up brutally. Recovering from the beating, Simon starts to communicate with Jesus who, entirely immersed in the 'biblical' time (he speaks in allegories, talks with God, is dressed in rags, and carries the crown of thorns), seems to recognise Simon as a manifestation of Devil's temptation. Simon, on the other hand, is extremely sceptical about Jesus, calling him a demagogue but, at the same time, does not leave him as he still needs to obey the given orders to proceed with his dinner plans. However, after Jesus passes out under the pressure of the cross and collapses to the ground, peacefully awaiting his destiny, one of the guards gets irritated by his emotionless stance and beats him to death. In order to carry out Pontius's orders, the guards decide to put Simon on the cross, thereby forcing him to pretend to be Jesus. Deeply disturbed by the violent death of Jesus, Simon accepts his position on the crucifix without any resistance, declaring how his own nothingness in this whole story is meaningful only to show the significance of other narrative elements of the story. After extensive torture, Justo and Parapuz take Simon down from the cross, hoping that the replacement will continue to go unnoticed. Although intending to kill Simon by sticking metal spikes into his heart, they renounce this plan. However, their deceit is being discovered by two of Pontius' security guards who arrest them and take them to their superior. The play ends with the speech by Pontius declaring that "we have the power, we do not need the arguments,"²⁶⁰ and ordering his army to guard the cemetery where Jesus' body was eventually dragged to. Pontius' last words are followed by music that appears to be sung by an angelic choir, forcing him to leave the stage in panic, shouting: "What are they singing? What are they signing?"²⁶¹ Although written as a situational play with traits of contemporary existentialist drama, according to Boris Senker, the play also referred to the Croatian theatrical tradition—more

²⁵⁸ The 1989's production of Bakmaz's text was actually not its first staging as the play was produced by the Zagreb Youth Theatre under the direction of Georgij Paro already in 1977. In 1982 the same theatre house staged the play again, this time under the direction of Radovan Milanov.

²⁵⁹ They are both carrying guns, truncheons, and handcuffs around their belts.

²⁶⁰ As detected in the video recording of the play from 1991.

²⁶¹ As detected in the video recording of the play from 1991.

precisely, by positioning the plot at different stations of the cross, Bakmaz sort of mimicked the structures of the Croatian liturgical drama. In addition, by mixing the biblical and modern time (the characters in the play are depicted as living in the actual reality of the text), he focused on the cyclical nature of the historical events, wanting to enforce their metaphorical potential. Following one comment, “the allegoric language and the characters such as Jesus, Simon or Veronika did not confuse the audiences, because everyone could easily recognise their own delusions and their sufferings in it.”²⁶² In other terms, the play had a clear and easily detectable critical relationship to its political context, presenting Simon as an individual who, wanting to disobey his given orders, eventually understands that this is not possible whatsoever, and in an act of utter hopelessness finally takes over the destiny of Jesus. Interestingly enough, when publishing the re-edition of his plays in 1989, Bakmaz actually radically changed the ending of this play—due to a personal “religious experience,”²⁶³ he apparently found his original narrative to undermine the teachings of the Church and the Bible itself. In this new version, it is Simon who dies beaten up by the guards while Jesus continues his trajectory, pursuing the actual Bible story. However, due to unsubstantiated directorial or managerial choices and according to the available video recording, the mentioned Split production actually followed the original version of the play. As explained by the director of the play, Nenni Delmestre, “one could make a psychological, or even better, psychiatric analysis of all our ideological caretakers after the reactions to this play.”²⁶⁴ More precisely, the reception that followed this staging during these very eventful three years revealed the nature and broadness of associations between the political elites, theatre system, and the institution of the Croatian Catholic Church. For instance, in 1988, when the director of the drama in the Croatian National Theatre in Split wanted to stage the play, he was confronted with the unofficial ban of its production from the theatre committee that executed repertory choices. “The rumours had it that Bakmaz’s text was too clerical and that, ‘through identifying with the way of the cross, it would encourage the average man to suspicious actions.’”²⁶⁵

Although seen as ‘too clerical’ in 1988, just one year later, the same theatre house managed to produce the play. The director Delmestre remembered how, during the first rehearsals, “nobody was bothered by the fact that the actors were dragging this cross across the Marjan

²⁶² Mrduljaš, “Igra skrivača duga 35 godina ili od Herakla do Cica i Marinka,” 174–175.

²⁶³ Nikčević, *Šta je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 50.

²⁶⁴ Lada Kaštelan and Nenni Delmestre, “Pustolov pred vratima,” *Hrvatsko glumište* no. 2 (1998): 32.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

forest”²⁶⁶ where the production would eventually be performed.²⁶⁷ Still, criticism followed soon after as some reviewers detected a considerable provocation in the fact that, every time that Pontius Pilate addressed his subordinates and threatened them with prison, he did so from a balcony decorated with a big red cloth that would be ceremoniously spread before him before he was about to give a speech. Although the choice of this specific prop featuring a colour strongly linked to the Yugoslav socialist rule was not further explained, Delmestre recalls how “it was actually just at the last rehearsals that the discussion concerning this big red cloth (...) started. They asked me if I could remove it, and I said no.”²⁶⁸ By staging her vision of the play, she considered that, presented “at the peak of this period of ‘Croatian silence’ (...) it spoke of what troubled us, when almost nobody neither wrote or talked about it.”²⁶⁹ One could only conclude that this kind of censorship followed by the firm positioning of the director was only possible in the context of a politically ‘transformative’ Croatia where the socialist authority was still in power while the calls for a nationally independent state were starting to get more and more publicly articulated.



Fig. 2: Šimun Cirenac [Simon of Cyrene], Split Summer Festival, 1990. Pontius Pilate delivers his speech from an elevated balcony, with the mentioned red cloth hanging in front of him. Photo credit: video still.

In the summer of 1990, after the first democratic elections in Croatia had been held in April, marking the formal end of the Communist regime in Croatia, the Archbishop of Split, Ante Jurić, saw the renewed production and allegedly gave it his “blessing.”²⁷⁰ In the summer of

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 32.

²⁶⁷ The play was staged outdoors, in a small urban setting close to the Marjan forest park, above Split.

²⁶⁸ Lada Kaštelan and Nenni Delmestre, “Pustolov pred vratima,” 32.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 32.

1991 and parallel to the beginning of the first conflicts with the Yugoslav People's Army in and around Split, the play and the wartime reality seemed to correspond on several levels. For instance, Delmestre remembered how "the helicopters of the Yugoslav People's Army were setting off to combat some 100 meters from our performance location, in the same moment that the character of the 'state policemen' Parapuš started to whip and kick Jesus and Šimun."²⁷¹ Although the conditions of performing the play were radically precarious, the production stayed on the repertoire of the Summer Festival, subsequently becoming a symbol of cultural resistance to the system that was attacking the city and its environment. However, already in 1992, "someone more papal than the Pope declared the play 'atheistic' (...) and it was taken down from the repertoire,"²⁷² apparently due to the fact that it did not follow the words of the Bible to the fullest. It seems that in 1992, the priorities began to shift as the political as well as censorial powers transitioned, with some demanding a 'clear' and accurate religious message and others probably fearing that the criticism of the play could now be interpreted as a criticism towards the outlined nationalist agenda of the new democratic government. In some way, it was as if the case of this drama pinpointed the initial moment in which Catholic religion and its agents gained 'official' political and wider national significance in Croatia.

In conclusion, as I have tried to argue, theatre dealing with religious topics in Croatia between 1945 until 1991 manifested a growing political potential by, more or less openly, supporting or even generating a certain national identity. In addition, by using the theatrical forms of liturgical theatre, it aimed at fixing the local cultural tradition as one of the most important features of national identity, thus reclaiming its continuity and reaffirming it as a strong element of nationhood. In general, by resorting to religious or drama with religious character, theatre of that time was perhaps sporadically but nevertheless actively engaged in further connecting the sources of 'Croatianhood' with the Catholic religion, a consequence which will be further analysed in a separate chapter.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 32.

²⁷² Ibid., 32.

2.5. Theatrical ‘Escapism’ of the 1980s

Due to the gradual decentralisation of socialist Yugoslavia and parallel to the emergence of different off-theatre groups and projects, as well as under the influence of the avant-garde or post-dramatic poetics presented at international theatre festivals by relevant performance groups from around the world, in the second half of the 1980s, the overall theatre scene in Croatia became progressively polyphonic and diverse. Despite this heterogenous character, the theatre scene nevertheless manifested some rather homogenous features. For instance, when analysing theatre production of contemporary playwrights at that period (authors considered to be part of the “young” or “new” Croatian dramaturgy),²⁷³ the national theatre historiography concluded that they almost unanimously abandoned the previous domination of the political drama as well as its critical objectives. Contrary to the already established generation of playwrights who still engaged in criticising their socio-political reality, Dubravka Vrgoč insists that the younger generation of Croatian post-dramatic playwrights appearing throughout the 1980s definitely wanted to move away from depicting and dealing with the historical perspectives, making a radical turn from the dominant theatre tradition.²⁷⁴ Due to this position towards their actuality, Croatian theatre historiography often identifies this specific theatre production as “escapist,”²⁷⁵ exercising certain “social escapism”²⁷⁶ and hence being apolitical. However, there were some theatre historians and researchers who saw this ‘apolitical’ generation of drama authors in a different light. Departing from the question of why, in a period of such acute socio-political tensions that marked the late 1980s, some Croatian authors would decide to distance themselves from the possibilities of reflecting these conditions or repercussions, Darko Lukić posits that they were actually positioning themselves against the galloping ideological (re)mythologisation featured in the institutional theatre of that time. In his view, “a whole generation seemed to have lost their ground”²⁷⁷ and was thus left feeling lost and helpless in the process of transition between old socialist and

²⁷³ There are different discussions concerning the use of the terms new/young Croatian dramaturgy. While some think of it as referring to the authors born mostly between 1960 and 1970, some consider as it being referred to those authors published or staged in the scope of the program “Contemporary Croatian Drama” led by the dramaturge Miro Gavran, and initiated in Theatre &TD in Zagreb in 1990. For more on this problematic, see Adriana Car-Mihec, *Mlada hrvatska drama* (Osijek: Ogranak Matice Hrvatske Osijek, 2006), 65.

²⁷⁴ Dubravka Vrgoč, “Nova hrvatska drama—primjeri dramskog stvaralaštva s kraja ‘80-tih godina,” *Kolo* 10, no. 2 (1997).

²⁷⁵ See Lederer, *Vrijeme osobne povijesti*.

²⁷⁶ Danijela Weber-Kapusta, “Drama i zbilja u hrvatskoj književnosti na izmaku 20. i početku 21. Stoljeća,” *Dani hvarskog kazališta* 40, no. 1 (2014): 397.

²⁷⁷ Darko Lukić, *Drama ratne traume* (Zagreb: Meandar, 2009), 301.

new liberal and capitalistic values. Dubravka Oraić-Tolić went further in explaining this position by stating that

in the culture in which the authentic reality has suddenly become problematic and subjected to manipulation (...), realistic mimesis is no longer possible, rather possible was post-mimesis. Post-mimetic strategies are neither representing nor describing the reality, but are rather exposing the fact that even the most faithful representations are somebody's construct, there is no authentic reality, each reality is fragile and susceptible for manipulation.²⁷⁸

In other words, these authors were viewed as actively opting for escapism as an expression of their 'existential crisis' in the context of the new ideological systems hastily taking form. Simultaneously, by the agency of their choices and engagements, they initiated a very relevant discussion, one dealing with the question on the nature of engagement of theatre systems and theatre artists in the scope of a socio-political setting on the verge of being discomposed. Just how political this position was is probably best proved by the fact that most of these authors were not staged during the early 1990s as they could not fit the ideological scenery of the new national theatre system promoting specific political directions. Nevertheless, the mentioned topic will become more and more articulated with the beginning of the 1990s and the more open manifestations of both nationalism and warmongering—while there were those who expected theatre and theatre professionals to deal with the “totality of human experience,”²⁷⁹ calling out for firm positioning towards the conflictual reality, others identified this post-dramatic clique of 'engaged escapist' authors as representing the true and direct answer to the conflictual reality and its repercussions. As I am going to show throughout this paper, the topic of artistic responsibility will prove itself to be one of the most valuable perspective points of the overall research, generating far-reaching comparative debates.

²⁷⁸ Dubravka Oraić-Tolić, *Muška moderna i ženska postmoderna* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2005), 189.

²⁷⁹ Velimir Visković, “Izazovi pred mladom hrvatskom dramom,” in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 1995: Suvremena hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište od 1968./1971. do danas* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/ Pedagoški Fakultet/Zavod za književnost i teatrologiju, 1996), 126.

2.6. Conclusion

As already emphasised, theatre production of theatres in Croatia in the period between 1945 and 1991 could be systematically divided into two opposing groups defined by their position towards the ruling political discourse. On the one side, there were those theatre productions and authors that passionately followed the ideological orders of the day, staging plays that promoted socialist ideological values; on the other side were those who criticised this context.²⁸⁰ In other words, “the Croatian theatre between 1945 and 1991 formed itself (...) between two possible and rarely reached extremes, between complying to everything (...) and not complying to anything,”²⁸¹ between the “utilitarian model” of art being in the service of politics and the “artistic model”²⁸² generated from the struggle for artistic autonomy. Among those latter productions that mostly directed their critique towards the system by resorting to metaphors or satirical and grotesque poetics, there were few but relevant productions or theatrical events that advanced a certain political agenda that affirmed the Croatian national identity.

As I have tried to show, staging these plays was very firmly connected to their socio-political context and, more precisely, with the period of “the Croatian Spring” and the more overt demand for Croatia’s political, economic, linguistical, as well as cultural autonomy. The socio-political repercussions of this movement and its significance for the overall cultural production in Croatia is of great importance as it will function as a sort of a formative event for many of those who will, some 20 years later, be the main political or cultural protagonists of the democratic nation-state. By detecting and analysing these performances, my main goal was to extract different elements of this theatre arguing for a more specific national identification that would eventually be re-visited in the national theatre production of the early 1990s.

Foremost, I detected and demonstrated how the topics from national history staged in theatre articulated and promoted the concept of national self-determination and its continuity. The most represented historical national narrative on the stages of that time was identified in the mythical Zrinski-Frankopan opus—appearing in the described times of political turmoil marked by the quest for a more exclusive national identity, these productions witnessed how “whenever Croatia hopes to attain freedom and believes in the possibility of its autonomy, it

²⁸⁰ This division clearly does not exclude the existence of all those creating ‘in-between’ of these two approaches, such as those authors that changed their political position with time, etc.

²⁸¹ Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 7.

²⁸² Muzaferija, “Zum Problem der Destruktion nationaler Mythen im neueren Kroatischen Drama. Paradigmatische Beispiele,” 285.

immediately reaches out for Zrinski-Frankopan topics”²⁸³ as a constitutional national myth. Furthermore, by introducing the example of the play *The Death of Stjepan Radić*, I wanted to point out the phenomenon of staging biographical stories of politicians and other representatives of national identity that will reappear in Croatian institutional theatre of the 1990s as a part of the process of mythologising its own political discourse. Another feature that has been distinguished in this chapter and that will also surface in the wartime theatre was the use of language as a feature of a specific national identification, much along theories of thinkers such as Ernest Gellner who considered the language as a core value of nationhood. Echoing the more and more open demands for linguistic autonomy of the Croatian language expressed in the “Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language,” theatre productions such as *The Purpose/End of Freedom* occur to be the most prominent theatrical examples witnessing this growing politisation of language. Subsequently, as I have tried to show, language was also used in a more general strategy of characterising and detecting those that do not belong to the unified linguistic and national body, i.e. ‘the others’. Theatrical narratives describing these antagonists (such as *The Death of Stjepan Radić* or *The Purpose/End of Freedom*) seemed to have corresponded greatly to those appearing in the political discourse of that time. Arguing for greater autonomy, these narratives were seen shifting from depicting the adversaries of the socialist regime (such as fascists or other class enemies) to depicting the enemies of Croatian political and cultural autonomy. Whilst focusing on the depiction of the enemy, this approach resulted in fabricating and securing one of the most used and misused national myths during the early 1990s, that of martyrdom and continuous suffering of the Croatian nation under foreign rulers.

Additionally, as I have outlined, religious narratives containing a potential for an ethnical-national identification presented another feature of the overall theatrical production during the period between 1945 and 1991. In a secular country that was created as a union of different ethnic and religious groups, emphasising religious affiliation was seen as potentially threatening to the supra-national identification of the country and was thus put under systemic control. In the Croatian theatre of that time, the religious motives appeared most predominately under the argument of revisiting the Croatian theatrical heritage, this being the liturgical drama. Parallel to detecting the most relevant phenomena in the realm of theatre, I have also indicated the evolution of the Croatian Catholic Church’s position in the context of

²⁸³ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 38–39.

the growing nationalist aspirations, hence outlining a referential framework for the research that follows.

Finally, by introducing the topic of the ‘engaged escapism’ of theatre authors in Croatia in the second half of the 1980s, I wanted to point towards one of the most relevant questions that emerged during the examined period, namely that of an ‘adequate’ position and responsible engagement of theatre in a rather conflictual and politically charged reality.

Ultimately, the main objective of this prelude chapter was to detect and present those historical and cultural narratives that were introduced as construction blocks of the ‘new’ national theatre and that were presented as arguments for proving its historical, national, and cultural distinctiveness and continuity. Manifested in form of sporadic ‘outbursts’ of ‘national consciousness’ throughout the period between 1945 and 1991, this continuity was seen as being preserved even in times of harsh suppression of nationalism—and it is exactly why the theatrical performances and events here presented that exhibited different elements of nationhood should not be neglected or separated from the main analytical focus of this paper.

3. STAGING HISTORICAL NARRATIVES IN CROATIAN INSTITUTIONAL THEATRE (1991-1995)

3.1. Staging National Myths

As already discussed above, parallel to the overall political, social, and economic crises that endangered the Yugoslav federation project during the late 1980s, demands for Croatia's national autonomy became progressively expressed in the public as well as the political arena. Furthermore, the League of Communist of Croatia introduced the multi-party political system in 1989 and thereby paved the way for political implementation of these nationalist agendas. In January 1990, the Yugoslav Communist Party actually transferred its political power and authority to the federative republics and simultaneously dissolved into national sections, hence indicating the direction and affiliation of future political movements arising on its territory. On January 20, 1990, during the 14th extraordinary Congress of the League of Communist of Yugoslavia held in Belgrade and following the progressively articulated nationalist aspirations in their respective communities, a Croatian and Slovenian party delegation officially advocated for a more loose federative structure, as well as the right to declare state independence via a referendum. Their demands were strongly opposed by the Serbian delegation,²⁸⁴ a position which provoked the Croatian and Slovenian delegates to demonstratively leave the Congress session, thus inciting an event which has most vividly symbolised 'the beginning of the end' of the Social Federative Republic of Yugoslavia.

Although still existing and functioning as a part of the Yugoslav socialist federation, on April 22, 1990, the Socialist Republic of Croatia held its first multi-party elections, representing the initial step in attaining full state independence. The majority of the votes was won by the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ], a party established in 1989 by the historian and politician Franjo Tuđman, featuring a political program constructed on the vision of an independent and democratic Republic of Croatia. Their aim of attaining this was further paved by the adoption of the first Croatian Constitution by the newly established Croatian Parliament in December 1990, defining Croatia as a liberal democracy, "a national state of Croatian nation and a state of members of other nations and minorities who are its citizens (...) who are guaranteed equality with citizens of Croatian nationality."²⁸⁵ The Serb minority in Croatia (which at that

²⁸⁴ During the same session, the Serbian League of Communists, under the guidance of its President Slobodan Milošević, insisted on revising the 1974 constitution with an intent to introduce the policy of "one person, one vote" on the level of the Federation. If this policy had been voted, it would have provide more significant political value to Serb population that was the largest one in the Yugoslav Federation (in 1981 it counted 36.3% of the overall Yugoslav populace).

²⁸⁵ In this new constitution, the status of Serbs was changed from an explicitly mentioned nation ("narod" in Croatian language) to a nation listed together with minorities ("narod i manjine").

time constituted some 12% of the population) contested these actions aimed at attaining Croatia's independence, both out of fear for their administrative position in the future national state as well as under heavy political manipulation from the Yugoslav government.²⁸⁶

During these processes of obtaining regulatory ground for the state's political independence and sometimes in direct response to them, the first armed conflicts on the Croatian territory began, mostly between the members of the Serb minority supported both in weapons and arguments by the Yugoslav government, and the Croatian police forces, hence confirming the distinct ethnic character of this imagined national project.

On May 18, 1991, the referendum deciding Croatia's state independence was held, with 93.24% of votes in favour of Croatia's full secession from the Yugoslav Federation.

Departing from these results showing the overwhelming support to the idea of state autonomy, on June 25, 1991, the independent Republic of Croatia was declared.²⁸⁷ Besides the referendum's results, additional arguments for the declaration were actually found in the arising armed incidents along the lines of ethnic affiliation, thus indicating in what way these two processes (the intensification of nationalist agendas as well as wartime conflicts) became much interdependent from that time on, serving as each other's justifications. More importantly, the general claims to Croatia's national sovereignty, as vocalised in 1990 and early 1991 by the local political factions gaining more and more power, were actually made by "reference to a discourse of historical statehood."²⁸⁸

At the most abstract level, Croatian national identity in the early 1990s—as well as the call for national independence—was actually constituted by "perceptions of a common history, and in particular, a shared state that can claim ancient roots."²⁸⁹ This meant that, in their demand for political sovereignty, political structures targeting power presented the argument of a continuous and long-existing historical nationhood as one of its most important political claims. Furthermore, as Alex Bellamy argues, this concept eventually became the foundation

²⁸⁶ For more on this see Nikica Barić, *Srpska pobuna u Hrvatskoj, 1990–1995* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2005).

²⁸⁷ Addressing the Croatian Parliament on the day when Croatia's independence was officially proclaimed, Franjo Tuđman stated how "we can no longer support life in a common state, in which there is continuous, unspoken and public aggression, pathological hatred and malice towards all Croatian. (...) By declaring Croatia's independence we are doing the same thing as all the nations of the world on the path of achieving their independence, out of the same, natural and supernatural reasons." Transcript from the YouTube recording of the parliamentary session, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtHyAp3_0k8, last accessed October 26, 2019.

²⁸⁸ Alex J. Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-old Dream* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 35.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

of the Croatian national identity, which was then further “perpetuated by the continuity of that statehood.”²⁹⁰ This is why presenting and ‘proving’ the existence of a continuous and rather ‘ancient’ mutual history was considered to be one of the most important assertions in attaining the newly defined statehood, with its representations being revoked in the general socio-political as well as the cultural or educational system. Or, as Maja Brkljac amply puts it, the grand narrative of Croatian history was depicted as being “the continuous fight for a nation state,” where “all events are appraised as beneficial or harmful for the creation of the state.”²⁹¹ As I am going to indicate throughout this chapter, rendering this ancient source and the continuity of the national statehood more apparent and ‘visible’ was executed through and by different modes of representation, of which theatre was one of the most engaged ones. Needless to say, these historical arguments proving singular statehood were first introduced on an official, political, and administrative level, hence setting the context and the discursive reference points for the representations that followed. Namely, the source and the main stages in the evolution of ‘Croatianhood’ were formally defined in the Preamble of the new Croatian Constitution written and adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 1990. For instance, this document interpreted the “formation of Croatian principalities in the seventh century,”²⁹² and “the Kingdom of Croats established in the tenth century”²⁹³ as some kind of earliest proto forms of the modern Croatian state. Regardless of the fact that the territories of these principalities and kingdoms did not fully overlap with those argued for in 1990 (and despite the fact that the notions of nationhood or statehood held their own meanings in those times), these medieval entities were nevertheless presented as a valid historical basis for claiming national autonomy. In an attempt to make this historical reference even more binding for the contemporary socio-political context, the newly established national government administered this claim by introducing emblems of these mediaeval state forms to the

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 57.

²⁹¹ Maja Brkljačić, “What Past is Present?,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 42.

²⁹² “Croatia’s Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2010,” *Constitute Project*, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Croatia_2010.pdf?lang=en; last accessed February 07, 2020.

²⁹³ Ibid. A unified Kingdom of Croatia was created in 924 with King Tomislav assuming the title of King of Croatia and Dalmatia.

repertoire of contemporary political insignia of Croatian state, such as the official coat of arms on the new Croatian flag,²⁹⁴ the new official currency Kuna,²⁹⁵ etc.

After positioning the first forms of statehood in the early seventh century, the same constitutive document continued to specify various “political forms from [Croatia’s] entire historical experience”²⁹⁶ during which “the state-building idea”²⁹⁷ was perpetuated and realised, hence apparently confirming “the millennial national identity of the Croatian nation and the continuity of its statehood.”²⁹⁸ Interestingly enough and confirming the stated agenda, episodes from national history were rather ‘patchworked’ in order to prove the historical continuity—even when Croatia was to be found under foreign rule or part of bigger political entities (such as the Croatian-Hungarian personal union, the Habsburg Monarchy, etc.), this was described as actually affirming the preservation of the ‘Croatianhood’, only by other means.²⁹⁹ In other words, the material officially presented as the justification for Croatia’s independence ‘authored’ by the highest political power in the country actually offered a certain interpretation of this history, rendering these accounts “useful and functional myths”³⁰⁰ in the overall strategy of proving and forging historical continuity of statehood. Which brings us to a very important characteristic of this process of including national history in the political discourse of 1990 Croatia, that of its reinterpretation and further mythologisation of the past, leading to “certain historical distortions.”³⁰¹

²⁹⁴ The new Croatian flag featured a coat of arms with five ‘crowns’ stemming from the middle ages and representing different Croatian regions. For more on this see Reana Senjković, “Poetika otpora: na početku su bili grb, zastava i pleter (...),” *Narodna Umjetnost* 29 (1991): 63–80.

²⁹⁵ The fur of the animal marten (“kuna” in Croatian) was a form of currency used in the middle ages. As of 13th century, the image of marten began to be used on coins circulating these territories. However, the same currency was made official by the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) from 1941 until 1945. For more on this see Maja Brkljačić and Holm Sundhausen, “Symbolwandel und symbolischer Wandel Kroatiens ‘Erinnerungskulturen’,” *Osteuropa. Zeitschrift für Gegenwartsfragen des Ostens* 53, no. 7 (2003) 933–948; as well as Mario Jareb and Dunja Bonacci Skenderović, “Hrvatski nacionalni simboli između negativnih stereotipa i istine,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 36, no. 2 (2004): 731–760.

²⁹⁶ “Croatia’s Constitution of 1991 with Amendments through 2010.”

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. In Budak’s view, this elaborated focus on defining its own historical roots of statehood and national continuity should be understood as a result of the fact that “the Croats had no power and no opportunity to create a state of their own in the 19th and the early 20th century,” and were thus doing it in 1990. Neven Budak, “Croatia between the Myths of the National-State and of the Common European Past,” in, *Quest for a suitable past: myth and memory in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. Claudia-Florentina Dobre and Emilian Ghita (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2016), 45.

²⁹⁹ For instance, the Croatian-Hungarian personal union is presented as a result of a rational decision executed by Croatian noblemen of that time and not as a result of an armed conquest. The same argument of the political ‘free will’, this time expressed by the Croatian parliament, was used when explaining how Croatia became a part of Austro-Hungarian empire.

³⁰⁰ Budak, “Croatia between the Myths of the National-State and of the Common European Past,” 39.

³⁰¹ Keith Langston and Anita Peti-Stantić, eds., *Language planning and national identity in Croatia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 271.

As relevant research posits, the past is very often found to be “an essential element in the negotiation of identities, both personal and political,”³⁰² and the historical narratives serve as important construction material of nationhood, defining the collective identity of a particular national group by providing stories of its historical origin. Moreover, and for the exact same reasons, they are also very often employed as arguments of different political projects and are, as such, often being (mis)used for different political purposes. In the case of Croatia during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political elites (which should be considered as “dominant agents of the process of building a national collective memory”³⁰³) were very much engaged in detecting and then disseminating the main episodes of the ethnogenesis of the Croatian nation.

Nonetheless, these historical myths of ‘long-lasting’ statehood were not only employed to justify national independence—in the context of war and interethnic conflicts, they also served as “more ‘objective’ or ‘hard’ boundary makers.”³⁰⁴ Defining historical ‘myths of origin’ had a very concrete consequence of differentiating and ‘excluding’ the Croatian ethnogenesis from the mutual Yugoslav project, penetrating the warmongering discourse of all the included war parties.

As already stated, national historical narratives, which I will analyse in the continuation of this chapter, were executed by different instances in a general effort to gain additional justification for a concrete political project—that being the independent, democratic, and ethnically exclusive Croatia. Following the arguments of Alex Bellamy, in these first years of defining Croatian statehood, the high rise in “drawing upon and offering interpretations of the historical statehood thesis [was executed] in order to legitimise programs [of the political elites].”³⁰⁵ Additionally, in order to attain these political goals, historical narratives were often remodelled and fashioned by the stated agents to conform to their political visions, simultaneously providing them with a certain interpretative authority. In addition, this mythologisation of the past was not just a pure nominal revision and rewriting of national history but, propelled with the warmongering atmosphere, an actual and sometimes even violent “transformation and destruction (...) aimed at (...) constructing a teleological idea of

³⁰² Daphne N. Winland, *We are now a nation: Croats between ‘home’ and ‘homeland’* (Toronto/Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 116.

³⁰³ Stevo Đurašković, “In Search of One-Thousand-Year Statehood: The Politics of History in Croatia and Slovakia in the 1990s,” *Der Donauraum* 49, no. 1–2, (2009): 141. The concept of the national collective memory is understood by Jan Assman as the frame of the formation and understanding of a group’s common history. See Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, April 1, 1995, 125–133.

³⁰⁴ Pål Kolstø, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe* (London: Hurst&Company, 2005), vii.

³⁰⁵ Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-old Dream*, 65.

Croatian statehood.”³⁰⁶ In other words, one must not disregard the fact that this specific process of mythologisation that occurred in Croatia in the early 1990s aimed at justifying claims to certain political, territorial, and social goals, sometimes even specifically used to “foment hatred and aggression.”³⁰⁷

This ‘reinterpretation’ of national history according to contemporary political programs was actually initiated prior to 1991, most notably by the prominent political figure of the political scene in the 1990s, Franjo Tuđman, who in fact “made politics of the past an important part of his agenda.”³⁰⁸ Originally a historian by profession, already in 1981, Tuđman wrote that “from the medieval times, the Croatian nation has preserved its national-state individuality, which has been encroached upon in the Habsburg monarchy but never shattered,”³⁰⁹ hence setting the general ‘tone’ of the story delivering Croatia’s ethnogenesis. In 1989, he authored a book with the title *Wastelands of Historical Reality*, in which he outlined his version of national history which will, in years to come, eventually become the discourse model for displaying “the myth of uninterrupted one-thousand-year statehood finally accomplished in the 1990.”³¹⁰

Besides being depicted in founding documents or by the national historiography, in the wake of the events of the 1990s, the mentioned historical narratives were also ‘performed’ in a political setting, further transmitted to the public by means of state-owned media. Notably, with the intent of rendering the longevity of Croatian national history more apparent and singular, political performances executed by state authorities such as the Croatian Parliament (and rather often disseminated on public TV channels or reported by other state-owned print media) became heavily saturated with imagery and symbols of national past—some of these would include the introduction of historical state insignia³¹¹ or the National Guard [narodna garda],³¹² re-erecting the monument of count Josip Jelačić on the main

³⁰⁶ Ljiljana Radonić, “Post-Socialist Politics of History in Croatia,” in *Of Red Dragons and Evil Spirits. Post-Communist Historiography between Democratization and New Politics of History*, ed. Oto Luthar (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017), 44.

³⁰⁷ Kolstø, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, 2.

³⁰⁸ Radonić, “Post-Socialist Politics of History in Croatia,” 42.

³⁰⁹ Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity: A Centuries-old Dream*, 68.

³¹⁰ Đurašković, “In Search of One-Thousand-Year Statehood: The Politics of History in Croatia and Slovakia in the 1990s,” 142.

³¹¹ Such was the mentioned coat of arms or the overwhelming application of the motif of the Croatian interlace, a medieval visual pattern used in pre-romantic art and generated on the territory of Croatia.

³¹² This was a ceremonial army battalion founded on April 14, 1991. The battalion was envisaged as president’s personal guard, with costumes designed as reflecting different historical sources. The general public could see the guard ‘perform’ their martial choreography every day in front of the Croatian Parliament, eventually securing its status as one of the most significant tourist attractions in Zagreb. For more on the topic see Frane Vrkić, “Počasna straža kao nacionalni simbol Hrvatske,” *Polemos* 20, no. 39/40, (2017): 13–28.

Zagreb square,³¹³ changing street names from prominent members of the anti-fascist movement to figures from Croatian national history, etc. As relevant research posits, shortly after proclaiming Croatian independence, “the state resources were targeted at projects celebrating Croatia’s history through its folklore, language, and culture. The government of Croatia busily resurrected and renovated selected Croatian historical, political, and cultural events and traditions,”³¹⁴ leading “to a plethora of government-sponsored publications, television programming, and other initiatives geared to commemorating selected aspects of Croatia’s past.”³¹⁵

As already mentioned, the early 1990s in Croatia saw a systemic revival of the historical narratives used as arguments for claiming the state’s right to political and other autonomy. The official conception of national history and the potential of its political use was best expressed in President Tuđman’s speech to the UN Assembly in August 1992, delivered on the occasion of Croatia becoming the official member of this organisation. Functioning more as a short ‘history lecture’ on ‘Croatianhood’ to the international community, Tuđman’s speech defined the Croatian nation as “one of the oldest in Europe,” bearing “written documents and traces of its national state identity as well as its affiliation to the Western-European civilisation from the 7th century until today.”³¹⁶ He continued to draft the ethnogenesis of Croatian nation, detecting its source and autonomy in different forms of statehood “under national rulers” throughout history. Explaining how this statehood of a small nation was continuously endangered or compromised by the international political alliances, Tuđman concluded that Croatia successfully attained its long-awaited sovereignty only in the 1990s, hence presenting this “thousand-year-old dream” as some kind of a justification for the ongoing war activities. In short, by presenting this concept of ‘Croatianhood’ to the international community, Tuđman also pointed out the most relevant and politically applicable national myths in power at that time, presenting them as arguments to both prove the ‘uniqueness’ of ‘Croatianhood’, the nation’s long position on the bulwark of the Western civilisation, as well as its ‘righteous’ role in the actual war.

³¹³ For more on the significance of this reinstallation of the monument see Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, “The monument in the main city square. Constructing and erasing memory in contemporary Croatia,” in *Balkan identities. Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (London: Hurst, 2004), 180–196.

³¹⁴ Winland, *We are now a nation: Croats between ‘home’ and ‘homeland’*, 116.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

³¹⁶ He specifically pointed out that this identity is not traceable only in written material but also exists in “arts, as well as the spirit of the nation.” In an attempt to prove the overall significance of Croatian cultural heritage for the ‘Western World’, he also mentioned how the entrance hall of the New York UN building was constructed out of the marble stone brought from the Croatian island of Brač, as well as that its garden featured a sculpture by a Croatian sculptor Antun Augustinčić.

National Myths: History in the Making

Following the concept of historical myth and its significance for the community as explained by Willem Frijhoff, “a historical myth may be defined as a narrative, fictional by intention or by the standards of historical scholarship, but expressing the perception of the past as meaningful history, meant to affirm one’s, or better: the group’s or community’s sense of identity.”³¹⁷ Analysing the narratives of the Croatian past as recorded through history, Neven Budak argues that “mythology played an important role in the creation of Croatian national memory, and thus in conceptualizing Croatian self-identity.”³¹⁸ Or, put differently, historical myths provide communities with a sense of belonging or mutual coexistence, sometimes even securing this better than the historical ‘facts’. Regardless of the political or social goals that the mythologisation of the past followed, there are several already disclosed myths from Croatian history that were regarded and presented as formative for the overall ethnogenesis and were hence often referenced to—in the scope of national historiography, official political discourse, and, as this chapter will go on to argue, in the sphere of theatre as well.

Besides categorising these myths according to the historical period their narratives belong to, I will use Pål Kolstø’s typology of historical myths as my main analytical frame, mostly because of its functionalistic approach focusing on the way these myths are used. More precisely, Kolstø approaches historical myths as “boundary-defining mechanisms”³¹⁹ aiming at distinguishing various communities from each other. As the socio-political actuality and communal identity agendas in Croatia in the early 1990s were heavily defined by the notions of differentiation, the role of historical myths in the context of these and similar concepts will be investigated accordingly. In his classification stemming from his special interest in the south-eastern European cultures and history, Kolstø mentions four models of myths having been historically most influential and relevant for these cultures: the myth of being *sui generis* (proving the historical ethnic ‘autonomy’ from the neighbouring cultures and peoples); the myth of being *ante murale* (existing on the bulwark of Christianity and “belonging to a larger and allegedly superior cultural identity”³²⁰); the myth of antiquity (asserting that an ancient state once controlling the territory in question was identical to the modern national state); and the myth of *martyrium* (focusing on the victimisation of a certain

³¹⁷ Willem Frijhoff, “Emblematic Myths: Anneke’s Fortune, Bogardus’s Farewell, and Kieft’s Son,” in *Myth in History, History in Myth: Proceedings of the Third International Conference of the Society for Netherlandic History*, eds. Willem Frijhoff and Laura Cruz (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009), 117.

³¹⁸ Neven Budak, “Croatia between the Myths of the National-State and of the Common European Past,” 29.

³¹⁹ Kolstø, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, 4.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

national group). As I am going to show in the course of this chapter, it was exactly this set of myths that gained prevalence on stages of institutional theatres in Croatia during the early 1990s as well. Finally, this elaborated context of the overall ‘comeback’ of national history, national mythology, as well as comprehensive ‘historicisation’ of political and war discourse will serve as the starting point for the further research concerning the staging of historical narratives in Croatian institutional theatre of the early 1990s.

Staging the Past: General Concepts and Interpretations

When discussing the connection of theatre to history on a more ontological level, theatre is one of the representational forms by which the past is being portrayed, internalised, and experienced. Defined as a place of “organised repetition of the past,”³²¹ theatre almost intrinsically connects the past and the present—existing simultaneously in the past (of its narrative) and the present (of its performance), theatre is thus considered as the medium where both tenses overlap and, in this position, incite a plethora of interpretations. As for the concept of staging historical narratives, this is rather well elaborated by theatre researchers and theorists, ranging from Aristotle to pivotal works on the topic authored by Freddie Rokem, Marvin Carlson, Herbert Lindenberger, and many others. Departing from the more or less functionalist approach of this paper, the most important questions in relevant research concerning this topic are how and to what ends certain historical narratives, as presented on theatre stages, communicate with the actual timing of their staging that could be centuries apart, what interpretations they incite, and to which ends. As Rokem explains,

theatrical performances about historical events are aesthetic adaptations or revisions of events that we more or less intuitively (or on the basis of some form of general knowledge or accepted consensus) know have actually occurred. The theatre, by performing history, is thus redoing something which has already been done in the past, creating a secondary elaboration of this historical event.³²²

However, as I am going to show in the continuation of this chapter, by presenting historical myths from the national past, theatre does not simply artistically elaborate these events but could incite some actual socio-political interpretations as well as consequences. For example,

³²¹ Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), xi.

³²² *Ibid.*, 6.

the past, as represented on theatre stages, could be considered as “always repeated—it is not so much being remembered as it is being “‘re-relearned’ again,”³²³ meaning that this type of stage material is not only commemorative but has active potential for creating ‘new’ history, new national collective memory, as well as the new “community where the events from this past will matter again.”³²⁴ As the rhetorical and semiotic characteristics of theatre relate to forming collective identities on a much more direct level, the staging of a content concerning and directly addressing theatre audiences as a collective body, theatre events could very directly influence the audiences’ perception of their shared mutual past. Reflecting the overall use of these narratives in the political discourse of that time, staging historical myths could also be considered as “intended to revive the past and to enable the listeners/observers/participants to identify themselves with their mythical ancestors, gaining additional strength and self-confidence.”³²⁵ For instance, representing the main positions of the ethnogenesis to contemporary theatre audiences caught up in the process of attaining an ethnically exclusive group identity creates a certain relation of responsibility between past and present members of the national community.

Furthermore, “theatre (...) has the power to reinforce the national narrative, and, if that theatre is an institution, it can give the chosen narrative status. It can also control the priority given to information and the organisation of the unfolding events. It is an act of asserting power.”³²⁶ By the advocacy of its representational authority, institutional national theatre can actually provide additional significance to these historical narratives, confirming them as valid national myths. Moreover, theatrical performances of and about history “reflect complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities and subjectivities and power structures,”³²⁷ and, in cases of open historical revisionism, it is somewhat needless to say that “the moral issues concerning the performances of history become a burning issue.”³²⁸ In other words, when analysing the staging of certain historical narratives, one should not only analyse the content but, in order to fully grasp the significance of this narrative, must also look deeply into the socio-political context of its staging.

³²³ Michael Y. Bennet, *Narrating the Past Through Theatre: Four Crucial Texts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

³²⁴ Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, xii.

³²⁵ Budak, “Croatia between the Myths of the National-State and of the Common European Past,” 30.

³²⁶ Paula Danckert, “Louis Riel: History, Theatre, and a National Narrative—An Evolving...Story,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2018): 39.

³²⁷ Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, 8.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

As relevant theories argue, collective identities grow from the sense of a mutual past, and institutional theatre could certainly contribute to this process, “sometimes contesting the hegemonic understanding of the historical heritage on the basis of which these identities have been constructed, sometimes reinforcing it.”³²⁹ As I am going to show, in the context of Croatia in the early 1990s, it was the latter process that gained prevalence, hence this chapter will focus on theatrical examples proving this position. Investigating to what extent the institutional theatre in Croatia in the early 1990s ‘helped’ to echo or construct specific national myths, all these positions will serve as the main guidelines of this chapter.

National Past in Croatian Theatre

Throughout its history, “theatre was recognized as a useful means for formulating and solidifying notions of national identity”³³⁰ and was as such used most ardently by different nationalist movements. For instance, as Steve E. Wilmer duly notes when writing about European theatre of the 19th and 20th century, “historical plays in the vernacular language portraying heroic national characters from the past or images from national folklore or rural life asserted the uniqueness of their culture.”³³¹ More precisely, in their ambition of defining unique and exclusive borders of the imagined national community, these movements understood theatre as providing relevant material to their political aims. Staging such and similar topics from the national past in different times of national upheaval and expression of national autonomy was a phenomenon that occurred in theatre history of Croatia as well—same motifs, topics, and even theatre texts were repeated in different historical periods marked by acute national consciousness, thus detecting not only the close connections between the institutional theatre and ruling political structures but also the ‘timeless’ functionality of these historical myths.

Nevertheless, as I have argued in the previous section of this paper, the period of socialist rule in Yugoslavia (1945–1991) generated a clear break in the way national topics were presented on local institutional theatre stages. During this period, this and similar content was conditioned by a different ideological setting, focusing on topics symbolising the victories of the Yugoslav anti-fascist movement and working class, abhorring from any kind of national narrative that would ‘endanger’ the supra-national nature of the Yugoslav project. In this

³²⁹ Ibid., 3.

³³⁰ Steve E. Wilmer, “Theatrical Nationalism: Exposing the ‘Obscene Superego’ of the System,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 23, no. 2 (2009): 77.

³³¹ Ibid., 77.

context, any potential occurrence of those topics interpreted and recognised as overt and affirmative exclamations of autonomous national consciousness were more or less sanctioned. Adapting to these conditions, as already demonstrated, the plays that affirmed a specific communal identity by the use of topics from the national past were very often ‘camouflaged’ in parody or travesty. As Dalibor Foretić claimed, during the 1970s and 1980s in Croatia, “the historical drama (if we could call it as such) was actually escaping all factual and historical authenticity,”³³² rather becoming a ‘metaphorical space’ for systemic criticism. However, parallel to the dissolution of Yugoslavia from the early 1990 onwards, narratives from national history started to be progressively present on theatre stages throughout Croatia for other reasons. While during socialism, this kind of theatre staged history as a metaphor and a tool for criticism, as of 1990s they were, more or less, focused on representing or, moreover, on adapting real historical facts to provide concrete evidences of national continuity—an ambition which was parallelly executed on all levels of political and social life.

When discussing the Croatian theatre in the early 1990s, Lada Čale-Feldman detects its “most striking feature” being “the invention of a new historical sense, a new range of narrative sequences which would be capable (...) of attributing to the reselected historical events new temporality, causality, coherence, unity, teleology and value.”³³³ In other words, an important aspect of the Croatian theatre system forming parallel to the new autonomous state was the overall reconstruction of meanings and purposes activated by different historical narratives being staged. Interestingly enough, this ‘resurgence’ of the genre was actually explained in different manners, mostly aiming to evade further correspondence to the political agendas of that time. Namely, as historical drama is generally connected to the artistic and political visions of nationalist movements during European romanticism, Pavao Pavličić explained how, in the case of Croatia, “romanticism started with Illyrianism³³⁴ but actually never reached its full culmination”³³⁵ which, subsequently, was seen by him to have happened in the early 1990s. Sanja Nikčević agreed with this explanation, stating that “in Croatia, the

³³² Dalibor Foretić, *Nova drama: svjedočenja o jugoslavenskim dramatikama i njihovim scenskim refleksima, 1972–1988* (Novi Sad: Sterijino pozorje, 1988), 415.

³³³ Čale Feldman, “Within and Beyond Theatre: President Tuđman’s Birthday Celebration at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb,” 153.

³³⁴ The Illyrian movement was a pan-south-Slavic political and cultural movement that marked the political, social, and artistic climate throughout the region during the 19th century. For more on the movement and its links to theatre, see pages 150–153 of this dissertation.

³³⁵ Pavao Pavličić, “Povijesna drama i periodizacija hrvatske književnosti,” in *Krležini dani u Osijeku 1992: Hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište i hrvatska povijest* (Osijek/Zagreb: Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište u Osijeku/ Pedagoški Fakultet/Zavod za književnost i teatrologiju, 1993), 22.

mode of romance has never had its day. We still lack epics, ballad stories about Croatian heroes and saints, not to mention historical debate, or even media coverage of important happenings.”³³⁶ In other words, this ‘comeback’ of historical drama was partly understood as a belated but needed artistic expression of national consciousness initiated in the early 19th century, as if the national theatre system had to follow some kind of inner evolution. The research that follows will work specifically against this argument, detecting in what way the theatrical system of that time was not a result of its unfulfilled romantic phase but rather of its direct socio-political context.

As mentioned, the main core of this chapter will focus on those productions that deal with historical myths from national past to assess in what ways these productions participated in building or strengthening the national identity in the context of both national consolidation and wartime. As “performances about historical events very directly reveal their ideological preferences and position within the specific social and the cultural context in which they have been created and performed,”³³⁷ this chapter will determine links, similarities, differences, and overlapping between exemplary theatre productions and the socio-political processes of (re)constructing ‘Croatianhood’ in the named period and place. Special attention will be given to recognising processes of forging, rewriting, and reinterpreting national myths via national theatre stages, a phenomenon somewhat intrinsic to nationalist ideologies in general, and, as I am going to demonstrate, a concept activated in the times of defining the new democratic nation-state of Croatia in the early 1990s as well. By analysing several pivotal productions addressing different episodes of Croatian national history staged in the institutional theatre, this chapter will deal with its role in this kind of reconstruction of the past according to the ideological agenda of the ruling structures.

As for the terminology and the main focus of the methodological choices applied here, and according to the definitions of the historical literary genre made by György Lukács, I will resort to those plays and productions that staged historical material as their main dramatical content, either concentrating on momentous, ‘dramatic’ events from the national history or featuring heroic or tragical heroes.³³⁸ However, I will not employ the term of the ‘historical

³³⁶ Sanja Nikčević, “Historical Plays in Search of National Identity in the Croatian Theatre Today,” *Slavic and East-European Performance* 17, no. 2 (1997): 22.

³³⁷ Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theater*, 24.

³³⁸ Lukács noted these features of historical drama in comparison to the historical novel, his main focus of analysis. See György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 89–52.

drama' itself, finding it extremely fluid and resisting an unambiguous definition.³³⁹ Nevertheless, in activating important analogies or differences that could enlarge the understanding of the proposed examples, additional definitions of the 'historical drama' will decisively influence my research perspective, namely those focusing on its relational aspects best discussed by Herbert Lindenberger. As already stated, in the context of the general topic of this paper, the relationship between the staged narratives from national history and their audiences (now recognised as national community) will be given special attention. Furthermore, when focusing on national historical drama, one needs to be conscious that the theoretical approach to the genre is also very much 'nationalised', i.e. it is usually set in a very specific national context. This is why I will also resort to theoretical approaches stemming from the local academic community, revealing additional contextual layers of the notion. For instance, Pavao Pavličić, one of the leading Croatian literary historians dedicated to national literary production, argued that the connection between the historical play and the community it addresses is one of the main characteristics of historical drama in a national setting, stating how the "historical drama always gives an interpretation of the history as something of greatest importance to the individual as well as the community."³⁴⁰ Elaborating on this concept, Pavličić actually detected several modalities of presentation or interpretation of this historical material—firstly, as an "archetype and diagnosis of national destiny;"³⁴¹ secondly, to "show prototypes, positive or negative figures whose behaviour could be the orientation today"; thirdly "as showing how the events from the national history have some sort of a general human dimension, reflecting basic existential questions."³⁴² It is to this set of definitions that the following research will be compared to, showing to what extent these and similar interpretations were to be found in the case of the productions presented here. As for the chosen productions, the main analytical content of this chapter will consist of theatre plays presented and produced by the institutional or state theatres, hence giving attention to the relationship between the official state government and theatre institutions it directly 'owned' or administered. However, few pertinent examples from the non-institutional theatres that presented historical content will also be inspected, only to expose

³³⁹ According to Lindenberger, "by a strict definition, one cannot categorize historical drama as a genre at all, though one can speak of specific forms of historical plays which prevailed at certain moments in history—for instance the medieval mystery cycles, the English chronicle plays, etc." Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), ix.

³⁴⁰ Pavličić, "Povijesna drama i periodizacija hrvatske književnosti," 21.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

³⁴² Ibid., 22.

how staging national past was not an exclusively institutional project but was rather welcomed by the overall theatre community.

As for the concrete material that would be consulted in this chapter, I will resort to various documents inspected during my research, such as the available textual and visual material acquired from the respective theatre houses and other sources. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the research lacks video documentation for all here-mentioned productions, a detailed analytical approach to these theatre events proved itself challenging to execute and, consequently, should be regarded as rather incomplete. In other words, one must be aware that the potential meanings and symbolics of the here-presented productions were not fully traceable and are hence open to further interpretations. However, all these productions were abundantly commented and mediated, reviewed, and discussed. Hence, this available material not only allowed me to reconstruct rather detailed aspects of these productions needed for a deeper analysis, but they also signalled the level of interest shown by the local theatrical community towards these specific topics and their presentations.

National Myths: The Zrinski-Frankopan Topics

When researching the repertoire titles of the institutional theatres in Croatia during the early 1990s,³⁴³ one historical narrative appeared rather frequently on their repertoires, namely the one featuring the Zrinski-Frankopan historical opus. More precisely, of those theatre productions that were recognised to present different national myths and will as such be analysed throughout this dissertation, a rather notable amount actually dealt with the mentioned thematic corpus.

³⁴³ Inspecting the repertoires of Croatian national theatres between 1991 and 1995 and comparing them to the previous period, one notices a rise in number of productions by domestic authors, as well as the rise in historical dramas. For instance, out of ten plays that were to be found on the repertoire of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1990, only one of them was a play by a domestic author, namely the play *Zajednička kupka* [A Common Bath] by Ranko Marinković. As the mentioned production actually premiered in 1989, one can conclude that the year of 1990 saw no new productions by domestic authors, a very unusual repertoire policy for a national theatre house. However, in 1991, out of five staged plays in the same theatre house, only one was authored by a foreign author, namely *Ondine* by Jean Giraudoux. Also, four of the productions staged in that season dealt with different national myths as I'm going to show in the course of this chapter. Croatian National Theatre in Split had only two premiere productions in 1990, both by international authors, while in 1991 the repertoire featured several plays by domestic authors. As for the national theatre in Osijek, the repertory of 1990 actually favoured the national production with three out of four production being written by domestic authors, although none of them tackled a national myth of some sort. The national theatre in Rijeka had three new productions on the repertoire in 1990, two of which were written by contemporary national playwrights, with one of them, *Vježbanje života* [Practicing Life] actually presenting a plethora of national myths. Theatre in Varaždin staged four plays in 1990 out of which two were written or adapted by a national author, still none of them dealt with a national myth.

As already explained in the prelude chapter, this mythological content was understood and presented as essential for the Croatian national identity, being artistically elaborated via numerous epic poems, novels, opera, and theatre plays, especially in the beginning of 19th century and the period of acute national awakening. As already mentioned, the history of these two families became more and more related and inscribed into the ethnogenesis of the ‘Croatianhood’ as of 19th century, with stories concerning clans being ostensibly employed in constructing a specific ethnogenesis of the Croatian nation. After being represented rather sporadically during socialist Yugoslavia, this “political syntheses [of the narrative] resurfaced in the 1990s, with an emotional-nationalistic tone, abandoning the archival research and simplifying the narrative.”³⁴⁴ When discussing the way Nikola Šubić Zrinski, the nobleman dying in the Szigeth battle, was treated by the national historiography in different times, Nataša Štefanec noticed how “on reading [these early 19th century historians] one could say that Zrinski died defending family possessions, the king and the law, Christianity and the Croatian homeland—in that order. Later on, especially in the 1990s, this order would be rearranged.”³⁴⁵ In fact, Štefanec notices a rather symptomatic ‘shift’ of the Zrinski-Frankopan topics in the 1990s, with most represented historians forging and adding new narratives to this opus in an intent “to prove the nation’s millennial vitality.”³⁴⁶ For instance, Trpimir Macan, author of the bestselling historical synthesis on Croatian national history published in 1995, selected those elements of the Zrinski narrative that would “fit into the linear interpretation of Croatian history, emphasizing Croatian contributions to European culture and the martyrdom of Croats throughout the centuries.”³⁴⁷ In his own interpretation and much along the political discourse of the 1990s arguing for the continuity of ‘Croatianhood’, Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan were seen as “carriers of Croatian state tradition and the aspiration to a complete Croatian independence.”³⁴⁸ Moreover, in the early 1990s, Zrinski and Frankopan not only gained significant positions in national ethnogenesis but were also introduced as national symbols in public and everyday sphere as well—numerous streets, squares, schools, or state institutions were named after members of both families. As of 1993, their portraits were even featured on the newly introduced national currency banknote and, in

³⁴⁴ Štefanec, “Zrinski family in the Croatian historiographic discourse: A case-study of the construction in national identity,” 394.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 397.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.,” 407.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 407.

³⁴⁸ Trpimir Macan, *Hrvatska povijest* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1995), 110.

the wake of the war, two special forces units of the Croatian army were titled after Zrinski and Frankopan, further connecting the national myth to the wartime reality.

As this chapter will show, narratives from the Zrinski-Frankopan opus were almost unanimously treated as bearing major cultural, social, and ultimately political significance by the theatre historiography throughout the 1990s as well. Likewise, recognising this national myth as “the barometer of Croatian freedom,”³⁴⁹ it would seem that its reactivated presence on theatre stages throughout the 1990s somewhat determined this period as a period of free expression of ‘national consciousness’ in national theatres.

Zrinski: Theatre as the Source of National History

In May of 1991, parallel to a wide set of laws and administrative regulations establishing the freshly proclaimed Republic of Croatia, a new theatre law was voted by the Croatian Parliament and was set in motion soon after. The law was in fact one of the first ones to be enacted by the freshly established parliament, only proving to what extent this “symbol of Croatian identity”³⁵⁰ was considered important. Already in its first article, the law stated that a theatre activity “is a part of the cultural and artistic national values,”³⁵¹ detecting the direct significance of national theatre in the overall political discourse aimed at forming a new national state. Alongside some general juridical provisions concerning the ownership or financing of these institutions in the new political context, the law also determined which theatres gained (or actually kept³⁵²) the status of a national institution as of 1991, these being the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb [HNK Zagreb], the Croatian National Theatre in Split [HNK Split], the Croatian National Theatre in Osijek [HNK Osijek], and the National Theatre in Rijeka [NK Rijeka]).³⁵³ While HNK Zagreb was confirmed in its position of the parent theatre of all national theatres and was, as such, put under direct ownership and

³⁴⁹ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 38.

³⁵⁰ Ana Lederer, “Zakon iz kazališta gledan,” *Dani Hvarskoga kazališta: Građa i rasprave o hrvatskoj književnosti i kazalištu* 45, no. 1 (2019): 142.

³⁵¹ As quoted from the Law in Maciej Falski and Tomasz Rawski, “Cultural Politics in (Post)Socialist Croatia: The Question of (Dis)Continuity,” in *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (Post)Socialism and Its Other*, eds. Dijana Jelača, Maša Kolanović and Danijela Lugarić (London: Palgrave, 2017), 293.

³⁵² Whereas other theatres actually kept their national status gained during socialist Yugoslavia or earlier, Croatian Nation Theatre in Rijeka was the only theatre house that actually got promoted into a national institution with the 1991 law.

³⁵³ Although appellations of these theatres are commonly translated as “national,” the Croatian word “narodno” in Narodno Kazalište refers more to the term *people’s* theatre, or *volk* theatre. By becoming national theatres (“nacionalno kazalište,”) it seems as if the law of the 1991 aimed at reaffirming not only their national appellation but, moreover, their national significance.

financial responsibility of the Croatian state,³⁵⁴ other theatres came under governance of their respective cities or municipal councils. Among the mentioned theatres with an obvious strategic position in the official cultural system (each one representing a specific region of the state), there were few theatre houses that, regardless of their status as city theatres, still staged ‘nationally’ relevant material featuring professional ensembles and authors. One such theatre that proved to be ‘national’ more by its repertoire than by its official status (which it was eventually awarded in 2013) was the National Theatre “August Cesarec” in Varaždin. Situated in the northern part of Croatia in a region characterised by a high level of ethnic homogeneity,³⁵⁵ Varaždin was in fact home to the second largest army garrison of the Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA) in Croatia until 1991. As well as in other Croatian cities where YPA had its quarters, tensions between the local population and the Yugoslav army, which was considered to incite a potentially deadly conflict, became progressively acute, eventually marking the beginning of the first armed clashes in the impending war. In September 1991, the YPA soldiers and army officers stationed in the Varaždin garrison started to shell their surroundings, killing several civilians and, later on, bombed the Varaždin airport. The Croatian armed forces—at that moment consisting of several Croatian police units and volunteers—responded to the attacks by surrounding the garrison and cutting its electricity as well as water supply. Isolated and under pressure of growing conflicts, the YPA general in charge of the garrison, Vladimir Trifunović, managed to negotiate a peaceful withdrawal of the YPA forces from the city, conducted on September 22, 1991. As the military equipment left behind by the YPA forces in Varaždin consisted of some 70 tanks, 80 armoured combat vehicles, and other important machinery, this event was seen as one of the most decisive military victories of the Croatian armed forces in the course of the war. After these events of 1991, due to being geographically positioned far from the contested warfronts as well as the ethnic composition of population, Varaždin and the region did not suffer any additional direct war combat.

As a result of its historical and regional significance, Varaždin had a very long and rich theatrical life, with documented proof of its existence dating back as far as 1637. In 1945, in the context of socialist Yugoslavia, its main theatre house gained the status of a people’s theatre and was named after August Cesarec, a Croatian author and communist, shot in 1941

³⁵⁴ Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb received 51% of its budget from the state Ministry of culture while the rest was acquired through the funding by the city of Zagreb.

³⁵⁵ The census of 1991 states that 92.11% of the city population declared itself as Croats, with only 2.34% officially declared as Serbs, and 1.52% as Yugoslavs. See <https://bs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vara%C5%BEdin>, last accessed November 13, 2019.

by the Ustashe regime. During the period between 1945 and 1991, the Varaždin theatre staged mostly contemporary international as well as domestic authors,³⁵⁶ gaining wider national attention with the production of the play *Smrt Stjepana Radića* [Death of Stjepan Radić] in 1971.³⁵⁷ In 1991, parallel to similar occurrences in other Croatian national theatres, as well as the concrete wartime conditions, their repertoire began to progressively feature more domestic authors and plays dealing with events and figures from national history. In addition, in 1991, it shortly accommodated the ensemble and productions of the Croatian National Theatre in Osijek whose functioning was greatly endangered by the war activities occurring on the territory of the city.

In this kind of setting, in October 1991, the theatre that still wore the name of a communist hero staged a production called *Zrinski* based upon the text by the actor and director Tito Strozzi³⁵⁸ written in 1924. Originally titled *Zrinski. Tragedy of Croats in 9 Acts*, this was not the first time that the play entered onto the Varaždin stage. Very symptomatically, it was first staged on the same stage in 1941 during the Ustashe regime, in a version performed by the guest ensemble of the HNK Zagreb. More importantly, it was staged again in 1971, in the midst of “the Croatian Spring,” and had more than 78 performances in six months before it was abruptly taken down from the repertoire.³⁵⁹ Already the fact that the play reached a national theatre stage again in 1991, a year marked by acute nationalistic ambitions penetrating the socio-political discourse, testified to the symbolic significance it held.

Simultaneously, this reintroduction to the repertoire ‘activated’ an interpretation consolidating the mentioned periods (1941 and 1971) into one continuous historical narrative depicting the ever-lasting struggle for national independence—something that the authors of the production were very well aware of as they officially invited those theatre artists involved in the 1971 production to attend the 1991 premiere as honorary guests.³⁶⁰

Just as several other texts analysed in the prelude chapter, this play also delivers the story of the last days of counts Fran Krsto Frankopan and Petar Zrinski while they awaited their execution in Wiener-Neustadt in 1671. Discussing its relation to the factual history of the

³⁵⁶ See Branko Hećimović, *Repertoari hrvatskih kazališta: Knjiga treća [1981.–1990.]; Abecedni popisi i kazala* (Zagreb: Hrvatska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 2002), 134.

³⁵⁷ See pages 61–64 of this dissertation.

³⁵⁸ Tito Strozzi (1892–1970) was a Croatian actor, director, dramaturg and translator. *Zrinski* was actually written as a part of a trilogy dedicated to notable individuals from Croatia’s national past, together with the plays about the Croatian king Tomislav and the leader of the Illyrian movement in Croatia, Ljudevit Gaj.

³⁵⁹ See pages 61–64 of this dissertation.

³⁶⁰ For more, see

<http://library.foi.hr/novine/broj1.aspx?v=1&t=1&C=3&godina=1991&broj=000041&stranica=007&u=zrinski>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

event, the play was found to actually not aim “at creating a precise scenic reproduction of the facts”³⁶¹ but rather summarising them in order to present Strozzi’s own “vision of history.”³⁶² Furthermore, it was argued that Strozzi concentrated his dramatic approach on depicting Zrinski as “freed from any pathos (...) rendering him an interesting character, a man with human flaws who (...) even feels fear.”³⁶³ In other words, the main heroes of the play were hence found to be ‘humanised’, with Nikola Batušić concluding that it was exactly due to this ‘toned down’ romantic modus of the play that it was staged rather often.

In national theatre historiography, Strozzi’s vision of the magnate conspiracy story was mostly interpreted as a sort of divergence from the prevailing romantic modus of plays dealing with topics from national history. This sort of ‘renouncement’ from the classical forms of theatrical representations of the concerning content was detected not only in the fact that Zrinski was somewhat reduced to a human level³⁶⁴ but also in the fact that Strozzi introduced some non-historical characters to the play. Most notably, he introduced the figure of the Historian who provides a commentary of the whole dramatic narrative, “explaining and justifying the intentions and actions of the main protagonists, the representatives of our nation, from a historical point of view.”³⁶⁵ For example, in his opening monologue, this Historian (actually a Viennese professor from an undefined period), goes on to explain how

the tragedy of the Croatian ban [Zrinski] lies not so much within himself as in his surroundings. The glance of the term nation plunged into him much too soon, when he was fighting the Turks. And it didn’t let go of him till his death, finally ruining him. Because the time was not yet ripe for causing an echo among people around him, the idea of nationalism that was brought to effective existence only in the centuries to follow, stayed secluded in him, without a support. (...) Being so alone, there was only one way out of this. Death.³⁶⁶

Nevertheless, one could argue that the introduction of the Historian, who clearly interprets the symbolic meaning of the characters to the audiences, actually underlined the general understanding of the narrative as a national myth. Although escaping the romantic modus of representation, Strozzi still managed to fixate these characters in their wider national significance, positioning the main dramatic tension of the play in this discrepancy between

³⁶¹ Batušić, “Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami,” 167.

³⁶² Ibid., 167.

³⁶³ Ibid., 168.

³⁶⁴ He was depicted crying in one scene.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 167. Besides the Historian, the play featured other non-historical such as the Poet and the Crazy Girl.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 167.

the conspirators and their direct surroundings. I would even go on to argue that the author somewhat needed to render Zrinski as much as psychologically complex or ‘human’ in order to render the consequences of this disparity between his ‘premature’ national consciousness and his surroundings more relatable, more tragic, and thus more condemnable to the contemporary audience witnessing its disastrous repercussions.

However, in the 1991 version of the play staged in Varaždin National Theatre and according to the available research material (unfortunately not including the video recording), the director Ivica Kunčević decided to “erase the tragical guilt of Zrinski,” emphasising the “warrior perspective of the play,” hence transforming the play back “into a romance.”³⁶⁷ This transformation, achieved most likely by some direct adaptations of the original text—such as the most probable elimination of the character of Historian³⁶⁸—should also be seen as reflecting its socio-political context featuring the intense national consolidation and prevailing war rhetoric. The way that the production was connected to its own actuality was best explained by its director Kunčević himself who stated how, by introducing some minor changes in the structure of the play, he wanted to make the analogy between the suffering of Zrinski and “the Croatian nation” visible, presenting it as a “constant of our mutual destinies.”³⁶⁹ Once again, the narrative of Zrinski and Frankopan was presented as evidence of historical constancy, this time serving as a valid argument to finally attain state independence, parallel to reintroducing the national myth of suffering and martyrdom into the dominant political arena.

Moreover, presenting Zrinski’s suffering as generated from the fact that his idea of nation was not recognised by his surroundings, one could presume that the staging of 1991 was presented or interpreted as a call for national unity around the national project of an autonomous Croatia. It would seem that, in this vision, the figure of the Historian would only get in the way of the potential interpretations generated by the more or less direct communication between the stage and the audiences, and it is for this reason that he was most probably omitted from the production.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 31.

³⁶⁸ When analysing the available list of characters in the 1991 production, there is no mention of this role. See <http://library.foi.hr/novine/broj1.aspx?v=1&t=1&C=3&godina=1991&broj=000041&stranica=007&u=zrinski>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

³⁶⁹

<http://library.foi.hr/novine/broj1.aspx?v=1&t=1&C=3&godina=1991&broj=000041&stranica=007&u=zrinski>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

³⁷⁰ Regardless of the elaborated handout, the information stating the author of the dramatisation was somehow left omitted. Jagoda Martinčević, “Povijest se ponavlja,” *Vjesnik*, November 29, 1992.



Fig. 3. *Zrinski*, Theatre “August Cesarec” Varaždin, 1991. Photo credit: I. Plovanić

Some additional interpretations of the play in its symbolic significance for the national community were outlined in the lavishly equipped, 40-page program leaflet that accompanied the production. For instance, the author of one of the included texts explained how “*Zrinski* begins in the depth of a concept that is all but unambiguous and banal: the concept of the people/nation.”³⁷¹ He continues by stating that in Strozzi’s dramaturgical vision, the term of nation “ceases to exist only as an ideological concept, a dead phrase or a political buzzword [but rather] becomes some sort of a deep and almost catastrophic symbol of something very heavy, unclear, bloody, in short: tragic.”³⁷² As already mentioned, the tragic of the narrative is transported from the individual to the tragic of a community, hence inscribing it to the actuality it was addressed to.

Another conceptual node that tied the narrative of the play and the time of its production was the relationship of Europe (or, more precisely, the Western European culture) towards Croatia and its path to independence. More precisely, the historical fact of other European countries not interfering or taking sides in the magnate conspiracy was detected as a reference to the actuality of the staging, with much of the Western countries still not openly encouraging and recognising Croatia’s independence. Understanding Croatia as an everlastingly integrative part of West European history and community, the domestic political elites were especially

³⁷¹ Ante Armanini, program of the 1992 production, provided by the courtesy of the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin.

³⁷² Armanini, *Ibid.*

concerned with the international recognition of Croatia's independence, engaging in extensive international activities in order to gain official acknowledgement.³⁷³ The Zrinski-Frankopan myth became widely interpreted as bearing direct meaning for the wartime actuality, with "commemorating this Shakespearean tragedy" in 1991 being understood not "as a part of the past but moreover, an episode that symbolically summarises the essence of the Croatian question itself: its, until now, unsuccessful internationalisation."³⁷⁴ In the case of the here-mentioned production, this balancing act between the need for Europe's official recognition and the condemnation of its apathy towards the question of Croatian independence was best symbolised in the fact that the representative of the Austrian cultural centre in Croatia attended the premiere as a special guest. Presented with an open anti-Habsburg narrative depicting this royal dynasty as standing in the way of Croatia's political autonomy, it was he who was addressed to side with dominant political ambitions of the local community, while being exposed to the possible repercussions if history were repeated. When analysing the media reviews reporting on the production, the relevance of the narrative for the time and the place of its 1991 staging was recognised by its reviewers as well, claiming how "the character of Petar Zrinski receives an applause from the audiences" because of the fact "that the situations coincide to such an effect, the history is repeating and Croats are still fighting for their freedom."³⁷⁵ The same author further pointed out the relevance of the historical continuity as presented in the production, explaining how "the play falls heavy on the hearts and minds of all of us because it makes us remember, but also warns us that today's war is only a segment of the historical continuity of this region."³⁷⁶ More precisely, describing centuries of suffering under foreign rule, the play activated the notion of justified revenge as a national myth, the use of which I discuss in detail throughout this dissertation.

³⁷³ The first state to recognise the independence of Croatia was Slovenia which also proclaimed its separation from the SFRY on June 25, 1991. Next states that recognised Croatia's autonomy were post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine and Lithuania. On October 3, 1991, the Vatican officially recognised Croatia, prompting recognition by other countries such as Iceland (December 18, 1991), Germany (January 15, 1992) as well as all the 12 members of the European Economic Community (January 15, 1992). On May 22, 1992, Croatia officially gained the United Nations membership. The most important 'push' towards general recognition of Croatia's sovereignty was actually provided by the first armed conflicts and especially the shelling of the city of Dubrovnik featured on the UNESCO World History Heritage list.

³⁷⁴ Marko Grčić, "Noćne more hrvatske povijesti," *Globus*, May 3, 1991.

³⁷⁵ Jagoda Martinčević, "Povijest se ponavlja," *Vjesnik*, November 29, 1992.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.



Fig. 4. Zlatko Vitez in *Zrinski*, National Theatre “August Cesarec” Varaždin, 1992. Photo credit: author unknown.

Another segment of the production that stood out in the available reviews was the performance of the actor Zlatko Vitez featuring the role of Zrinski. Described as “perfectly interpreting this corpulent warrior,”³⁷⁷ the reviews thus emphasised the physical similarity between the actor and the historical personality and, one might even say, hinted the ‘historical accuracy’ of the production. Although this impression was only expressed in different interpretations of the production and was not found in the conceptual intentions of the authors expressed in the leaflet, it may seem that it confirms the presumption that the historical narrative staged in *Zrinski* aimed more at presenting or ‘confirming’ historical facts from the national past. As one can understand by consulting the available visual material, this format of staging a ‘factual’ historical narrative was also promoted by the use of elaborated historical costumes and scarce stage props stemming from the associated period.

In the described context of its staging, what *Zrinski* clearly expressed was the relevance that historical factuality dealing with national myths held in times of defining national affiliation and identity. Or, more accurately, it demonstrated in what way an institutional theatre could serve as an additional source of ‘historical truth’ in times of comprehensive ‘historization’ of the socio-political discourse.

³⁷⁷ Siniša Kolarić, “Prvorazredni kulturni događaj,” *Varaždinske vijesti*, October 31, 1991.

U Bečkom Novom Mjestu: The Myth in Service of Politics

Another example of how the Zrinski-Frankopan myth represented “usable past”³⁷⁸ in the period of defining national identity considers a play produced by the non-institutional acting ensemble “Histrioni,” one of the most active and influential domestic theatrical troupes of the late 1980s and 1990s. In 1975, after the production of *Domagojada* mentioned in the prelude section of this dissertation,³⁷⁹ the repertoire of this collective composed of both professional and amateur actors began to feature plays by mostly domestic authors, either dealing with the genre of farce and satire or with stories from the national past or Zagreb history. Although existing as a non-institutional company without a fixed space and acting ensemble, some of the most renowned Croatian theatre directors directed (and still direct) their productions as guests, in a way confirming their mainstream theatrical and cultural position.

Although the group started out as a ‘subversive’ project against different ideological and poetical conditionings of the theatrical scene in the 1970s—such as the predominance of a ‘director’s theatre’ or the ‘prohibition’ of staging plays affirming topics from national history—along socio-political transformations of the 1990s, these initially critical positions progressively supported the new ideological shifts. Put differently, their repertoire consecrated to the national history that was found to be subversive during the socialism, as of 1991, was seen as following the ideological directions of the nationalist government. Their national significance for the Croatian theatre in the 1990s was best depicted by Sanja Nikčević who called the group “the guardians of the affirmative theatre,”³⁸⁰ with “their political direction affirming love towards the homeland and the nation.”³⁸¹ Finally, this compliance of “Histrioni” theatre company to the dominant discourse of the political elites in the early 1990s became further confirmed with the actor, director, artistic director, and manager of the collective, the already mentioned Zlatko Vitez, being appointed state minister of culture in 1994.³⁸²

One of their most famous productions that openly endorsed the nationalist agendas of that time, *U Bečkom Novom Mjestu* [In Wiener-Neustadt] once again featured a story from the

³⁷⁸ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³⁷⁹ See pages 64–67 of this dissertation.

³⁸⁰ Sanja Nikčević, “Poetika kazališne družine Histrion ili čuvari afirmativnog kazališta,” *Krležini dani u Osijeku* (2014), 284.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁸² In 2007, during the presidency of Ivo Sanader over the HDZ government, “Histrioni” acquired their own theatre building in the centre of Zagreb. During the ceremony of the opening, the minister of culture Božo Biškupić declared that the group gained this house “due to their numerous merits (...) spreading the Croatian dramatic word domestically and internationally in times that were not in favour of Croatia.” See <https://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=2835>, last accessed: March 16, 2019.

Zrinski-Frankopan opus and was staged in 1991 in the Gavella city theatre in Zagreb. The play was originally written by the Croatian author Milan Ogrizović in 1921 upon the open call made by the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb marking the 250th anniversary of the events in Wiener-Neustadt.³⁸³ In his own dramatical vision of the myth, Ogrizović also depicted the last act of the conspiracy story, constructed around the final prison days of Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan. However, unlike Strozzi's dramatic vision mentioned in the previous case of the production *Zrinski*, the plot of this play focused on the character of the Habsburg emperor Leopold I., presented as having second thoughts about sentencing the two Croatian noblemen to death. Although heavily impregnated with historical facts and quotes found in the documents from the actual trial, Nikola Batušić claimed that the play was not "declarative Croatian" and that it featured "not so much of nationally pathetic overtones."³⁸⁴ In fact, due to the socio-political context of Ogrizović's own period and his pro-Yugoslav beliefs, the nation outlined by the play was actually considered in its pan-Yugoslav form, with characters claiming how "we are all one folk—from the Adriatic Sea to Thessaloniki."³⁸⁵ Regardless of its overt pro-Yugoslav position, Batušić still detected "a strong patriotic charge"³⁸⁶ in the portrayals of Zrinski and Frankopan as imagined in the original text and, most precisely, in the notion of the revenge that they openly invoked. For example, in the original play, Zrinski stated how "our death will shout to our progeny: never trust oppressors of your kin, because your faith will be paid with death and disgrace. (...) Revenge our chopped-off heads!"³⁸⁷ In order to make this motif of revenge more dramatically relevant, he depicted Zrinski and Frankopan as representatives of 'good', freeing them of any suspicion for conspiracy and coating them with characteristics of highly moral as well as deeply religious national leaders.

After its premiere in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1921, the play actually was not staged until late 1991 by the theatre ensemble "Histrioni" and under direction of Zoran Mužić, with Zlatko Vitez (once again) in the role of Petar Zrinski. The premiere took place in Vienna on December 14, 1991, with the Croatian premiere hosted in the municipal Gavella theatre in Zagreb just a few days later. This repertory decision of executing the premiere in

³⁸³ Interestingly enough, the open letter announcing the commission of the work stated that "as the censorship is now gone, this event can be freely elaborated." For more see Batušić, "Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami."

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 61.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 168.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., 61.

³⁸⁷ Milan Ogrizović, *U Bečkom Novom Mjestu: Epilog zrinsko-frankopanskoj tragediji u jednom činu* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1921), 44.

Vienna,³⁸⁸ even if this was unfortunately documented in only one review and was not further argued in any available material, coincided with the period of already mentioned extensive diplomatic activities of the newly established Croatian state towards its international recognition explained above. The wider political meaning of the production was further emphasised in the existing review following the Vienna premiere, declaring how it had not only “theatrical but also political significance,”³⁸⁹ and how the actors, “these brave thespians, led by the tireless Zlatko Vitez,” actually travelled to Vienna in hope that their performance will only be the “final chord in recognizing the Croatian independence.”³⁹⁰ In other words, the production was placed into the service of securing a specific political goal, once again positioning this myth as the material justifying the ambition towards national autonomy. This ‘political mission’ of the production was further underlined by depicting how the theatre group in fact travelled “almost the same route as Zrinski and Frankopan,”³⁹¹ connecting the main objectives of this theatrical tour to that of the actual historical event. However, the analogy was not restricted to the personal trajectories of Zrinski and Frankopan and the theatre company—the same review saw the theatre group as representatives of “all Croats who, for centuries, travelled Europe pleading for some sympathy for their fragmented and eternally endangered homeland,”³⁹² thus again outlining the continuity of the claim for national independence. Regarding its staging in Vienna, one could state that this event opened several potential interpretations, depending on the audience it initially addressed³⁹³—for instance, if intended primarily for the diaspora audiences outside Croatia, the play could have been easily regarded as material for political activation of this specific population.³⁹⁴ However, staged in the centre of historical power that in fact punished the Croatian magnates and was hence seen to have ‘postponed’ the official confirmation of Croatian national sovereignty, it could have been constructed as a sort of warning/plea towards the international community considering this long-due earned state autonomy.

³⁸⁸ Apparently, the premiere took place in a hall of an unnamed city high school, and was performed for a small audience, result of the “poor advertisement.” Josip Pavičić, “Program za priznanje,” n.d. Similar tours featuring topics from the Zrinski-Frankopan history were organised in that period as well—for instance, the National Theatre Osijek’s production of the opera *Zrinjski* was on tour in Germany in October of 1991, staged two days in the city of Ludwigsburg.

³⁸⁹ Josip Pavičić, “Program za priznanje,” n.d.

³⁹⁰ Ibid. Austria eventually recognised Croatia as an independent state in January 1992.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Unfortunately, the information whether the production was translated for the German-speaking audiences is missing from available research material.

³⁹⁴ For more on the political activation of Croatian diaspora see pages 210–215 of this dissertation.

However, due to the lack of material documenting the performance, one cannot tell if Ogrizović's text was staged in its original version; according to the reports, there were some adaptations and interventions in the text that were introduced to make the play more "contemporary,"³⁹⁵ alongside the 'modernised' set and costume design. For the same reasons, the question of how the authors of the production approached different concepts from the original play that would, in the context of the early 1990s, be considered as inconsistent to the story of exclusive national identity (such as the pro-Yugoslav definition of the nation as mentioned above), remains unanswered.

Nevertheless, what is once again particularly stressed in the available review of the production was the performance of Zlatko Vitez in the title role of Zrinski, being depicted as "the best imaginable interpreter of this historical figure in Croatia today."³⁹⁶ As mentioned, just a few months prior to this premiere, Vitez had actually already played the role of Zrinski in the National Theatre in Varaždin production of *Zrinski*, hence almost subscribing to the role of the magnate and thus somewhat adding to its 'credibility' or 'authenticity'. In addition, just as in *Zrinski*, Vitez also ended this production with a monologue of unknown origin calling for the unity and self-reliance in the fight for independence of all Croats, thus embedding the climax of the play into the actuality of its staging. His 'theatrical speech' was seen as referring to "many other similar cries from the Croatian literature and history,"³⁹⁷ but also to the one spoken from the actual political stages of that time, such was the one declared by the politician Vlado Gotovac in 1991.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Josip Pavičić, "Program za priznanje," n.d.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Josip Pavičić, "Program za priznanje," n.d.

³⁹⁸ Vladimir Gotovac, a Croatian poet and politician, one of the most active protagonists of "the Croatian Spring," arrested in 1971 by the socialist government for his political activities. In 1990 he became the president of "Matica Hrvatska," the most important cultural institution in the country, as well as the president of the Croatian Liberal Socialist Party. Known as a charismatic speaker, he held one of his most famous speeches in front of the Command of the 5th Military District in Zagreb in July 1991, addressing the Yugoslav People's Army officers still situated on its premises. In his speech, he touched upon different questions concerning the Croatian fight for independence, demanding from YPA "to leave us alone! We will secure our freedom, our independence and our values ourselves!" See https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Govor_Vlade_Gotovca_ispred_zgrade_Komande_5._vojne_oblasti, last access on March 16, 2019.



Fig. 5. Zlatko Vitez as Zrinski in *U Bečkom Novom Mjestu* [In Wiener Neustadt]. Photo credit: Davor Višnjić

This overlapping of Vitez's theatrical and political activities occurred very frequently throughout the 1990s. For instance, he was known as one of the most avid speakers at different official manifestations and events organised by the Croatian Democratic Party [HDZ] and the President Franjo Tuđman, often using monologues from national historical plays as motivational material.³⁹⁹ In other words, some of these productions that delivered national myths actually provided the ideal material for specific ideological and political use, even when presented outside of theatre context itself.

After the Viennese premiere, the production continued its 'political mission' as it toured the battlefields emerging on the territory of Croatia throughout 1991 and 1992 and was performed "more than 40 times in three months."⁴⁰⁰ Except being shown to audiences composed of soldiers, wounded, or refugees, the production apparently toured the schools as well—in fact, Vitez considered the play to be some sort of "educational theatre (...) serving as a visual template for the school curricula a student needs to master."⁴⁰¹ Although claiming that touring the schools with the mentioned production was primarily aimed at creating and activating new theatre audiences, by merging artistic interpretations with 'factual' historical

³⁹⁹ He was one of the speakers-performers during Tuđman's birthday celebration in 1997. See Čale Feldman, "Within and Beyond Theatre: President Tuđman's Birthday Celebration at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb," 151–171. Vitez's most recent 'performance' that featured excerpts of the Zrinski-Frankopan opus occurred at the commemorative event for the general Slobodan Praljak, the former general of the Croatian army who committed suicide while receiving his sentence at the Hague court for war crimes. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQNKTe38JOo>, last accessed March 16, 2019.

⁴⁰⁰ http://library.foi.hr/novine/broj1.aspx?v=1&t=1&C=3&godina=1992&broj=000008&stranica=008&u=zrinski*vitez, last accessed March 16, 2019.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

narratives taught in the school curricula, Vitez rather indicated the way in which these ‘extra-mural’ theatrical activities could have helped in the processes of (re)constructing national history. In conclusion, the case of this production demonstrated precisely the extent to which the dramatised historical narratives from the national past served as a tool to reinforce specific processes of rewriting and adapting national mythologies, even if extracted from their original setting.

Vuci: “Drama Croatica”

Alongside already known and presented topics associated with the Zrinski-Frankopan narratives presented in Croatia since the 19th century, in 1992, another branch of the opus was introduced to national theatre stages, this one concerning the story of Krsto Frankopan Brinjski (1482–1527). By gaining an additional narrative segment, the opus was further fixed in its significance as one of the most important national myths and the imperative step in the overall ethnogenesis of the Croatian nation. The named magnate and the ancestor of the already mentioned Fran Krsto Frankopan was a military commander fighting in the service of the Habsburg Empire, first against the Venetians and then against the Ottomans, during the first half of the 16th century. His military campaigns were mostly concentrated on liberating different regions of today’s Croatia, earning him the title of “defensor totius Croatiae.”⁴⁰² In one of the battles in the scope of the armed clashes between the supporters of the two kingdoms alternating their rule over Croatian territories (the Habsburg Empire and the Hungarian Kingdom), Krsto was heavily wounded and died soon thereafter. Marking the 400th anniversary of his death, in 1928, the Croatian poet, playwright, and one of the most acclaimed modernist authors, Milutin Cihlar Nehajev (1880–1931), wrote and published a novel *Vuci* [the Wolves], depicting the life and the tragic death of Krsto. Fascinated with “both his human and political dimension,”⁴⁰³ Nehajev approached this topic with an ambition to tell a story of the “battle against absolutism of the kings impregnated with the feeling of special national interest,”⁴⁰⁴ specifically detecting how “in the narrative of his life, the history of all Croatian suffering was depicted.”⁴⁰⁵ Insisting on creating a realistic novel, he extensively consulted historical material such as chronicles, letters, and other

⁴⁰² Translated from Latin, the defender of the whole Croatia. Eugen Kvaternik, *Das historisch-diplomatische Verhältnis des Königreichs Kroatien und der Ungarischen St. Stephans-Krone* (Nordstedt: Hansebooks, 2017), 79.

⁴⁰³ Dragomir Babić, “O historijskom romanu Vuci Milutina Cihlara Nehajeva,” *Senjski zbornik* 9 (1981/82): 372.

⁴⁰⁴ Milutin Cihlar Nehajev, as quoted in *ibid.*, 372.

⁴⁰⁵ Milutin Cihlar Nehajev, “Frankopani,” *Jutarnji list*, XVII (1927), 9.

available material by and about Krsto Frankopan Brinjski, even leaving some of these documents as integral textual parts of the novel. Although imagined as delivering a realistic historical narrative, the novel still featured romantic overtones in line with the period of its creation, ultimately idealising the character of the magnate torn between his duties towards his foreign rulers and his personal beliefs.

The novel was adapted for a theatre stage for the first time in 1992 by Darko Gašparović, the dramaturge and, at the time, artistic director of the national theatre “Ivan Zajc” in Rijeka,⁴⁰⁶ where the production eventually had its gala premiere on March 14 of the same year. Situated on the north of the Adriatic coast and territorially detached from the battle lines of the ‘homeland’ war, the city of Rijeka was nevertheless an important focus of the local nationalist agendas all throughout the 1990s. Accommodating a large Italian community,⁴⁰⁷ and due to its important symbolical position prior to and during WWII,⁴⁰⁸ Rijeka always had a rather ethnically mixed population,⁴⁰⁹ especially if compared to other Croatian cities or regions, thus somewhat presenting a nominal point of resistance to the call for ethnic homogenisation and exclusivity vocalised by the nationalistic discourse of that time. In addition, in the scope of the first parliamentary elections in 1990, which marked the path to Croatia’s independence from Yugoslavian Federation, Rijeka was one of few cities in Croatia that did not overwhelmingly vote for the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ], a party which eventually won in the overall election. Instead, it was a socialist political coalition that won the majority of the seats in the city senate, a result explained by the mixed ethnic composition of the locale as well as the prevalent anti-fascist heritage of the city liberated by the Yugoslav Partisans in 1945.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁶ As mentioned, this theatre house gained the status of a national institution following the law on theatres passed in 1991.

⁴⁰⁷ According to the population census from 2001, the Italians in that whole region made up some 6.03% of population.

⁴⁰⁸ Dominated by one of the largest ports of the north-Adriatic coast, the city of Rijeka was annexed to Italy in 1924, and came under occupation of German forces in 1943. On May 3, 1945, it was liberated by the joined activities of the Yugoslav forces and was, soon after, annexed to the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. A large majority of Italian citizens fled the city in 1945 fearing ideological vengeance and official prosecution (according to several sources, some 80–90% of the pre-war Italian population left the Istrian region). For more see Franko Dota, “Od usuda povijesti do fatalne greške; hrvatska historiografija o stradavanju i iseljavanju Talijana Istre i Rijeke,” *Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske* 6/7, no.1 (2012).

⁴⁰⁹ According to the population census from 1991, the population in the city was composed by 69.7% of declared Croats, 11.24% Serbs, 4.12% Yugoslavs, 2.85% Muslims and 1.93% Italians.

⁴¹⁰ As I will elaborate in this paper, the nationalist political elites were using the anti-fascist heritage of Croatia for their own political purposes throughout the 1990s. In order to render this heritage more ‘fitting’ the new ideological strategies, the anti-fascist struggle was additionally ‘nationalised’ and stripped off its pan-Yugoslav perspectives. However, as Rijeka was liberated by a joint military action of joint Partisan army units coming from all over Yugoslavia in 1945, this nationalist version of the history obviously clashed with the experiences of the population.

In the context of transforming and structuring the overall national theatre system from 1991, the theatre house in Rijeka came under direct ownership and program dependency of the city which was, from 1988 until 1993, headed by the governor Željko Lužavec. Although winning the 1990 multi-party elections as a member of the socialist-democratic party [SDP], Lužavec soon ‘switched’ his ideological position by becoming a member of the Croatian Democratic Union, in this way redirecting the political orientation of Rijeka from ‘above’. As the city was not only the owner of the National Theatre but was also responsible for choosing its artistic director, the newly imposed political discourse inevitably trickled down to one of its most representative structures. This interdependence between the institution and the ruling political discourse of that time was actually best confirmed by the statement of the production’s authors saying how the premiere in Rijeka was actually conceptualised as “an execution of the theatre function—giving contribution to the collective awareness and the spiritual renewal.”⁴¹¹

The concept of spiritual renewal was in fact introduced into the official political discourse by Franjo Tuđman himself. More precisely, in his speech on the occasion of the first plenary session of Croatian parliament in 1990, he explained the task of a spiritual renewal as “revival of the Croatian national self-consciousness” and the “removal of all ruinous divisions.”⁴¹² Besides media outlets, which soon came under direct control of the state,⁴¹³ cultural and artistic production played an important role in attaining this communal self-consciousness, with the ruling elites considering national culture as its most important component. Moreover, staging of the historical drama *The Wolves* in Rijeka, i.e. ‘outside’ the political and cultural centre of the state, should in fact be interpreted as an act of engaged homogenisation of a wider national territory, a process occurring on all levels of social and political life of that time. By choosing to stage a play about a nobleman who in fact originated from a small town close to Rijeka and was engaged in liberating territories of this very region with a vision to unify them in one Croatian state, the call for national homogenisation gained not only a historical but, more importantly, a local argument. This overlap of local, regional, and national historical narratives concerning the production was

⁴¹¹ Snježana Hribar, “Klopka za Frankopane,” n.p., n.d.

⁴¹² Franjo Tuđman, Opening speech at the first parliament session of the Croatian Parliament, May 30, 1991. <http://www.tudjman.hr/govori/konstituirajuca-sjednica-hrvatskoga-sabora>, last accessed December 5, 2019.

⁴¹³ The best ‘proof’ of the spiritual importance of media was the 1993 declaration made by the director of the Croatian Radio-Television, Antun Vrdoljak, stating how the “television must be a cathedral of Croatian spirit.” See <https://apnews.com/7254ee541a0513a4b79520e3cc5cae40>, last accessed December 5, 2019. For more on the position of Croatian media during the 1990s, see Kemal Kurspahić, *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003).

additionally articulated by its authors, stating that their work was “regional when it comes to the place of the events, national when it comes to its affiliation, and global when it comes to its quality.”⁴¹⁴

According to the authors of the production (the dramaturge Darko Gašparović and the director Želimir Mesarić), their initial intention was to stage the play some 15 years prior to 1992, but in the context of socialist Yugoslavia they feared that its staging would “provoke the political authorities to proclaim the main characters of this play as greatest Croatian nationalists.”⁴¹⁵ Regardless of the fact that the play ended up never being staged during the “Croatian Spring” and movements of the 1971, a direct link to this period was established to confirm the status of a national myth to this historical narrative, further fixating it as the ‘true’ expression of national self-consciousness.

Dealing with the reviews of the production as the main material extensively depicting the production—the dramatisation of the novel was never published as such and is thus missing from this research—one could learn that the play, much like the original novel, followed the story of the father and son, Bernardino and Krsto Frankopan Brinjski, princes of the Croatian town Modruš living in the 15th and 16th century. The plot focused on presenting their attempt to organise the Croatian national state as well as their diplomatic activities meant to assure the European rulers of the general danger once the Ottoman Empire succeeds in conquering Croatia. In addition, Krsto’s intimate life was also featured in the novel, represented by the love story between him and his first wife, Apolonija. Due to the absence of the production’s video recording, significant adaptations of the original novel are unfortunately difficult to trace. However, by consulting the available material, one could understand that the author of the 1992 dramatisation, Darko Gašparović, added some new content to Nehajev’s original. The most obvious addition was the introduction of material from the novel *Frangipani’s Ring* written by a German writer and art-historian Henry Thode (1857–1920),⁴¹⁶ depicting the life and adventures of Krsto Frankopan Brinjski.⁴¹⁷ However, Thode not only entered the production as an author but also as a character—according to the reviewers, he was

⁴¹⁴ N. Koščić, “(Z)vuci hrvatske povijesti,” *Večernji List*, March 14, 1992.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ This highly romanticised description of Frankopan family was first published in 1901. Its Croatian translation appeared in 1944 hence indicating how important the reaffirmation of national myths was for the Ustashe regime in Croatia (1941–1945). For more about the historical revalorisation of the Ustashe movement, see the following chapters of this paper.

⁴¹⁷ While writing his own recount of the story, Nehajev also consulted Thode’s novel. Moreover, he considered him as “the first author that, using a very professional method, tore away the curtain in front of the most intimate, most human sides of our hero.” Milan Cihlar Nehajev, <https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Vuci/Pripomena>, last accessed December 05, 2019.

apparently present on the stage throughout the whole play and functioned not only as the commentator of the plot but also its protagonist and ‘manager’, stopping or initiating different events, even providing the production with an “almost a post-dramatic”⁴¹⁸ twist. Moreover, in his dramatisation of the novel and much along the previously mentioned actions of rewriting history, Gašparović deliberately deviated from the historical facts. First of all, wanting to reach the “dramaturgic clarity and actant purity,”⁴¹⁹ he blended few characters into one role, hence blurring their specific historical conditionings and trajectories. In addition, he also rewrote Krsto’s death, depicting it as a political assassination rather than the result of a deadly battle, an assumption that was never historically proven.⁴²⁰ Once again, the historical facts which were announced as the base of this production were manipulated and adapted, thus only confirming their ‘flexibility’ when envisaged to argue for a concrete political aim. When explaining the specific genre of this production, its director Želimir Mesarić said that he and Gašparović, the author of adaptation, actually considered it to represent what they personally named “*drama croatica*.”⁴²¹ Elaborating this ‘genre’, Mesarić accentuated its ‘eternal’ poetics and national significance, explaining how the play was imagined “as some sort of sequencing of historical pages in which one can find the past, the present and the future being mixed together.”⁴²² According to Michael Y. Bennett and some other theatre historians and researchers, historical plays not only reflect their present but, additionally, include the future as well, generating what he calls the “tense of *always*.”⁴²³ In other words, by staging the past that resonates in the theatrical present and could as thus always be restaged or repeated, this type of theatre generates or aims towards an opinion that these narratives will continue to occur in the future as well. This interpretation becomes additionally intriguing in the case presented here —when staging stories and episodes from national history in which the heroes failed to attain their political agendas, the presented historical narratives start to function as some sort of a warning or, moreover, as an instruction for the present or even the future. In order to irrevocably end the eternal suffering of Krsto Frankopan Brinjski (and all those with similar destinies and symbolic), the national autonomy they have anticipated becomes an imperative.

⁴¹⁸ Ivica Buljan, “Kronika povijesne zbilje,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, March 18, 1992.

⁴¹⁹ Program leaflet of the production, pages 11 and 12.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴²¹ Jakša Fiamengo, “Istraga nad Frankopanima,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, March 13, 1992.

⁴²² *Ibid.*

⁴²³ Bennett, *Narrating the Past Through Theatre: Four Crucial Texts*, 4.

In the example of the here-mentioned play, this concept of the “tense of always” was best represented in the figure of Frankopan Brinjski and its national ‘function’. For example, as one of the critics noticed, by carrying his dead body off the stage in a casket followed by his worshippers, his tragic ending was not conceptualised as “the final end. With his death, it’s only the play that ends,”⁴²⁴ while history continues, now represented in the collective body of his ‘followers’. In other words, although staging Brinjski’s bitter end, his status of an immortal national hero was actually confirmed by a strong theatrical metaphor, hence rendering him “indistinguishable from, and fused with the sacred and eternal status of the nation.”⁴²⁵ Such a concept of the nation regarding it as a continuous, eternal, and sacred entity echoed the elaborated arguments employed in the overtly nationalistic political discourse of the early 1990s as well—for example, most of Franjo Tuđman’s public speeches during the 1990s ended with a salutation “long live our only and eternal Croatia!”⁴²⁶

In fact, many of the available reviews of the production recognised Frankopan Brinjski as the symbol of the nation, mentioning, for instance, that he “embodied ‘Croatianhood’.”⁴²⁷ Furthermore, in one of the scenes added to the play by the dramaturge Gašparović, he was apparently ‘transformed’ into St. Christopher,⁴²⁸ thus attaining additional spiritual and moral significance. It seems that this religious addendum was employed as to confirm the immaculate character of Brinjski as a warrior—by rendering him a saint, his battles and conflicts thus gained a higher moral value. The metaphor was additionally solidified by the stage sets that, besides the false stone constructions mimicking the “lost Croatian architectural heritage,”⁴²⁹ featured a huge cross hovering above the stage. The essential departing point of this analogy between Brinjski’s personal trajectory and that of a Croatian nation was detected in the concept of his martyrdom, i.e. his suffering for a higher communal cause. Explaining how “in the suffering of Krsto, the author of the dramatisation saw the

⁴²⁴ Ivica Buljan, “Kronika povijesne zbilje.”

⁴²⁵ Harry Anastasiou, *The Broken Olive Branch: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and the quest for Peace in Cyprus* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 73.

⁴²⁶ <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/novosti/hrvatska/3302613/sasvim-osoban-izbor-prisjetite-se-pet-najpoznatijih-govora-franje-tudjmana/>, last accessed January 15, 2019.

⁴²⁷ Zdravko Zima, “Frankopansko vježbanje života,” *Vjesnik*, March 18, 1992.

⁴²⁸ In another newly written scene one of the characters, a refugee from Jajce, recognises Krsto as St. Christopher, the Cross-bearer, asking him to “carry us and our people across the river to the other side, just like baby Jesus.” Upon this demand, Krsto takes off his army uniform and puts on a sackcloth, and “looking at the sky takes the palm branch from the refugee and says: *Spea mea in Deo est!* [my hope is in god]” As quoted in Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 24–25.

⁴²⁹ Ingrid Žic, “Stvarnost prožeta Frankopanskim mitom.” *Novi List*, March 17, 1992.

Way of the Cross of his own nation,”⁴³⁰ one could see that the communal body presented by this character was further personified as “a nation which is pinned to the cross.”⁴³¹

On the other hand, according to some of the available reviews reporting on the premiere of the play, several commentators tried to ‘defend’ this production from being identified as a national historical piece complying to the dominant nationalistic proclamations of that time. Namely, these reviews claimed how this was not “one of the actual patriotic *reveilles* popular in our times”⁴³² and that it did not “follow the actual trend of reaffirmation of the forgotten or forbidden Croatian literary or dramatical heritage”⁴³³ but rather saw it as a “fruit of the continuous experimental politics of Rijeka theatre in its attempts to synthetise some important points of Croatian history and literature.”⁴³⁴ In other words, the production was depicted as some sort of a result of a specific repertoire policy of the national theatre house of Rijeka and its unique position in the overall national culture as well in the arising conflict.⁴³⁵

Regardless of the different interpretations, a somewhat predominant conclusion of the available reviews depicting the production was the direct and active relationship that the production had with the wartime actuality of its 1992 staging. First of all, on a more formative level, the production was connected to its wartime context by the fact that, according to the program leaflet, it was officially dedicated to the fallen Croatian soldiers and “victims who gave their lives to the homeland.”⁴³⁶ The play was produced and staged in the time of the first more or less efficient cease-fire period on the territory of Croatia⁴³⁷ marked by the regrouping of different army forces, lingering conflicts, and the overall recapitulation of the losses both in material and human lives. As a result, the narrative of the play was seen

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ivica Buljan, “Kronika povijesne zbilje.” This referential relation to Catholic religion as another important position of ‘Croatianhood’ was additionally solidified by the fact that the shorter version of the production was eventually staged in the Rijeka Cathedral on the day of St. Vitus, the protector of the city (June 15, 1993).

⁴³³ Ingrid Žic, “Stvarnost prožeta Frankopanskim mitom.”

⁴³⁴ Ivica Buljan, “Kronika povijesne zbilje.”

⁴³⁵ Kim Cuculić detects several ‘crucial’ points in the repertory history of the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka. Some of the most important creative activities of the theatre were located in the late 1980s and early 1990s when theatrical experiments and scenic reflection of Rijeka’s own geopolitical position were being staged. See more in Kim Cuculić, *Peti red, parter: Kazališne kritike, osvrti, razgovori* (Rijeka: Društvo hrvatskih književnika, 2012).

⁴³⁶ Gordana Milić, “Prsten oko vukova Frankopanskih,” *Novi List*, March 4, 1992. The nature of this consecration (whether it was nominal, financial or other) is not detectable in the available research material.

⁴³⁷ In March of 1992, after the signing of the Vance Plan designed to implement a ceasefire and demilitarise parts of Croatia that were under the control of Croatian Serbs and the Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA), the United Nation’s Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) were being positioned along most active frontlines, hence building some sort of a buffer-zone between the two warring sides. However, some of the battlefields, as those around the city of Dubrovnik, were still very much active throughout 1992, with YPA forces surrounding the city until July of 1992.

as a reflection of the actual socio-political context, introducing the play's content as a direct interpretation of actuality by claiming how “everything that is happening on the soil of our wounded Croatia is only a reprisal of the history that already happened,”⁴³⁸ or how the play represents “the repetition of the continuing Destiny. Once again (...) the statehood is being defended, once again the Civilisation is being under attack of the Primitive.”⁴³⁹ In other words, the ongoing conflict was interpreted and explained as an episode in the saga of the everlasting nations' suffering, while, at the same time and in line with the concept of historical narratives suggesting the future, it detected the ‘solution’ to this suffering in successfully winning a war for Croatian territories and state autonomy. The story of Krsto Frankopan Brinjski was thus added to the national myth of Croatia's victimhood, not only providing new content but also the justification for the actual wartime—by winning and securing this timeless and immortal national autonomy, the ‘eternal curse’ of the Croatian nation would finally come to an end.



Fig. 6. *Vuci* [the Wolves]: Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka. Photo credit: Ivan Fabijan.

Many other elements described in the play were also recognised to directly communicate with the wartime reality, namely “the army coming from the east, the friction between the local aristocrats, the play between the world and European forces over our territories, the blooded Krajina, demolished Croatian cities, burned land, the exodus of Croats from their hearths, the fight for bare life, etc.”⁴⁴⁰ When analysing some interpretations that tackled

⁴³⁸ Zdravko Zima, “Frankopansko vježbanje života,” *Vjesnik*, March 18, 1992. This author associates the name of the play *Vuci* with the town of the Croatian city Vukovar which was lost to the enemy back in November of 1991 and, since then, became known as the city-hero. “Vuci” [the wolves] is an alternative plural to the singular “vuk” [the wolf], other being “vukovi,” signalling a reference to Vukovar.

⁴³⁹ Davor Špišić, “Ispijanje kušnje,” *Glas Slavonije*, May 21, 1992.

⁴⁴⁰ N. Koščić, “(Z)vuci hrvatske povijesti.”

potential analogies, one could see in what way were they constructed or, moreover, adapted—for example, one author recognises the exodus of people from Jajce⁴⁴¹ described in the original play as “identical to the exodus from Vukovar,”⁴⁴² regardless of the fact that the Jajce exodus took place several centuries prior and under entirely different circumstances. In other words, not only did the historical narratives in the play get accommodated to the ruling nationalist programs but their interpretations did as well.

Lastly but no less important, the premiere in the National Theatre in Rijeka was actually accompanied by several ‘extra-theatrical’ programs and events depicting to what extent the production was conceptualised as not only to engage theatre audiences but to simultaneously penetrate the public consciousness as well. For instance, one could learn that there were several public activities organised by the theatre in the week of the productions’ premiere, namely, the public offering of “bread and salt (...) as a re-enactment of an old popular custom that was depicted in the original novel and the production as well,”⁴⁴³ and “folklore groups demonstrating local dances and songs”⁴⁴⁴ in the city’s public spaces. In this way, the theatrical event managed to ‘spill’ out of the theatre building, demonstrating an additional method of being related to the ruling socio-political discourse that generated specific rituals which could be identified as social re-traditionalisation.

In conclusion, by analysing the production of *Vuci* and the narrative of Krsto Frankopan Brinjski by which “theatre was looking for the source of one nation,”⁴⁴⁵ I indicated various levels of engagement and open ‘cooperation’ of a national theatre institution with the official socio-political agendas of the wartime. In addition, I detected in what ways the staging of a historical narrative from national past activated interpretations and meanings concordant to the ruling discourse effective in Croatia in the early 1990s, further reflecting the introduced definitions of the historical play as located between the fiction and the historical factuality.

⁴⁴¹ The population of Jajce, a city in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina, abandoned their city under threat from Ottoman empire in 1527, hence defining Jajce as the last Bosnian city to fall to their rule.

⁴⁴² Snježana Hribar, “Klopka za Frankopane,” n.p., n.d. Vukovar, a Croatian town situated on the very border with Serbia was the place of some of the most cruel conflicts executed during the Yugoslav wars, mostly due to its pre-war ethnic composition consisting of a large Serb minority. After a 87-days siege, on November 18, 1991, the YPA forces and Serbian para-military troops officially took over the city, evicting some 20,000 people from the town.

⁴⁴³ Gordana Milić, “Prsten oko vukova Frankopanskih.”

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Zdravko Zima, “Frankopansko vježbanje života.”

Katarina Zrinska od Frankopana: Distorting the National Myth?

As one could understand from the previous examples, the majority of the plays dealing with national myths staged in Croatian theatres during the early 1990s were adaptations of novels or plays written prior to the time of their actual staging. Nevertheless, in 1993, one newly written play dealing with the Zrinski-Frankopan opus was staged in the Theatre &TD in Zagreb, testifying on the interest of contemporary authors in this topic. Interestingly enough, the named theatre gained its notoriety due to its experimental and often critical positions as of late 1960s and early 1970s. However, during the 1990s and due to the fact that it was not under direct governance of the state administration but the Zagreb city student council, &TD was actually seen as providing some sort of a platform for domestic theatre authors somewhat subversive towards the prevailing nationalistic regime.⁴⁴⁶ A rather large presence of domestic playwrights on the repertoire of the theatre house was actually maintained through the program “The Young Croatian Drama,” in the scope of which a play *Katarina Zrinska od Frankopana* [Katarina Zrinska of the Frankopans] by Vladimir Stojsavljević was staged in January, 1993. Unfortunately, the video and other documentation material of the production was not available, thus obstructing a more accurate research.⁴⁴⁷ However, due to the fact that this was the only written play on the topic during the timeframe presented here, I decided to analyse it nevertheless, in the hope of detecting new relevant positions activated by its staging.

The Zrinski topic actually served as a special focus for Stojsavljević who, until 2010, wrote an oeuvre of four plays dealing with different but not so much known or researched aspects of the famous narrative.⁴⁴⁸ In all of them, the author introduced characters or plots of the myth that had been somewhat ‘neglected’ by both the national historiography as well as national theatres, focusing instead on “women and children, those who await the results of historical battles while looking through the window.”⁴⁴⁹ Introducing these historical ‘side-

⁴⁴⁶ The most relevant examples of this critical stance towards the ongoing processes of national homogenisation were the plays *Filip Oktet i čarobna frula* [Filip Oktet and the Magic Trumpet] written by Pavo Marinković staged in 1991; *Lov na medvjeda tepišara* [Hunting of the Tepišar Bear] by Milica Lukšić staged in 1991; etc.

⁴⁴⁷ I have contacted the respective theatre on multiple occasions, finally receiving an answer that they do not own the video recording of the play and have no knowledge if it was ever actually filmed.

⁴⁴⁸ His second play, *Odlazak* [Departure] was written in 1996 and refers to the departure of Jelena Zrinski (Petar Zrinski’s daughter) to Turkey with her second husband Imre Thököly. The third one, *Nikola sedmi* [Nikola the Seventh] was written in 2008 and was set in Čakovec in the late autumn of 1664, sometime between the Peace Treaty of Vasvár and the death of Nikola Zrinski. The last play, *Kronika nestajanja* [Chronicle of disappearance], was written in 2010 and tells the story of the decline of the Zrinski family, with an interesting portrayal of a jealous Petar Zrinski whose outbursts towards his wife Katarina are “explained as a consequence of his impotence caused by congenital syphilis.” Dukić, “The Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy as a national sacrificial narrative,” 155.

⁴⁴⁹ Mirjana Dugandžija, “Kazališni hit glavnog zagrebačkog kulturnjaka,” *Nacional*, December 2, 2003.

characters' as protagonists, Stojsavljević concentrated on narrating their individual destinies to provide certain external positions to the known national myths, departing from the concept of history as a subjective construct. Furthermore, he aimed at presenting those historical figures located on the 'frontline of history', i.e. those who were not active executioners of history, but were rather influenced by its unfolding. The production of this 1993 play, directed by the renowned director Božidar Violačić, followed the story of the Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy from the perspective of Petar's wife and Fran Krsto's sister, Katarina. In fact, this was not the first time that Katarina underwent a theatrical treatment—in 1899, the Croatian writer Ante Tresić Pavičić published a play about her in which she was depicted as the "driving force of the conspiracy, but, unlike valorisations she had in different epic poems, was in this case interpreted as a woman role-model and a national hero."⁴⁵⁰

As mentioned, Stojsavljević's dramatic approach to the historical conspiracy myth concentrated on its neglected 'backstories', describing the life of Katarina who stayed to take care of her children and their family possessions once both her husband and brother had been taken away to Vienna on charges of conspiracy against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Faced with the Austrian army approaching her residence with the intent to not only confiscate all the family belongings but also to imprison her and the rest of the noble families, she is depicted as sinking into despair, recognising and eventually accepting her tragic destiny. As the available reviews show, due to the fact that some historical facts were adapted by the author in order to make his dramatical vision more clear,⁴⁵¹ the production was recognised as a "free variation of historic events."⁴⁵² Furthermore, the significant symbolic potential of the play was found to communicate with the wartime reality of its staging, representing the "process of accepting the suffering and misery as a way of life."⁴⁵³ Out of the large volume of symbolic concepts attached to this national myth, it seems as if the concept of national suffering was (once again) brought to the frontline of the production's interpretation. Notably, in the beginning of 1993, with the wartime activities on the territory of Croatia

⁴⁵⁰ Zrinka Blažević and Suzana Coha, "Zrinski i Frankopani—strategije i modeli heroizacije u književnom diskursu," *Radovi: Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* 40, no. 1 (2008): 106.

⁴⁵¹ For instance, in this version of the story, Katarina's son Ivan stays at his mother's side upon arrival of the Austrian soldiers, which was not historically accurate. This modification was most probably introduced to further emphasise the position of innocent victims of history as elaborated by Stojsavljević himself.

⁴⁵² Batušić, "Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami," 70.

⁴⁵³ Andrea Zlatar, as quoted in Zrinka Blažević and Suzana Coha, "Zrinski i Frankopani—strategije i modeli heroizacije u književnom diskursu," 107.

gaining a more offensive character⁴⁵⁴ and the overall shifting of the conflicts to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it seems as if the concept of sacrifice gained another level of interpretation. More precisely, with the national independence attained and secured, the concept of national continuous suffering was now more used to justify the wartime conflict itself. In propagating this ‘victim strategy’ as an argument for a just war, the political elites reached out for historical assertions as well, arguing how the Croats “had been the victims of expansionist powers throughout their history.”⁴⁵⁵ Bearing this context in mind, investigating the story that intermixes a national myth with the concept of suffering should be executed under the scrutiny of its symbolic potential in the actual time of its staging.

Interestingly enough, the play was still seen by some as “freed from the potential national pathos due to the author combining historical and fictional episodes” as well as “positioning the play on an impressive level of universality.”⁴⁵⁶ Considering the direct context of its staging, one could argue that the production also reflected the position of ‘bystanders’ in the ongoing conflict—in other words, it possibly aimed at symbolising all those who did not actively participate in the war or supported the nationalist agendas of that time but were, nonetheless, much effected by these processes. One needs to be aware that, despite the overwhelming encouragement, a silent minority of the population was still critical towards the dominant politics of that time, arguing for a peaceful resolution of the conflicts or denouncing the exclusivist project of argued nationhood. Nevertheless, the term ‘silent’ should be used with reservation because the majority of these anti-war movements and campaigns were given considerable presence in the general public as they actually corresponded to the dominant political discourse. More precisely, these organisations and groups promoted the argument of national as well as moral superiority, demanding the war activities to be stopped as they considered the war to be directed against or imposed on the ‘innocent’ Croatia.⁴⁵⁷ On the other hand, there were several anti-war campaigns and organisations in Croatia that stemmed from the local civil society (most prominently the “Anti-war Campaign”), arguing and protesting the war in its totality and not in its ethnic outreach. As of April 1993, and with the involvement of Croatian army forces in the conflicts occurring throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, this much engaged anti-war stand became

⁴⁵⁴ In January of 1991, the Croatian Army forces launched an armed operation called “Maslenica,” aimed at regaining the bridge of Maslenica, the only land approach to the Dalmatian city of Zadar.

⁴⁵⁵ David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts?: Serbian and Croatian victim centred propaganda and the war in Yugoslavia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 105.

⁴⁵⁶ Batusić, “Zrinski i Frankopani u hrvatskoj drami,” 71.

⁴⁵⁷ See pages 263–264 of this dissertation for a detailed analysis of one of such movements called “The Wall of Love.”

more and more articulately focused on presenting the actual repercussions of Croatia's interference in the mentioned war activities. Although these positions have been presented by the few existing independent media outlets of that time and were thus limited to a smaller public (such as the weekly *Feral Tribune* or the monthly *Arkzin*), they uncompromisingly reported on crimes executed by the Croatian army against the Bosniak populace,⁴⁵⁸ hence interfering a meticulously constructed image of Croatia as an innocent victim. Furthermore, they generated the awareness that the conflict in fact followed undisclosed goals of political elites, hence inducing a certain sense of powerlessness to actively transform its course while not participating in it. It is in this setting of certain helplessness confronted with the direct consequences of war that *Katarina* was staged, probably activating some relevant analogies to its actuality—just as Katarina had to reconcile with the suffering imposed on her against her own will, many citizens of Croatia had to somewhat reconcile with wartime conditions against their actual role in it. Although one needs to remain aware of the possible differences in suffering of those belonging to the dominant ethnic structure and those belonging to ethnic minorities against which the conflict in Croatia was nominally fought, presenting Katarina's 'individual suffering' as resisting to symbolise the suffering of the community could potentially be seen as distorting the national myth of continuous and comprehensive victimhood. Regardless of the fact that the lack of research material did not allow me to confirm the original intentions and interpretations of its author, I believe that this production still outlined the attainable strategy of using historical material from national history to subvert the dominant (mis)use of national myths occurring in the dominant discourse of the early 1990s.

As I have demonstrated, different narratives from the national myth dealing with the Zrinski-Frankopan topics were staged rather frequently in Croatia in the course of the early 1990s. The reason for this prevalent theatrical application of the myth should be found in the fact that it activated the most important reference points of the dominant political discourse of that time. Namely, it touched upon the 'dearest' national myths of that time and place, such as the myth claiming superior antiquity (presenting an old state as the source of the modern, national one) or the myth of martyrdom presenting the nation as the "perennial target of discrimination and persecution."⁴⁵⁹ In addition, due to the fact that it featured numerous

⁴⁵⁸ Most notably on the massacre in the village of Ahmići that took place in April 1993, as well as the existence of several prison camps in which both Bosniak and Serb detainees were kept, tortured and killed (Gabela camp, Dretelj camp, Čelebići camp, etc.)

⁴⁵⁹ Kolstø, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, 21.

stories of armed battles and conflicts with members of other national or political groups, it also represented an apt metaphor of the wartime it was addressing, hence providing moral and historical justifications.

As I am going to indicate, although the Zrinski-Frankopan myth was by far the most represented historical matter on national theatre stages during war in Croatia, there were other historical narratives that were performed throughout this period, many of which will be mentioned in the following sections of this paper for the reasons explained in the introduction. Nevertheless, one more example that originated outside of the mentioned thematic opus will be detailed, predominately because it delivered some compelling associations to the socio-political context of its staging, this being the final phase of the ‘homeland’ war.

Kletva: The Myth of Disunity

On November 11, 1995, the National Theatre in Zagreb staged a play based on a novel by August Šenoa,⁴⁶⁰ one of the most popular Croatian authors of the 19th century whose works very seldomly entered national theatre stages after his death, mostly due to the somewhat outdated poetics of his writing fused with historical pathos. Considering the socio-political context of the staging, the premiere took place at the very end of the ‘homeland war’, marked by the Dayton Peace Accords. Signed by the Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, the Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, and the Bosnian-Herzegovinian President Alija Izetbegović on November 21, 1995, this agreement actually marked the formal end of the conflicts throughout the territories of former Yugoslavia.

In fact, in the months leading up to the Dayton agreement, the socio-political life in Croatia was marked by local authorities starting to openly demonstrate their discontent with the UN peace-keeping mission (UNPROFOR) which, as of 1992, actively upheld cease-fire on the contested Croatian territories. This critical stance towards the international peace forces was endorsed by accusations originating from the main political actors in the country about how the mission was actually ineffective and biased, only maintaining the *status quo* and not actually ending the conflicts. On March 31, 1995, the Croatian authorities decided not to give

⁴⁶⁰ A writer, critic, editor, poet and dramatist, Šenoa (1838–1881) was actually one of the most proliferate and popular novelists of his time, writing mostly extensive romanticised historical novels dealing with the local past. Introducing the historical novel to Croatian literature, Šenoa contributed to the growing sense of national identity among the Croatian people during the Austro-Hungarian rule. In addition, he was known as a committed social chronicler of his time, arguing that literature should also educate the public and promote progressive social and political struggles.

permission to a new UN peace-mission mandate on its territories, hence ending its activities. In fact, the project transformed into an interim mission aimed at creating conditions that would facilitate a negotiated settlement consistent with the territorial integrity of Croatia, along with guaranteeing the security and rights of all communities living in Croatia. Referring to this decision, Tuđman explained it by saying that the “dismissal of UNPROFOR does not mean war. It’s a high-risk decision but in the same time, it’s a step further towards the solution concerning our occupied territories, leading to normalisation in the relationship between the new Yugoslav states.”⁴⁶¹ His vision of this “solution” became evident just a few months after the UNPROFOR forces left Croatia, manifested in a form of a combat action under the codename “The Storm.” This armed operation was entirely executed by the Croatian army forces composed of ordinary and special fighting units and was aimed at reintegrating parts of Croatia’s territory from the Serbian paramilitary militia by force (consisting of some 18% of Croatia’s territory lost during the previous war years, mostly in the region of the Republic of Serbian Krajina).⁴⁶² “The Storm” began along the 630 km long frontline on August 4, 1995, and was declared successfully completed only four days later. While Croatian authorities promoted it as an outstanding military success, the Serbian government argued that it in fact took the form of an ethnic cleansing, considering the mass exodus of Serb population from the effected regions.⁴⁶³

While the territory of Srpska Krajina was ‘liberated’ and the process of integration to the Croatian state administration began shortly thereafter, other parts of Croatia were still controlled and governed by the enemy. However, the execution and outcome of “The Storm” secured better negotiating positions of Croatian authorities with Serbia, all of which eventually led to the peaceful integration of these territories and the signing of the Dayton Agreement. Subsequently, the end of 1995 was marked by the appeasement of war activities as well as the Croatian state slowly gaining its ‘final shape’—with defined territorial borders, articulated political agendas, as well as an exclusive ethnic structure. It was in the echo of these eventful months that *Kletva* [The Curse] was staged in the central national theatre house in Zagreb, opening some compelling interpretations of the actuality of its staging.

⁴⁶¹ <https://hu-benedikt.hr/?p=115410>, last accessed February 5, 2020.

⁴⁶² Republic of Serbian Krajina was a self-proclaimed Serbian state (1991–1995) located on the territory of the Republic of Croatia traditionally populated by Serbs. The UNPROFOR peace-mission controlled this area as of 1992.

⁴⁶³ According to different sources, it is estimated that some 150,000 Serbs from Croatia escaped to Serbia following “The Storm.” In 2010 Serbia sued Croatia before the International Court of Justice in Hague, claiming that this military operation constituted a genocide. In 2015 the Court ruled out this claim, affirming that the departure of the Serb population was a direct result of the military offensive. Nevertheless, crimes against civilians executed by the Croatian forces during the campaign had been (and still are) registered and prosecuted.

Written as an “original story,”⁴⁶⁴ the novel was set in the late 14th century and depicted the rebellion of Croatian noblemen against the Croatian-Hungarian King Sigismund and his wife, Queen Elisabeth, with a parallel story following the disputes between the citizens and clergy in Zagreb. As in most of Šenoa’s works, the plot was set in a clearly defined historical period but was ‘upgraded’ with different fictional content. Following this concept, the list of figures featured a combination of historical figures (mainly those representing either a state or church power) and fictional characters. In depicting the rebellion of the Croatian noblemen against the Austrian court, Šenoa was “holding onto historical facts,”⁴⁶⁵ but still omitted those details that he found to be “less favourable to the rebels”⁴⁶⁶—for instance, Queen Elizabeth (1334–1287), who was in fact killed by the Croatian rebels, is killed by Venetians in Šenoa’s version of the narrative.

In general, the novel itself aimed at “emphasizing the national and patriotic elements”⁴⁶⁷ in order to vocalise a call for national unity, therefore its content strongly adapted to these aims. The accentuated patriotic characteristics and the call for national unity in attaining specific national goals were undoubtedly provoked by the acute political situation experienced by Šenoa himself, marked best by the unsuccessful Rakovica revolt against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1871.⁴⁶⁸ This call for national unity was emphasised by episodes depicting “scenes of fratricidal fight and hatred, which is periodically repeated with Croats, and in which fellow countrymen destroy each other,”⁴⁶⁹ with a goal to demonstrate the brutal repercussions of the division among peoples of same ethnic affiliation. Moreover, this “curse of disunity, betrayal, mutual hatred and destruction (...) hovering above the whole of Croatian nation”⁴⁷⁰ was pointed out as the warning message of the novel.

Once again, the detailed analysis of the production itself is based on the only available research material, that being several reviews of the staging found during my study of accessible documentation.⁴⁷¹ This again prompts the reader to approach my conclusions

⁴⁶⁴ Antun Barac, afterward to August Šenoa, *Kletva* (Zagreb: Zora, 1953), 651.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 651.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 651.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 652.

⁴⁶⁸ Rakovica revolt (1871) was an armed uprising against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, led by Croatian politician Eugen Kvaternik. After only four days of intensive armed clashes the Croatian rebels advocating for an independent republic of Croatia were defeated and executed shortly after.

⁴⁶⁹ Barac, afterward to August Šenoa, *Kletva*, 652.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 654.

⁴⁷¹ After numerous attempts and up to this date (September, 2020) I received no information from the Croatian Nation Theatre in Zagreb whether the video-recording of *The Curse* exists or not.

cautiously as one can unfortunately not know in what way the original novel was dramatised or even staged.

As in other examples presented here, the initial reasons for staging a dramatisation⁴⁷² of this voluminous novel for the first time in 1995 are not traceable in the available material concerning the production set in the Croatian National Theatre. Nevertheless, these reasons are to some point detectable in the available reviews following the premiere, stating how “although situated in the known Croatian past, the play was still focused on us, here and now.”⁴⁷³ Although the author of the review found that the play “definitely lacks this banal association with Croatian reality,” he—somewhat paradoxically—praises the contemporaneity of the text, stating that “it’s so actual, as if it were authored by a living author.”⁴⁷⁴ In other words, the reasons of its staging were found in its contemporaneity and universality. However, the concrete similarities between the historical material of the play and the actuality of its staging were found in the submissive position of Croatia under its foreign ‘rulers’ or centres of power, both in time of the original story and in 1995. More precisely, the way that “this Croatian discord was, throughout the history, aptly used by the eternal tutors in order to divide, torture, disunify and rule over Croatia” was found to correspond to the contemporary moment in which Croatia was also seen as being neglected by “those more important seeking to achieve global interests.”⁴⁷⁵ Originally presenting national unity as a prerequisite of attaining full political sovereignty under the nation’s own conditions, the production staged in the context of 1995 seemed to emphasise this imperative of unity for executing an autonomous combat action as well. If one is reminded of the socio-political context of the production, the call to reclaim ‘national destiny’ could have precisely reflected self-governed actions, such as the discontinuance of the UNPROFOR peace-mission as well as the activation of the military operation “The Storm.” While the political discourse in 1995 presented these events as evidence of Croatia finally taking over the responsibility for its own existence, the Croatian National Theatre pointed towards the more or less same concept by staging this play.

While still demonstrating to what extent a historical narrative could be adapted to the ruling political agendas by means of theatrical metaphor, *The Curse* did this with one small but important difference to the other productions presented here. Staged in the context of “The

⁴⁷² The dramatisation was done both by Nino Škrabe and the director of the play, Želimir Mesarić.

⁴⁷³ Josip Križan, “Kletva ostaje vječnom opomenom,” *Vjesnik*, November 25, 1995.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

Storm” interpreted as the victorious ending of the war, the main concept of the play was no longer seen exclusively as instructions for future existence of the nation but was also understood from the position of this everlasting ‘curse’ finally being lifted from the nation itself. This ‘shift’ in the interpretation was best described by one of the reviewers—referring to the main message of the narrative for its actual public, he stated “how, luckily, we have noticed the threatening danger on time and started to act appropriate to attaining the clear and holy goal.”⁴⁷⁶ It would seem that, in 1995, these mythologised historical concepts of eternal suffering of the Croatian nation began to function more as a vague reminiscence or, moreover, the departing point of the now-achieved national autonomy. One could affirm that in 1995, with Croatia successfully ending conflicts and attaining full sovereignty on its pre-war territory, the national myths, as presented both in the dominant socio-political discourse and on national stages, started to serve other objectives.

Conclusion

After the socialist period, it seemed as if the national theatre houses in Croatia returned to their primary roles: “staging traditional repertoire and plays by national dramatists,” “supporting rather than opposing the ruling ideology (or the ideology of the ruling class),” receiving “substantial financial revenues from public budgets,” as well as residing in “respectable buildings representing the economic and political power of the national bourgeoisie.”⁴⁷⁷ Comparing the period of the 1990s to the previous one marked by the socialist rule (1945–1990), the repertoires of national theatres throughout Croatia extensively featured plays with topics from national history. On the one hand, a part of the Croatian theatre community explained this ‘revival’ of national topics and national authors as ‘re-establishing’ a theatrical production previously suppressed and censored from national stages by a dominant “culture imposed from without.”⁴⁷⁸ On the other hand, there were those who, as mentioned, explained the revitalisation of this genre by the historical absence or ‘belatedness’ of national romanticism, now finally receiving the context for its full realisation. However, as I argue, reintroduction of these narratives should be considered from a point of view of their potential function, namely, the potential of their direct and concrete

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Aldo Milohnić, “Performing Identities: National Theatres and Re-construction of Identities,” in Aldo Milohnić and Nada Švob-Đokić, eds., *Cultural Identity Politics in the (Post) Transitional Societies* (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2011), 54.

⁴⁷⁸ Laurence Senelick, “Recovering Repressed Memories Writing Russian Theatre History,” in *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories*, ed. S. E. Wilmer (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 51.

‘political (ab)use’. In other words, when dealing with central national myths promoted in the political discourse of that time, the vast majority of the here-analysed productions were found to only reflect and, moreover, to confirm them. By presenting these examples and the interpretations they have generated, this chapter aimed to validate the premise how theatre often serves as a political and ideological tool to help reconfigure the nation—especially at times of national crisis or wider socio-political turmoil.

As I have indicated throughout the chapter, theatre productions staging national myths on institutional stages responded directly both to the processes of national homogenisation as well as the wartime discourse during the early 1990s. In elaborating this understanding, special emphasis was given to the most represented thematic opus in national theatres during this period, i.e. the Zrinski-Frankopan opus. The reasons for its extensive use and presence should be detected in the fact that it activated most of the national myths as elaborated both by Pål Kolstø and Davor Dukić. More precisely, referring to the claim by Dukić, the Zrinski-Frankopan myth presented the main myth of the “great Croatian historical narrative”⁴⁷⁹ as it included

a continuity of foreign rule since the Middle Ages; the preservation of statehood in the central parts of the country (...); the status of Croatian lands as *ante murale christianitatis*, which is the central point of the anti-Turkish sub-narrative; the participation of Croatian soldiers in wars outside the Croatian lands as a fight for foreign interests; and finally, the assumption about a continuous existence of common interests of Croatian nobility and common people.⁴⁸⁰

In other words, considering what kind of political and social functions these selected plays delivering national myths actually fulfilled, several conclusions are rendered obvious. For instance, probably the most obvious is that most of them confirmed the myth of *antiquitas*, contributing to the general claim over specific national territory. Either by being staged in different regions of Croatia (*Zrinski* in Varaždin; *The Wolves* in Rijeka⁴⁸¹) or by the geographical area these narratives implied (*The Wolves*, *The Curse*), the here-analysed productions often indicated the existence of a historical autonomous Croatian state territorially coinciding with the modern one. By making this ancient statehood ‘visible’, they

⁴⁷⁹ Dukić, “The Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy as a national sacrificial narrative,” 149.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁸¹ Another example adding to this conclusion would be the production *Posljednji Zrinski* [The Last Zrinski] written by Higin Dragošić (1845–1926) staged in the city theatre of Virovitica in 1992 and directed by Snježana Banović. However, the production was not included in my paper due to lack of research material.

in fact reinforced the argument vocalised in the political discourse of that time, in particular the argument which justified the requested state autonomy with the existence of an ancient state form.

In addition, they also engaged in highlighting the *sui generis* national myth by showing the specific and unique ethnic affiliation of the featured heroes, conceptually identical to the notion of ethnically exclusive nationhood advocated by the political elites in the early 1990s (Zrinski and Frankopan in *Zrinski* and *In Wiener-Neustadt*; Krsto Frankopan Brinjski in *The Wolves*). In this way, these narratives in fact confirmed that a certain ethnic category of ‘Croatianhood’ existed throughout national history, pointing towards the origins or reference points of this common descent.

Likewise, the myth of the national martyrism was also being heavily promoted by the staging of these plays—as one could detect, the totality of the here-analysed plays focused on depicting different defeats and failures, hence promoting the perennial victimhood of the nation. Although the discrimination and persecution as presented in these narratives originated from an enemy not identical to the one which was fought in the actuality of their staging, in the context of the ‘homeland war’, this historical enemy was recognised as universal, consequently providing a more general and thus more ‘applicable’ aspect to the concept. It was the destiny of the nation that was put to the foreground of these recounts, simultaneously providing a moral significance to the ongoing war as well. More precisely, by displaying this communal suffering (in this case ranging from 14th in *The Wolves* to the late 17th century in *Zrinski*), these narratives were put to use in justifying the actual conflict, presenting this everlasting sacrifice as some sort of a valid argument for conducting a morally just conflict aimed at attaining state autonomy. As the “experience of victimization and its presence in the collective memory raises group awareness,”⁴⁸² presence of this motive in national theatres during times of defining an exclusive group identity should be taken into analytical consideration.

As I have shown, in presenting these national myths, both the authors of the original texts (Strozzi in *Zrinski*; Stojšavljević in *Katarina Zrinska*; Nehajev in *The Wolves*; Šenoa in *The Curse*) or the authors of their dramatisations (the unknown author in *Zrinski*; Darko Gašparović in *The Wolves*) often resorted to rewriting historical facts according to either their

⁴⁸² Kolstø, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, 21.

own political agendas or those effective in the early 1990s.⁴⁸³ Representing national myths (meaning narratives formed in history) through the medium of theatre actually proved itself to be somewhat ‘ideal’ for the process of revising national history and additionally blurring the difference between historical facts and fiction. To be exact, as these events and stories were scarcely documented in times of their occurrence, their representations offered different possibilities of interpretation. Following Ernest Renan’s assertion of how the process of forgetting or even getting one’s history wrong “are essential factors in the making of a nation,”⁴⁸⁴ one should be concerned with the full social and political potential of theatre production blatantly helping in constructing a specific national identity.

⁴⁸³ For instance, in many renditions of the Zrinski-Frankopan conspiracy story, the conspirators’ alliance with the Turks was often suppressed as it was thought that it “ruins their image as Christian saints.” See Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 20.

⁴⁸⁴ Renan, “What is a Nation?,” 145–146.

3.2. Staging National Culture

As argued in the previous chapters, the Croatian institutional theatres as of 1991 often resorted to staging different events from national history, reinstituting them as national myths and thus providing arguments for attaining an autonomous Croatian state. As I am going to demonstrate throughout this chapter, besides staging selected episodes from national history conforming to the ‘official’ political visions of that time, institutional theatres were also engaged in forging an ethnically consolidated ‘national culture’.⁴⁸⁵ By choosing and representing specific material from the realm of national cultural heritage, the national theatre system of the early 1990s actually secured content and further propelled the nationalistic project of the new Croatian state administrated by the political elites of that time.

As previously discussed in the prelude chapter, in the context of the socialist Yugoslavia after WWII, the nationalist currents of Croatian society argued that this political system actually represented a certain “loss of continuity with the national heritage and a subsequent adoption of foreign values.”⁴⁸⁶ They actually considered Croatian national culture as a historically continuous concept missing its greater political meaning and that, due to the fact that it was ‘suppressed’ by different political systems, it was lacking ‘confirmation’ by and within an autonomous state form.⁴⁸⁷

Seeking additional valuable criteria for constituting an autonomous state, nationalistic movements often resort to proving that a specific culture could be seen as the founding ‘material’, thereby not only defining a nation-state but also providing “a vision of the nation’s identity, history, and destiny.”⁴⁸⁸ In general, nationalisms could be determined as projects aimed at either incorporating people into a state or a unified political body, or breaking from an existing state structure. In both cases, these aims that nationalist projects stand for could

⁴⁸⁵ Throughout this chapter, the extremely polysemic notion of culture will refer to the cultural material of a nation such as language, customs, religion, common law, tradition, material culture, etc.

⁴⁸⁶ John Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45, no. 3 (1999): 399–400.

⁴⁸⁷ The position of the Croatian nationalists towards the existence of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) (1941–1945) is a specific topic that will be discussed throughout this paper. For some, NDH actually represented the first independent Croatian state entity with national culture being considered as one of the pillars of its nationhood. However, due to the controversy of its politics and along with the ideological shift of the socialist context, after 1945 the Croatian nationalists rather timidly argued for NDH to be recognised as an embodiment of the ‘thousand-year-old dream of independence.’ After 1990, however, this argument became more freely expressed, with Tudman himself claiming that “NDH was not only a quisling-form and a ‘fascist crime’, but also an expression of the political aspirations of Croatian people.” Quote from the first plenary meeting of the Croatian Democratic Union in 1990,

https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Govor_Franje_Tu%C4%91mana_na_I._Op%C4%87em_saboru_HDZ-a_24._velja%C4%8De_1990, last accessed July 20, 2019.

⁴⁸⁸ Eric Taylor Woods, “Cultural Nationalism: A review and annotated bibliography,” *Studies on National Movements* 2 (2014): 3.

be realised by resorting to different features of culture, depending on the specific context. In the case of Croatia and its secession from Yugoslavia, a significant number of historians argue that both of these approaches were put into action—the process of national unification focused both on defining a homogenised national culture as well as on administrating the processes of differentiation from other Yugoslav nations.

The political elites in Croatia were very much engaged in defining a national culture, following the argument that the more a certain national culture is defined, the more its right to cultural survival, cultural self-expression, and ultimately national self-determination is justified. This line of argumentation is generally used by nationalistic discourse as it considers the nation-state the final ‘product’ of this process. Put differently, by referring to specific and defined cultural material, nationalism constructs “a sense of shared subjectivity, but it also provides the symbolic content which political nationalists draw upon in their struggles for political and territorial autonomy.”⁴⁸⁹ Defined by the process of national self-determination followed or accompanied by a war, these positions proved to be serving as some sort of guidelines in the various stages of the evolution of the Croatian nation-state. As one can conclude when analysing different manifestations of Croatian nationalism, the argument of a distinctive Croatian culture was very often used by the political elites in the process of arguing for Croatian independence. Namely, different elements of culture conceived on the territory of modern Croatia were ultimately detected and employed as distinctive categories of creating an exclusive national identification by those in power. Following the general nationalistic agenda of presenting the concept of a common and continuous culture as one of the central points of national identity, the nationalistic discourse gaining political power in Croatia in the 1990s also positioned culture as one of the most genuine pillars of constructing a nation by emphasising (and to some extent even forging) its longevity.

In fact, when analysing the significant position that national culture was given in the political discourse of the early 1990s in Croatia leading up to the formation of the national state, one could easily resort to the theoretical context of cultural nationalism, considered by many to present the very heart of the nation-formation process.⁴⁹⁰ Although seen as having different

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁹⁰ See Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

positions in relation to its political version,⁴⁹¹ cultural nationalism focuses on “cultivating the nation” and is set out to “provide a vision of the nation’s identity, history and destiny.”⁴⁹² If approached from this perspective, it is the national culture that is seen as catering a nation with its symbolic content.

Furthermore, as cultural nationalism is projected to “restore a sense of common pride (...) energy and sense of direction”⁴⁹³ (all concepts very much desired by political elites in the times of arising wartime conflicts), some historians and cultural theorists argue that it should also be seen as an “educational movement directed to inner or moral reform,”⁴⁹⁴ addressing the citizens of the nation as its carriers. In the case of Croatia, this ‘didactic’ objective of cultural nationalism is perhaps best proven by the example of the textbooks that deal with the literature curriculum for the seventh and eighth grades as of 1991. This obligatory content, apart from being ‘cleaned’ from any literature in Serbian or other Yugoslav languages, was officially explained as aiming at the “development of homeland feelings and feelings of responsibility to the homeland,” the “acquaintance with Croatian cultural heritage,” and the “development [of] abilities of comparing the Croatian and European cultural heritage.”⁴⁹⁵ Detecting not only the sources but also the mechanisms of ‘imposing’ a specific national culture, as I am going to argue, similar processes will be employed in the sphere of institutional theatre as well.

As already mentioned, parallel to culture becoming more and more ‘nationalised’ with the aim of constituting a national body unified around its ethnic affiliation, it also became progressively exclusive and differentiating. This process, however, needs to be investigated from a more general perspective that includes the whole region—as some historians argue,

the experience shows that the domestic peoples of Balkans, growing up in the narrowed empirical horizon of contemporary national states, were prone to search for symbols of what they’ve experienced to be their own national culture, and were thus ignoring the traditions of the mutual

⁴⁹¹ For Miroslav Hroch or J. Leerssen cultural nationalism actually precedes the political one, while for John Hutchinson it’s an episodic phenomenon that could occur even once the national state is constituted. Considering the fact that the Croatian cultural nationalism already sporadically occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s (as argued in the prelude chapter of this paper), one could claim that the political proclamation of the autonomous Croatia was actually already prepared by nationalistic cultural demands prior to 1990.

⁴⁹² Woods, “Cultural Nationalism,” 1.

⁴⁹³ Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” 399–400.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 399–400.

⁴⁹⁵ Alex J. Bellamy, *The formation of Croatian national identity: A Centuries-old Dream* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 152.

past.”⁴⁹⁶

In Croatia as of 1991, these mutual elements of culture (such as the common Serbo-Croatian language) were politically ignored and reinterpreted in order to serve the nationalistic agenda pushing for an autonomous state. For example, in one of his speeches, the Croatian President Franjo Tuđman (a historian by vocation) expressed how:

Croats belong to a different culture—a different civilisation from the Serbs. Croats are part of Western Europe, part of the Mediterranean tradition. Long before Shakespeare and Moliere, our writers were translated into European languages. The Serbs belong to the East. They are Eastern peoples like the Turks and Albanians. They belong to the Byzantine culture (...) despite similarities in language we cannot be together.⁴⁹⁷

A homogenised cultural identity was very much incited by the national-integrational ideology, with wartime rhetoric providing urgency to its construction as well as generating its ethnic exclusivity. Envisioning the national culture as a conservative, past-oriented narrative aimed at strengthening the national community, the political elites of that time saw “national values attributed to cultural activity as exclusive, as a tool helping to reinforce a difference between Croats and others, creating what one could call an ethnocultural identity.”⁴⁹⁸ As shown in the quote above, this ethnically exclusive identity was simultaneously being defined as Western European, proving its affiliation to “the Greek culture, the Roman legislation, Christianity, the enlightenment, ideas of French Revolution,”⁴⁹⁹ etc.

As I am going to show, all these mentioned strategies could be detected in the general production of the institutional theatres in Croatia of that time. Considering theatre to be “one of the primary medias of national consolidation,”⁵⁰⁰ it comes as no surprise that the Croatian

⁴⁹⁶ Edgar Hösch, Karl Nehring, Holm Sundhaussen, eds., *Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas* (Wien/UTB Stuttgart: Redaktion Konrad Clewing, 2004), 47.

⁴⁹⁷ Franjo Tuđman, as cited in L. J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia's Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition* (Oxford: Westview, 1995), 211.

⁴⁹⁸ Falski and Rawski, “Cultural Politics in (Post)Socialist Croatia: The Question of (Dis)Continuity,” 294.

⁴⁹⁹ Eduard Kale as quoted in Anđelko Milardović, “Hrvatske kulturne zajednice u Europi i njihova uloga u očuvanju hrvatskoga kulturnog i nacionalnog identiteta,” *Migracijske i etničke teme* 8, no. 2 (1992): 167–168. This argument of Croatia belonging to the European cultural context had an additional political aim. More precisely, by emphasizing the ‘Europeanness’ of Croatian national culture, the nationalistic political elites were actually redefined the occurring conflict as European. By doing so, they simultaneously aimed to internationalise the responsibility for the war, as well as to provoke concrete military reaction from abroad.

⁵⁰⁰ Lada Čale Feldman, *Žene, drama i izvedba: između post-socijalizma i postfeminizma* (Beograd: Orion Art, 2015), 7–8.

institutional theatre of that time also contributed to the homogenisation of what was defined as national culture, reaffirming its own importance in securing the newly proposed statehood.

***Teuta*: The Revival of the Illyrian Myth**

As noted, unlike those theatrical examples that staged narratives from national history analysed in the previous chapter, this chapter will be dedicated to those productions that actually do not deal with historical events or figures detected as founding symbols of ‘Croatianhood’ but that are chosen and staged as constitutive segments of the proposed national culture by means of their authorship, their language or their ‘place of origin’. In the following pages, I will hence investigate different correlative levels between these productions and the national-building context of their staging. The starting theatre production serving as the analytical material in tackling the question of national cultural heritage being used as a symbol of a certain communal identity is the tragedy *Teuta*, staged in May of 1991 in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

As it happens, the months prior to and following the premiere of *Teuta* were heavily marked with different political and social events defining and progressively generating the tactics of the ‘new’ national identification referring to ethnic exclusivity, the concepts of mutual territory, language, historical and national myths, as well as cultural heritage. The premiere of the play coincided with public discussions concerning the result of the census carried out in Croatia in March 1991. Demonstrating the prevalent ethnic identification of people living in Croatia as Croats of the Catholic religion speaking the Croatian language,⁵⁰¹ this census in fact propelled and legitimised the ethnic argument in the process of reclaiming national independence, best administered by the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ] and its president, Franjo Tuđman. It was not long after that these results were effectively implemented—just two months after the census and almost simultaneously to the premiere of *Teuta*, on May 19, the referendum considering Croatia’s independence was held.⁵⁰² To no surprise, the outcome of the plebiscite was an overwhelming endorsement of the independence and Croatia’s

⁵⁰¹ Out of 4,784,265 people processed by the census, 78.10% declared themselves as being Croats, 12.16% as Serbs and only 2.21% as Yugoslavs. Furthermore, 76.6% of the total number identified themselves as being of Roman-Catholic religion (in comparison to 11% identifying as Orthodox believers); and 82% specified Croatian language as their mother tongue.

⁵⁰² The referendum question offered two options to its voters: with voting for the first one, Croatia would become a sovereign and independent state free to form an association of sovereign states with other former Yugoslav republics, guaranteeing cultural autonomy and civil rights to Serbs and other minorities in Croatia. With opting for the second one, Croatia would continue to exist as an integral part of Yugoslavia. For more on the referendum question see “Odluka o raspisu referenduma,” *Narodne Novine*, May 2, 1991, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1991_05_21_646.html; last accessed on May 14, 2019.

secession from Yugoslavia (with 93.24% of votes in favour of this option). However, this almost unanimous decision already demonstrated strategies of exclusion—understanding the offered cultural and civic autonomy⁵⁰³ as actually invalidating their status of a constitutive nation in Croatia, 600.000 Serbs living on the territory of the Republic of Croatia decided to boycott the vote. Following the results of both the census and referendum, the structures of power in Croatia not only clearly declared their intention to leave the Yugoslav Federation but also promoted Croats as the only constitutive nation of the country. Laying this groundwork, the overall process of national homogenisation around the ethnic affiliation was set in motion, executed by different modes of governance.

During these months of acute socio-political events, the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb was in the midst of its 1991 season, producing four new plays of a rather ambiguous common denominator. Namely, three of these four plays staged during 1991 were authored by domestic authors (*Teuta* by Dimitrije Demeter, *Ognjište* [The Hearth] by Mile Budak and *Škorpion* [Scorpio] by Josip Kulundžić), with the only foreign text on the repertoire being *Ondine* by Jean Giraudoux, directed by a Romanian guest director, H. Popescu.⁵⁰⁴ While *Teuta* and *The Hearth* featured an open and affirmative position towards the socio-political context promoting specific national narratives (which will be described in detail), *Scorpion* was, to some extent, an anomaly in this setting. Not only was the mentioned play written in 1926 as an expressionist grotesque dealing with the question of personal tragic guilt, but its author, Josip Kulundžić, writing both in Croatian and Serbian idioms, was hence considered both as a Croatian and Serbian author.⁵⁰⁵ These repertory positions in fact only prove to what extent the season of 1991 was ‘transitional’ in its nature⁵⁰⁶—featuring domestic plays dealing both with domestic and foreign topographies, international classics, as well as

⁵⁰³ This implied the right for all the minorities in Croatia to “freely use their language and script” as well as to “freely express their national affiliation.” In the constitution written in December 1990 this claim was directly followed with an explanation how, in the case of war or other outside threat to the state’s autonomy, this rules and regulations could be fully revoked. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1990_12_56_1092.html, last accessed July 20, 2019.

⁵⁰⁴ For the sake of comparison, in 1990, the repertoire of the same theatre house under the same direction consisted of following productions: *Miss Julie* by A. Strindberg, *Troilus and Cressida*, by W. Shakespeare, *A Month in the Country* by Ivan Turgenev, *Redevelopment* by Vaclav Havel, and *The Wedding* by Elias Canetti. Parallely to these plays, few from the previous year stayed on the repertoire as well: *The Wild Duck* by Henrik Ibsen, *Zajednička kupka* [a Common Bath] by Ranko R. Marinković, *Just Between Ourselves* by Alan Ayckbourn, *Closely Watched Trains* by Bogumil Hrabal, and *Devils’ Disciple* by Bernard Shaw.

⁵⁰⁵ Josip Kulundžić (1899–1970) was a playwright, theatre director and theatre theoretician active in Croatia until the end of the 1920s. In 1928, after a confrontation with the newly positioned management, he left the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb and moved to Serbia where he worked as a theatre director and professor until his death.

⁵⁰⁶ In comparison, the repertoire of the same theatre house in 1990 consisted of five premieres, all of them being foreign classics: Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, Turgenev’s *A Month in the Country*, Havel’s *Redevelopment*, and Canetti’s *The Marriage*.

theatrical remnants of mutual Yugoslav history. It thereby precisely reflected the somewhat turbulent processes of forging and defining national identities happening simultaneously to the progressively articulated ethnic tensions. Although the choice of *Teuta* for the 1991 repertoire was not publicly discussed or explained by the theatre's management, the reasons of its staging are most probably to be found in the specific significance of its author. More precisely, as I am going to argue, they can be found in the authors' affiliation to the Illyrian movement, one of the several historical sources considered as a formative origin of the Croatian nationhood.

Choosing to stage this play written by Dimitrije Demeter⁵⁰⁷ in 1844, the direction of the theatre most probably aimed to 'rehabilitate' this important period of national past marked by specific nationalistic articulations in order to connect this historical position to its actual political context, hence inducing a narrative of national cultural continuity. Although the chosen play demonstrated national 'relevance' via the significance of its author and not the story it narrated, as I am going to show, the plot still communicated with the actual context of its staging, further stimulating the processes of communal identification occurring at that time.

As a proliferate theoretician and practitioner of theatre, Dimitrije Demeter was one of the most engaged representatives of the Illyrian movement, a socio-political and cultural movement marking the period between 1830s and 1850s in different south-eastern European countries.⁵⁰⁸ Heavily influenced by similar revivalist and nationalist campaigns occurring throughout Europe, the main activities of those connected with the movement were actually aimed at defining and achieving a pan-Slavic political, cultural, and linguistic unity.

Although originally directing their endeavours towards a general pan-Slavic emancipatory movement opting for what could be defined as a 'proto-Yugoslav' state form (and the 'proto

⁵⁰⁷ Dimitrije or Dimitrija Demeter (1811–1872), Croatian-Greek poet, playwright, librettist and theoretician, one of the most prominent members of the Illyrian movement. Born in Zagreb in a family of rich Greek merchants, he started writing his poetry and drama in Greek but soon switched to writing in different Croatian idioms, opting for the Shtokavian dialect. He was also one of the founders of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, serving as its first dramaturge and director.

⁵⁰⁸ The exact starting point of this movement is hard to establish as it occurred in different times throughout the south-east European region. The initial moment for the Croatian branch of the movement was detected in 1835 when the first issue of the newspapers *Danica Ilirska* in 'Illyrian' language was published. The Croatian segment of the movement is thought to have ended in 1849, parallel to the new laws imposed by the Austrian emperor Franz Josef concerning the political dissidence, and more precisely, the ban of the *Danica Ilirska* newspaper. For more on different sources of the Illyrian concept see Rok Stergar, "Illyrian Autochthonism and the Beginnings of South Slav Nationalisms in the West Balkans," in *Search of Pre-Classical Antiquity: Rediscovering Ancient Peoples in Mediterranean Europe (19th and 20th c.)*, ed. Antonino Francesco (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 96–119.

Serbo-Croatian' language as well), the Illyrians⁵⁰⁹ were, however, ultimately considered with shaping the foundations of a more nationally focused cultural system. With Croatia being under the direct rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time, the Croatian branch of the movement actually advocated for the political emancipation of the national language. In fact, it was during this period that it became used in the state parliament, in print-media, in literature, and in theatre for the first time.

The Illyrian linguists active during the times of the general national uprisings actually settled on a Shtokavian dialect as the basis for the standard language of their conceptual state-structure for several reasons: With their choice generously influenced by the rich Shtokavian literary tradition of Dubrovnik, Shtokavian speakers represented the majority in today's Croatia, with Serbia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina being exclusively Shtokavian. However, this standardised language⁵¹⁰ was considered to cover the "territory and the cultural circle (...) much wider than the Croatian ethnic space,"⁵¹¹ meaning that this '(mis)reinterpretation' of the language (and the movement itself) being exclusively Croatian was carried out sometime later.

During his highly productive career, Dimitrije Demeter authored numerous works substantial to both national theatre theory and practice, and is considered to be the main promotor of the national-programmatic theatre in Croatia—conforming to similar theatre theories and programs of that time occurring throughout Europe, Demeter understood theatre not as an exclusively artistic but, moreover, an educational institution, with its most important objective being the dissemination of the literary language among its audiences.⁵¹²

In line with his patriotic aspirations and concepts of the Illyrian movement, which he earnestly adopted, Demeter aimed at renewing the overall interest in historical drama in verse, himself writing in decasyllabic verse used predominantly in the south and south-eastern European epic poetry. In fact, his written language was heavily influenced by the dialects of the Dubrovnik poets such as Ivan Gundulić (already an established linguistic role-model of the Illyrians),⁵¹³ and it was the Dubrovnik renaissance idiom that Demeter

⁵⁰⁹ The term refers to the promoters of the Illyrian movement and not the members of the Illyrian tribes inhabiting western Balkans.

⁵¹⁰ In line with their pan-Slavic ideals, Illyrians never called this version of language Croatian but rather Illyrian, Slavonic, Bosnian, Serbo-Illyrian, Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian. For more detailed explanation of these categories, see Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010), 267–269.

⁵¹¹ Anita Peti-Stantić, *Jezik naš i/ili njihov: vježbe iz poredbene povijesti južnoslovenskih standardizacijskih procesa* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2008), 149.

⁵¹² Branko Hećimović, "Dimitrija Demeter, kazališni pregalac i književnik," *Croatica: časopis za hrvatski jezik, književnost i kulturu* 5, no. 5 (1973): 108.

⁵¹³ See pages 170–173 of this dissertation.

advocated for in his writings, defining it as the most suitable one for nationally significant artistic practice. Arguing for the use of the Dubrovnik idiom characterised by the Ijekavian variant of the Stokavian dialect, it was Demeter who eventually established the link between the south-Croatian literary heritage and the Illyrian literature, hence fashioning a certain constancy and interdependence.⁵¹⁴ Following this line of argumentation, staging his work in 1991 thus somewhat implied adding a newest chapter to this hypothesis, proving a continuous national cultural practice. One could say that, already on the level of repertory choice, staging *Teuta* in 1991 in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb attributed to the consolidation of a specific national culture, positioning the Illyrian movement and the national language it argued as one of its main features.

In line with the Illyrian preoccupations of its author, *Teuta* actually tells a story of a historical figure of the same name, the fearless and honourable Illyrian queen whose piracy along the Adriatic Coast eventually led to a war with the Roman Empire sometime during the 3rd century BC. In the play, after progressively losing her battles against the prevalent enemy, Teuta falls in love with one of her subordinate army commanders, Dmitar, and decides to marry him and hand him over the rule. After renouncing her governance of the Illyrian state and its peoples to Dmitar, Teuta withdraws to a small castle on the coast where she dedicates herself to her family, caring for her husband and their new-born son. In the same time, an illegitimate son of the deceased Illyrian King Argon claims the throne of Dmitar and challenges him to combat. Dmitar eventually gets killed in this confrontation, and Teuta, upon receiving the news of her husband's death, decides to kill herself and her son by jumping off a cliff.⁵¹⁵

As one can understand, on the level of the dramaturgical narrative, Demeter stayed loyal to his Illyrian political and cultural conceptions, depicting an Illyrian myth as a symbolic 'concentrate' of the pan-Slavic identity. However, although resorting to a historical myth of non-Croatian prevalence,⁵¹⁶ Demeter still left its narrative sufficiently 'open' for different suitable interpretations. For example, in the play, he portrayed the Kingdom of Illyria as a prototype of an ancient homeland, a pastoral paradise inhabited by proud, brave, and open-minded tribes whose success in fighting off the prevalent enemy resided in their unity. Although this motif of unity actually originated in Demeter's own social-political reality in

⁵¹⁴ "The name 'Illyrian' had the advantages of being founded in antiquity, which lent historical weight to their program, but also of being sufficiently vague to be potentially acceptable to any or all of the South Slavic nations." Langston and Peti-Stantić, eds., *Language planning and national identity in Croatia*, 84.

⁵¹⁵ More detailed plot concerning the character of Teuta is being outlined on pages 267–268 of this dissertation.

⁵¹⁶ The actual Illyria of Teuta's time was located in the region of today's Montenegro and Albania.

which the different Slavic and south-eastern European ‘tribes’ were called to engage in unification processes on the political as well as the cultural level, its interpretation was adapted in the nationally exclusive context of its modern staging. As one could presume, the concept of unification gained an entirely new meaning in 1991, with the Croatian President Tuđman, and his political supporters arguing for “the unity of Croatian national identity,”⁵¹⁷ not only as the condition for constituting the national state but also as the condition of winning the war on the horizon.

This congruence of meanings that one historical drama written with specific political and didactic ambitions had from the point of view of its contemporary audiences was also reflected in available media reports that dealt with the production of *Teuta* directed by the experienced and celebrated director Kosta Spaić.⁵¹⁸ On the one hand, the staging of the play was recognised as a “proof of the director’s intention to confirm scenic viability of Demeter’s play,”⁵¹⁹ as well as “the fulfilment of Croatian National Theatre’s program orientation directed towards questioning the Croatian theatre heritage.”⁵²⁰ As one can see, the appropriation and nationalisation of the Illyrian movement already happened by simply naming *Teuta* an essential feature of the Croatian heritage, hence proceeding to define the movement as an important episode in the process of attaining Croatian national independence.

Nevertheless, the symbolic importance of *Teuta* in the times of constructing a certain national identity was also detected in some of its narrative elements. As one critic stated in his review of the 1991 performance, “most of all, *Teuta* evokes the unity and harmony of the nation in its overall struggle for freedom,” and “it’s not losing its actuality as it brings us back, with the help of nostalgic remembrance, to the time of the national awakening, anticipating our actual fears and anxieties.”⁵²¹ Although the play’s narrative has not dealt with the historical territory of Croatia, it seems that this fact was deliberately abstracted in the prevailing commitment to read something concrete from it. The revocation of Illyria, a somewhat utopian *topos* invented by the members of the Illyrian movement and painted as a picture of the lost ancient homeland and paradise inhabited by brave, honourable, and culturally very autonomous

⁵¹⁷ This concept was one of the most important political visions of Franjo Tuđman, as quoted on the web-page dedicated to his legacy: <http://www.tudjman.hr/vizija>, last accessed April 6, 2019.

⁵¹⁸ The archive section in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb does not own a video recording of the production. Due to this fact, the research material used in the case of this production is consisting solely of reviews and few available photographs.

⁵¹⁹ Dubravka Vrgoč, “Teuta i za ovo vrijeme,” *Vjesnik*, May 14, 1991.

⁵²⁰ Sanja Nikčević, “Otkriće nakon 150 godina?,” *Vjesnik*, May 10, 1991.

⁵²¹ Ibid.

people, was seen as accurately answering the almost utopian image of the state-nation as conceived by the Croatian political elites during the early 1990s. This openly conforming position of *Teuta* to its socio-political context was also confirmed by others—for instance, in his review concerning the production from 1991, Boris Senker posits that the production of *Teuta*

wasn't built upon the text and wasn't moving towards it, but it rather bypassed it, proceeding straight to the concepts of Nation, Home, Freedom, Sacrifice, Unity and other 'fundamental ideas' that supposed to be the base for the state, the theatre in this state, as well as every theatre production and every text for that theatre and that state.⁵²²

Moreover, Senker actually considers *Teuta* to be an “emblematic play (...) not because of its superior value but rather because of its averageness, its theatrical and political conformity, its almost perfect spiritual mimicry.”⁵²³ On the same note, upon seeing the production, Vladimir Stojsavljević reasoned that “theatre should be a decoration and not an obligation of the state,”⁵²⁴ evidently identifying *Teuta* as some kind of a docile ‘nod’ to the political power. Concerning the staging itself, both Senker and Stojsavljević detected *Teuta* as a kind of failure in the context of local theatre history. For instance, Senker identified it as a failure of “that kind of theatre that irritates the ruling power as well as all the public and all the participators of the production by constantly repeating annoying questions and by breaking taboos.”⁵²⁵ On the other hand, Stojsavljević saw it not only as a poetic regression when compared to the productions of “the truly European new theatre created in this city”⁵²⁶ but also as a political regression concerning theatre audiences “being brought back to the sheepfolds, treated as sheep that don't know how to bleat.”⁵²⁷ In conclusion, whether the connection between the play and the actuality of its staging provoked affirmative or negative comments, *Teuta* was in both cases identified as an appropriate theatrical symptom of its socio-political context.

⁵²² Boris Senker, “Zapisi iz zamračenog gledališta (XXV),” *Republika* 67, no. 10–11 (1991): 193.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵²⁴ Vladimir Stojsavljević, “Kruna za ljubav, muda za bubrege,” *Globus*, May 17, 1991.

⁵²⁵ Boris Senker, “Zapisi iz zamračenog gledališta (XXV),” 193.

⁵²⁶ Stojsavljević, “Kruna za ljubav, muda za bubrege.”

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

As already mentioned, although the content of *Teuta* itself did not tackle a ‘purely’ national myth,⁵²⁸ the context to which its author belonged was obviously re-appropriated in order to serve the discourse of the exclusively national unification in Croatia from 1991.

Eventually, *Teuta*’s affiliations to the ongoing processes of defining national identification did not end at the above-explained level—as I am going to demonstrate in a separate chapter of this paper, the 1991 staging also generated different relevant symbolic connotations concerning the eponymous figure of the woman-warrior and the wartime actuality of its staging.



Fig. 7: *Teuta*, the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, May 1991. Photo credit: author unknown.

***Hekuba*: Staging the Myth of Dubrovnik**

Just few months after directing the play *Muka Spasitelja našega* [the Torment of Our Saviour] as an open/air spectacle in Split,⁵²⁹ the director Ivica Boban⁵³⁰ engaged in setting up the play *Hekuba* written by the Dubrovnik author Marin Držić in the scope of the Dubrovnik

⁵²⁸ Underlining the priority of presenting topics from national past in a theatre of national significance, this is something that Senker actually regrets: “From all the topics that fed our literature, our theatre, music and arts—for instance, the coronation of King Tomislav, the death of King Zvonimir, the battle of Krbava, the peasant uprising, the fall of Szigeth, the Sisak battle, the conspiracy of Zrinski and Frankopan, the fall of Dubrovnik, the Illyrian movement, the Rakovica uprising—we do not have one relevant dramatic narrative authored by Gaj, Demeter, Vraz, etc.” Boris Senker, “Zapisi iz zamračenog gledališta (XXV),” 193.

⁵²⁹ See pages 290–297 of this dissertation.

⁵³⁰ Born in 1942, Ivica Boban holds a very versatile directorial interest (directing historical dramas, modern texts, etc.) Still, her approach was mainly influenced by theatrical poetics of 1970s such as physical theatre, ritualised and communal theatre, etc. Due to her specific interests, she was never really part of the Croatian theatre ‘mainstream’ and was regarded as one of the most interesting authors and directors of her generation. As of 1980s she directed several ceremonies and celebratory events such as the opening event of the “Dubrovnik Summer Festival” as well as the sport event “Univerzijada” in Zagreb in 1987.

Summer Festival. The named Festival, whose position and significance for the overall Yugoslav cultural system I already explained in the prelude chapter of this paper, was slowly transforming into the most representative national theatre platform, backed by the progressively overt demand to attain national independence. In addition, due to the fact that the wider Dubrovnik region became the setting of some of the most deadly wartime clashes of late 1991, the Festival gained further relevance in the years that followed, considered and presented not only as the meeting point of Croatian national culture but also as the symbol of Croatian culture resisting the enemy aggression.

The 1991 edition of the Festival actually happened in the atmosphere of first armed conflicts occurring on the territory of Croatia.⁵³¹ In fact, during the month of July of that same year, Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) forces penetrated the eastern Croatian regions of Slavonia and Baranja, distributing their artillery and men around the locations with Serbian minority, preparing and parallelly inciting armed clashes. In the moment of rising armed tensions, the official Croatian Army corps were founded in late June 1991, marking the first official display of the state army forces.⁵³² Parallel to these actions focused on consolidating a war machinery, on June 25, the Republic of Croatia officially declared its independence from Yugoslavia, thus consolidating its national sovereignty as well. This decision, which was based and justified by the results of the Independence Referendum,⁵³³ provoked the further hostile actions of the Yugoslav government, with the Yugoslav Army progressively engaging in armed incidents under the pretext of preserving the territorial and political integrity of Yugoslavia. As for the region of Dubrovnik, the summer of 1991 was still more or less peaceful, with territorial forces of YPA slowly approaching the region and assuming their position on the hills encircling the city.

It was in this setting of a general anticipation of the war and the hasty formation of the national unity that the publication that announced the 1991 edition of the Festival featured an introduction authored by the Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, the new official patron of the manifestation. In this leaflet, he explained the stages of the Festival's transformation, stating how socialist Yugoslavia used and capitalised Dubrovnik, its "world-known beauty (...) and

⁵³¹ The Plitvice incident on March 31, 1991 (one Croatian policeman killed); the Borovo Selo incident on May 2, 1991 (12 Croatian policemen killed).

⁵³² Parallel to the official forces, there were also self-organised and self-armed voluntary military brigades that were engaged in the conflicts, presenting themselves as the 'real defenders of Croatia'. One of these units organised in the wake of the war was called *The Tigers* and featured the controversial official Ustashe salutation "Za dom spremni!" [For home(land)–ready!] as their main motto and visual symbol.

⁵³³ Out of 83.56% of the general population that voted in the referendum, 94.24% voted in favour of Croatia's independence.

the richness of its cultural and historical heritage”⁵³⁴ as “its most shiny display window.”⁵³⁵ Even though Tuđman recognised that socialist Yugoslavia did, however, value Dubrovnik as its most respected cultural manifestation, he denounced the hidden objectives behind this approach, stating how “Dubrovnik’s reputation [in Yugoslavia] was mostly serving as an affirmation of the system, which in practice, negated every identity except the unnatural construction of its own identity.”⁵³⁶ In his own words, he saw “the ‘Croatianhood’ of Dubrovnik [being] neglected for decades in a known perfidious way, presented as the meaningless Yugoslavism”⁵³⁷ and was thus replaced or overwritten in an act of political manipulation.

He also pointed out the numerous attempts of “Serbian appropriation of Dubrovnik”⁵³⁸ by referring to the arguments of several Serbian linguists and historians defining Dubrovnik as a constitutive part of the Serbian cultural territory,⁵³⁹ hence simultaneously defining ‘the enemy’. Tuđman’s written introduction to the 1991 edition of the Festival ended with an exalted interpretation of the “fresh beginning”⁵⁴⁰ of the manifestation in a city that, in the new political constellation, was seen as “finally”⁵⁴¹ being freed of its role to “legitimise a forged identity,”⁵⁴² testifying on “that freedom in which the universal values of its historical and actual survival legitimises its Croatianhood and belonging to the Western-European civilisation.”⁵⁴³ In other words, Dubrovnik and, more precisely, its cultural heritage, were given a new ‘imprint’ of national significance, a process that was seen as bearing not only local but also—propelled by the narratives of the wartime threat depicted as being of ‘eastern’ provenance—overall Western European significance as well.

It was in this kind of setting marked by the reaffirmation of a certain cultural identity built on the specific significance of Dubrovnik’s cultural heritage that the production of *Hekuba* took place in the summer of 1991. The play itself was actually an adaptation of the same

⁵³⁴ Suad Ahmetović, “Deseteljeća prešućivanog hrvatstva,” *Vjesnik*, August 19, 1991.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Many of these arguments focus on the language that was spoken in Dubrovnik (the Ijekavian variant of Shtokavian dialect) but also in the region of eastern Herzegovina, historically populated by inhabitants of Orthodox religious affiliation. The question of the linguistical ‘appropriation’ of Dubrovnik’s literary heritage is still very much present: for instance, the 2011 edition of the publication *Ten Centuries of Serbian Literature* published by “Matica Srpska” in Belgrade [the Serbian Cultural Foundation] included the works of Dubrovnik authors such as Marin Držić or Ivan Gundulić. For more detailed account see Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History* (London: SAQI, 2006), 84.

⁵⁴⁰ Ahmetović, “Deseteljeća prešućivanog hrvatstva.”

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ahmetović, “Deseteljeća prešućivanog hrvatstva.”

production staged by Boban in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 1982 which, due to its popularity among Festival audiences, stayed on its repertoire for the following four seasons.⁵⁴⁴ Although one can only speculate about the poetic guidelines of its conception or its reception due to the lack of material documenting this original production, Boban herself presented partial clues on her directorial approach to the text, stating how “back then, the play was born out of my personal inspiration based on the sadness of my mother caused by my father disappearance at Bleiburg,⁵⁴⁵ then from the scenes of the massacre in Beirut, etc.”⁵⁴⁶ In other words, already back then, Boban clearly oriented the play towards commenting on different socio-political conditions—as I will demonstrate in the following pages, its ‘resurrected’ 1991 version was also conceived in direct communication with its wartime reality. Just as was the case in *Teuta*, regardless of the fact that its dramaturgical plot did not depict events from the national history, its historical justification and significance for the body of national culture was, however, detected elsewhere.

Hekuba, the first tragedy written in Croatian idiom by the Dubrovnik author Marin Držić in 1558, was in fact his adapted version of the eponymous play by Euripides or, more likely, of its Italian translation authored by Držić’s contemporary, Lodovico Dolce. Being the only tragedy in his opus, the play itself was supposedly staged in Dubrovnik in 1559 but was banned shortly thereafter by the city government, allegedly because it featured criticism towards the Dubrovnik authorities.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ Unfortunately, as the video material or other documentation concerning the 1982 production is not available, I have not been able to engage in the detailed comparison between the two.

⁵⁴⁵ Bleiburg, a small town in today’s Austria, marks the place where the British Army handed over some 20,000 prisoners of war to the Yugoslav partisan forces in May 1945. Considered as war criminals by the Communist government, many of these prisoners were executed on their way back to Yugoslavia, but the exact number of those killed in the following marches is still a subject of ideological dispute. During socialism, the story of Bleiburg was interpreted as a justified act of revenge towards the fascist occupiers and collaborators, while, simultaneously, for Croatian nationalists it became a symbol of the cruelty of the Yugoslav government towards the Croatian nation in general. As of 1991, Bleiburg and its aftermath (known by its other name of “the Way of Cross”) regained its importance for the narrative constructing the story of Croatian sacrifice during the socialist times. This redefinition of the event was fixated by the Croatian government holding its first official commemoration event there in 1995, initiating a tradition that sparks controversies until today. For more see Lavinia Stan, Nadya Nedelsky, eds., *Post-Communist Transitional Justice: Lessons from Twenty-Five Years of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 195; <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/08/austrian-church-bans-mass-at-bleiburg-commemoration/>, last accessed April 2, 2019.

⁵⁴⁶ Sanja Nikčević, “Držićeva ‘Hekuba’,” *Večernji List*, October 9, 1992.

⁵⁴⁷ The debate whether Držić’s critique inscribed in *Hekuba* aimed at his contemporaries or was more or less imported from the original material still lingers in the sphere of national theatre historiography. For an accurate and dense analysis of this debate, see Irena Bratičević and Ivan Lupić, “Držićeva Hekuba između izvedbe i knjige,” *Colloquia Maruliana* 22, no. 22 (2013).

In his vision of this narrative interpreted as a sort of “tragedy of power,”⁵⁴⁸ Držić follows the Euripides story of Hecuba, the wife of the last Trojan King Priam. After losing her children, friends, and homeland in a war and becoming a captive of the Greeks, she engages in a revengeful campaign against her adversaries. The play is structured in five acts, opening with the prologue delivered by Polydorus’ shadow, announcing the main dramatic plots.

Polydorus, Hecuba’s son, was killed by the Thracian King Polymestor for the gold that Polydorus’ father and Hecuba’s husband Priam left in his care. When finding out that her daughter Polyxena is destined to be sacrificed to Achilles, the God of War, Hecuba rigorously opposes this practice, denouncing it as barbaric, and offers her own life *in lieu* of her daughter’s. Presented as a protective mother, the main motivation of Hecuba’s character is situated in her will to preserve her closest family. However, after Polyxena’s death on the altar and the discovery that her son was in fact killed by King Polydorus, Hecuba decides to take revenge. She lures Polymestor and his sons to the tent of captive Trojan women and, with their help, blinds the king and kills his sons. The tragedy ends with the confrontation of Hecuba and Agamemnon, the Mycenaean king who imprisoned her in the first place, to whom she successfully justifies her crimes.

The most important differences between Držić’s and Dolce’s versions of the story were found in the two inserted segments constructed as a direct address to the potential public of the play and were thought to be added following its initial censorship by the Dubrovnik government. Both featured group characters (Satires and Nereids) and appeared at the end of the acts as a conclusion of the presented narrative.

Just as its literary models, Držić’s *Hekuba* also reveals the concept of revenge as its dramatical core. Although a Trojan queen, Hecuba seems to fully execute this political role only when deciding to avenge the killings of her children—portrayed as a defender of her family who transforms into a defender of her enslaved people, this shift from her private to her public ‘function’ represents the most dramatic element of the play. Furthermore, Hecuba’s revenge for her children is seen as a legitimate and official act of justice, thus introducing the concept of the ‘righteous vengeance’ which could have serious connotations in the actual times of an upcoming war. Hecuba’s transformation from the lamenting and suffering entity to a fierce and revengeful actant coincided with the transformative characteristics of the year in which it was performed, initiating some telling recognition in the

⁵⁴⁸ Slobodan Prosperov Novak, *Planeta Držić: Držić i rukopis vlasti* (CEKADE, Zagreb: 1984), 134.

way the new Croatian state started to engage in warfare.⁵⁴⁹ In addition, historical national hatred between peoples of the western Balkans almost always included narratives of revenge, reflecting Tom Gallagher's interpretation of the acts of violence as acts of revenge for historical injustices emphasised or generated by nationalist ideologies.⁵⁵⁰ During the wars in Yugoslavia, the revenge discourse was a very occurring element of nationalistic hate speech, used by all sides in the conflict.⁵⁵¹ This is why one should not disregard the potential contextual meaning that the staging of *Hekuba* could have had for its audiences. This focus on the concept of the revenge was, to some extent, confirmed by the main actress playing the role of Hecuba, Doris Šarić-Kukuljica, when expressing her own understanding of the play as some sort of a reproduction of the fixed reality in which "suffering creates only further suffering, how evil gives birth to evil,"⁵⁵² concluding that this only reflects that "we are still in this closed circle out of which in this moment, I see no exit."⁵⁵³

Analysing in detail the available video material of the production, one could detect several ways in which it was directed towards its own actuality, one of which will be further discussed in one of the following chapters. However, besides this relational potential of the narrative itself, one of the most visible references to the actuality could be detected in the visual elements of the staging, namely in the stylised uniforms of Greek soldiers created for the Dubrovnik performance—being olive-green, the costumes made reference to the official YPA soldier uniforms worn at that time. Vesting the brutal Greek army in these costumes could only additionally reaffirm the positions of the 'good' and the 'evil' in the arising conflict, depicting but also morally interpreting the actual situation of the summer of 1991. This connection to the actual context was detected by the reviewers as well, claiming how "Ivica Boban goes through these pages, and almost forcibly, compares them with the daily

⁵⁴⁹ Or to put it more simply, although the wartime activities of Croatian Army were described as being defensive and liberative (focused on the defence of the territorial integrity of the Croatia), this defence was also justified by different narratives of revenge extending to the time before the 20th century. For more on this see Doris Gödl, "Challenging the Past: Serbian and Croatian Aggressor-Victim Narratives," *International Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2007): 43–57.

⁵⁵⁰ Tom Gallagher, *The Balkans After the Cold War. From Tyranny to Tragedy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 109.

⁵⁵¹ For example, Serbian media propaganda often justified the war against Croatia as a revenge for crimes manifested over Serbian population during the WWII; Croatian arguments for fighting the enemy were seen as revenge for 50 years of suppression of 'Croatianhood' allegedly administrated by Serbs; both Bosnian Serbs and Croats explained their warmongering activities as a revenge for living under 'Muslim yolk' for more than four centuries; etc.

⁵⁵² Suad Ahmetović, "Hekuba našeg doba," n.d.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., n.d.

pages of the tragedy that hangs over our homeland. The compliance between theatre and life is being confirmed in its most painful point.”⁵⁵⁴



Fig. 8: a photo-caption from the video recording of *Hekuba*, July 1991, Dubrovnik Summer Festival

Several months after the premiere in Dubrovnik and parallel to the first concrete war activities occurring in this city, the production travelled to Zagreb where, in October 1991, it was performed in a context that was found to be “largely corresponding to the events on the stage.”⁵⁵⁵ This correspondence sort of added a new interpretation to *Hekuba*, recognising that “until now [it] carried an announcement; then a picture of events happening in our country, and from now on, it will also carry a commentary.”⁵⁵⁶

Responsibility and Engagement: The Open Letter

However, the production of 1991 was further ascribed to its reality in other, somehow ‘extra-performative’ ways. For instance, the premiere itself was officially dedicated to the Croatian victims of the first armed incidents arising throughout the country, with incomes from the sold tickets going to a relief fund. But the most concrete attachment of the production to its wartime in fact occurred after each performance, with one member of the production ensemble reading an open letter authored by the collective itself. The choice to jointly create and sign the text of the proclamation corresponded to the arising importance of the communal ‘national’ homogeneity in that time—in this way, the collective ‘we’ of the ensemble seemed

⁵⁵⁴ Jagoda Martinčević, “Aktualna Hekuba,” *Vjesnik*, July 30, 1991.

⁵⁵⁵ Nikčević, “Držićeva ‘Hekuba’.”

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

to appropriately symbolise the national body in question. Although addressing the theatre audiences of the production, this letter was directed at the international theatre community, which was asked to engage in ending the arising conflicts throughout Croatia.

Analysing the available video material, one could see that the reading of this open letter happened right after the performance, using the existing scenography as the setting, with performers still in their full make-up and costumes. The ensemble, positioned in an embracing half-circle facing the audience, was joined by the director Boban and those working ‘behind the scenes’, some of whom placed lit candles on the ground in front of the ensemble in mournful silence. In the case of the performance captured on the above-mentioned video recording, the letter was read by Anja Šovagović, an actress playing Polyxena, still dressed in white robes covered in red blood stains. The choice of Šovagović delivering the text could have been random,⁵⁵⁷ however, bearing in mind that Polyxena symbolised an innocent victim in the original play, this selection obviously added some new interpretations to the material she read.

The letter opens up with the ensemble explaining the actuality of this production, stating how “our *Hekuba* of 1991 is a view into an open wound” and is depicting “a world in which the innocent suffer, and the children do not have a future.”⁵⁵⁸ The statement then continues with the description of the current situation in Croatia and its impact on theatre-making, explaining how “the word from the stage is deafened by the noise of the airplanes” and how the “view is contaminated by the images of the insanity in which the life itself is being killed.” In other words, the explanation of the arising conflict is depicted in more or less universal categories of life and death, with those who are ‘killing life’ and abating theatre message not being named. In addition, the ensemble directly addresses all those who are “not listening to the sounds of war while rehearsing plays and staging your dreams,” begging them for their “help in words.” This plea was distributed “in the name of humanity, civilisation, and the sense in which all believe,” obviously appealing to the artistic solidarity among those who “play the same tragedies and dramas in different languages, but with the same thoughts in our minds and feelings in our hearts.” Finally, the letter also emphasised the significance of Dubrovnik

⁵⁵⁷ The information on who read this letter during other performances could not be extracted from the available research material.

⁵⁵⁸ Upon mentioning the children, the camera actually zooms in on several child actors quietly playing in the sand in front of the ceremonial circle composed by the ensemble. In this manner, the more or less abstract children with no future are given real bodies and faces, making this segment of the call for peace more relatable. All quotes (in my translation) are from the video recording of the Dubrovnik performance staged in July 1991. This material was consulted during a private viewing on the premises of the Croatian National Television on May 3, 2019.

as a symbol of resistance and “a lighthouse to all those souls in search of freedom and truth,” ending with the call to the international theatre community to “add your voices to ours—for art, for existence, for life.”

As one could understand, by delivering this extra-performative material, what was a theatrical set only minutes ago was now transformed into a political platform, with performers being promoted to engaged political agents. In other words, this event, albeit retroactively, actually provided new interpretations to the dramatic narrative itself, rendering this historical material relevant to the present of its staging. Moreover, by attaching it to the specific theatrical material and to a specific location, it enabled audiences to ultimately consider Dubrovnik as one of the most important spaces of ‘Croatianhood,’⁵⁵⁹ with Držić as one of the most passionate advocates of the Croatian national agenda.

Although invoking generally affirmative and morally universal categories of peace, life, and existence, in this letter, the national theatrical community presented itself as the vocal defender of these values. On the other hand, it simultaneously defined this unnamed enemy as being morally corrupt, representing violence, extermination, insanity, death, etc. Vocalised in times of armed conflicts and tragic incidents executed both by the Serbian separatist formations, the YPA, as well as by paramilitary Croatian forces throughout Croatia,⁵⁶⁰ this type of delimitation delivered by the ensemble needs to be examined from a wider contextual perspective. Arguing for the humanist and pacifist approach to the arising conflicts could also conceal the call for direct and concrete acts of responsibility of the national theatre community confronted with a war. While the letter argued for “the human existence” as the ultimate motive for ensemble’s ‘activist’ engagement, the question is how universal and comprehensive this concept was to the ensemble; namely, were the ethnic minorities living in Croatia also included in this category in need of defending? Although the definitional

⁵⁵⁹ When opening the Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 1993, the president of Croatian government, Nikica Valentić, declared how “these ancient Dubrovnik city walls testify on the centuries of historical struggle of the Croatian people for their freedom and their state. These same walls are witnesses of many events and much blood that our people shed for their country.” Suad Ahmetović, “Branit ćemo naše svetinje,” *Vjesnik*, (n.d.).

⁵⁶⁰ The first incidents of Serb civilians being killed or imprisoned in Croatia occurred throughout the spring and summer of 1991, especially in the city of Vukovar. As of spring 1991, member of the Croatian Democratic Union and secretary of local defence unit, Tomislav Merčep, started to engage in liquidation of Serb locals in and around Vukovar, with some 86 to 125 Serb civilians gone missing. Croatian media reported on these crimes and the wider Croatian public was informed about these controversial wartime activities. Just several weeks before the battle of Vukovar, Merčep was transferred to Zagreb where he gained a post in the Croatian Ministry of Internal Affairs. However, he actually started to serve as a leader of a paramilitary organisation focused on expelling and killing ethnic Serbs from Croatia. One of the most violent examples of Merčep’s activities was the case of killing the Serb family Zec in the vicinity of Zagreb. Under the overt pressure of the Amnesty International, the Croatian Court sentenced Merčep to five and a half years in prison in May 2016. However, he was not sentenced for the crimes he executed or commanded in 1990 and 1991, but for the crimes over Serbs in Pakračka Dolina during 1993.

‘vagueness’ of the enemy, as described in the open letter, does not help us in answering these and similar questions, it still indicates the ways in which theatrical systems could be used for daily political and, moreover, wartime purposes.

Finally, by reading this public letter, the ensemble not only highlighted its own moral motives in the case of a soaring conflict but also showed in what way it considered the international theatre community as ‘objective judges’ in this matter. However, as the text was read in Croatian and had no additional translation, one could postulate that the message was not so much addressed to the international, but rather to the more ‘local’ theatre community—those not hearing “the sounds of war” could have easily been their colleagues from other parts of Yugoslavia choosing not to condemn the ongoing acts of ethnic hatred, or they could as well be those domestic authors, theatre professionals, or members of the public not openly engaged in denouncing what the ensemble depicted as an endangerment of “art, existence, life.” In conclusion, regardless of the intention, by adding this public address, Boban’s *Hekuba* was presented to transmit an anti-war message directly from its originally historical position, hence not only establishing its significance for the myth of cultural continuity but also stamping it with a specific ethnic and national affiliation.



Fig. 9 & 10: Anja Šovagović reading the open letter after the performance of *Hekuba* in Dubrovnik; the ensemble of the play by reading. Photo captions from the video recording of *Hekuba*, July 1991, Dubrovnik.

Osman: Staging the Cultural Continuity

As with other productions analysed in this chapter, the direct relevance of the next production to the period of consolidating national identity in Croatia was detected outside the territorial position of its dramatic narrative. Yet again tackling a story not dealing with events or persons from national history, the significance of the play *Osman* was to be found in its authorship, as well as the specific cultural values it generated in the scope of the early 1990s.

Premiering in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb on October 6, 1992, this production actually went on to be defined as the most representative example of the ‘new’ national culture, as well as “a programmatic example of appropriation of heritage on the grounds of which modern Croatian literature will be build.”⁵⁶¹

The socio-political context of the premiere was marked by rapid political consolidation of a newly founded state, with most of the war activities on the territory of Croatia ending in early 1992 by a UN administered ceasefire.⁵⁶² Elaborate diplomatic activities resulted in the EU Commission to recognise Croatia as an independent state in January 1992, and in May, the Republic of Croatia became a full member of the United Nations. However, sporadic battles were still fought throughout the year, most predominately in the south of the country and around Dubrovnik, which was still surrounded by the YPA forces.

More importantly, as of April 1992, the first conflicts between members of Croatian and Bosniak entities on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina were launched, followed by the more and more articulated demand for an independent Croatian enclave in Bosnia.⁵⁶³

Although a general Croat-Bosniak alliance was formed at the beginning of the Yugoslav conflict (mostly due to the fact that both states ‘shared’ the enemy), over time, there were notable breakdowns of the union due to rising tensions, lack of mutual trust, and differences in national political objectives. Throughout May and June 1992, the local armed incidents in Bosnia and Herzegovina intensified, resulting in casualties on both sides of the conflict, with the Croatian Defence Council taking over some 20% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On July 3, 1992, the Croatian Republic of Herceg-Bosnia declared its secession from the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and proclaimed its independence as a political, cultural, economic, and territorial entity. Its proclamation was heavily fuelled by Franjo Tuđman and the Croatian political government of that time, arguing for the “spiritual and territorial integration of the Croatian national being”⁵⁶⁴ and the unofficial separation of Bosnia and Herzegovina into three ethnic states (Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian).

⁵⁶¹ Antun Pavešković, “Gundulićev Osman kao antropološki problem,” *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Dubrovniku*, no. 42 (2004): 101.

⁵⁶² The first lasting ceasefire was agreed on January 2, 1992 in Sarajevo. Even though the YPA forces began to withdraw from Croatia, one third of the country in fact stayed under control of Yugoslav and Serbian military forces.

⁵⁶³ The conflict occurred between the Croatian Defence Council [HVO] composed by the Bosnian Croats on the one, and the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the other side.

⁵⁶⁴ Franjo Tuđman, as quoted in Ivo Goldstein, “Zašto mislim da obljetnicu osnutka Herceg-Bosne nipošto ne treba slaviti,” <https://www.jutarnji.hr/globus/Globus-komentari/za-globus-pise-ivo-goldstein-zasto-smatram-da-obljetnicu-osnutka-herceg-bosne-niposto-ne-treba-slaviti/7871766/>, last accessed March 26, 2019.

In conclusion, 1992 was the year heavily marked not only by the shifting of the war activities to the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina but also with further processes of consolidation and homogenisation of the Croatian state, national identity, and culture. It was in the above described context and backed by the freshly appointed management of the Zagreb Croatian National Theatre that *Osman*—a play based on an epic poem by the Dubrovnik poet Ivan Gundulić written in 1622—was staged.

Even before it reached the main stage of the central theatre house in Croatia, its premiere was heavily mediatised and announced as a major event in the overall national cultural history.

The same reports also presented elaborated accounts from the rehearsals that lasted more than four months as well as detailed discussions concerning the overall costs of the play, etc.

Apart from this, the event was also seen as an ‘identity card’ of the new theatre’s leadership, with both Georgij Paro (the director of the theatre as well as of the play itself) and Jakov Sedlar (the director of the drama department) introducing this production as a pivotal example of the new and official repertory policy of the theatre house. By declaring how *Osman* is “not only one of the key works of Croatian literature but also an epic poem with which we became a part of world literature and culture,”⁵⁶⁵ Sedlar evidently aimed to link this national cultural production to the overall realm of the Western-European cultural heritage, an argument which coincided with political efforts towards the international recognition of the state.⁵⁶⁶

In addition, by producing the play in a mutual engagement of both Split and Zagreb National Theatres, Sedlar expressed his directorial ambition to position the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb as a central meeting point for all other national theatres in the country, explaining how “we need to be one theatre in four cities—Croatia’s spiritual space must become unique.”⁵⁶⁷ It was exactly this work on defining and unifying the “spiritual space” that was featured in the main plan and program of his presidency over the national theatre, detectable in almost all activities of the institution. For instance, “not wanting to financially burden the country in a war,”⁵⁶⁸ Sedlar enabled direct financing of the productions by private companies

⁵⁶⁵ “Jeftin ‘Osman’, skupi tračevi,” *Večernji List*, October 2, 1992.

⁵⁶⁶ As already mentioned, the narrative positioning Croatia as an integral historical part of western European culture was very often featured in the overall political discourse as of 1990. For instance, in his official speech following the international recognition of Croatia’s independence, Franjo Tuđman stated how “by preserving its national and state identity throughout its whole history and despite all evil obstacles, Croatia is now returning to the international community after nine Centuries.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=212&v=wjQTImD_8I0, last accessed April 1, 2019.

⁵⁶⁷ “Jeftin ‘Osman’, skupi tračevi.” According to Sedlar, this is why some productions from Zagreb were set out to be premiered in other Croatian cities such as Pula or Split.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

and individuals, with many of them being members of Croatian emigration. While it had a specific position in the war, which will be further discussed,⁵⁶⁹ the diaspora's role in expanding of the 'Croatian spiritual space' did not end at these sporadic acts of 'patriotic kindness'. As one can learn, the premiere of *Osman* featured the first public appearance of the "Foundation HNK" [Croatian National Theatre Foundation], composed by the "most renowned Croats from all around the world—some 15 of the most successful and known Croats, as well as priests, that were helping and promoting Croatian culture up to that point as well."⁵⁷⁰

While Sedlar was explaining the play's importance by mentioning its contextual 'benefits' for the more general realm of national culture, the director Paro concentrated on describing its significance for the theatre, stating, among other things, how *Osman* "was supposed to be staged 20 years ago (...) when I first fell in love with this work from our literary heritage."⁵⁷¹ By positioning its supposed premiere in the early 1970s, a period marked by national upheaval in the scope of "the Croatian Spring" as well as the suppression of different nationalistic phenomena, Paro additionally determined the epic as a material of specific national significance. As I am going to argue, reiterating the already mentioned sources of national culture, such as the Dubrovnik literature circle and the Croatian segment of the Illyrian movement, *Osman* operated as some sort of an extract of these most important and most reiterated national cultural positions.

The historical epic *Osman*, written by the Dubrovnik poet Ivan Gundulić⁵⁷² sometime between 1621 and his death, recounts the life of the real historical figure, Ottoman Sultan

⁵⁶⁹ Unravelling the exact ways in which this event involved financial help from emigres and returnees, Sedlar depicted how "we manage as we can—just recently, one returnee promised to give us 50 kilos of meat for every premiere that we host, another one promised champagne," "Jeftin 'Osman', skupi tračevi."

⁵⁷⁰ Ilija Letica (Detroit), Svetko Marušić (Cleveland), Anton Kikaš (Toronto), Slavko Soldo (New York) Janko Segarić (Los Angeles), Gracijan Birišić (Sydney), Luka Budak (Sydney), Gojko Nakić (Sydney), Ante Odak (Johannesburg), Josip Vranješ (Melbourne), Miroslav Kovačević (Chicago), Milan Blažeković (Buenos Aires), Jakov Romić (Wiesbaden), Ivo Rojnica (Buenos Aires), Tony Mandić (Los Angeles), Melkior Mašina (Chicago), Tvrtko Musalo (Johannesburg). Although the actual activities of this Foundation are not detectable in available research material, considering Sedlar's previous connections with Croatian diaspora, one can presume that the Foundation acted as an organisational framework for executing guest performances of the Croatian National Theatre productions in respective overseas communities.

⁵⁷¹ Jakša Fiamengo, "Predstava za 'dobru publiku'," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, October 6, 1992.

⁵⁷² Ivan Gundulić (1589–1638) was the most prominent baroque poet and author of some of the most significant literary works written in Croatian language. An aristocrat, originating from Dubrovnik, he was also a diplomat and the official of the Dubrovnik Republic. Writing in Shtokavian dialect considered a Serbian dialect by the majority of Serbian linguists, he was equally (and still is) one of the most important figures of both Croatian and Serbian national cultures.

Osman II, in twenty cantos, two of which were never found.⁵⁷³ Interestingly enough, the events depicted in the epic took place several years prior to Gundulić's conception of the story, thus proving his ambitions of writing a work that would comment and interpret his direct reality. Throughout its very elaborated and complex narrative, the poem follows Osman's life from his violent seizure of power, the defeat of the Turkish army by the Polish forces under Wladyslaw at the battle of Chocim in 1621, the Janissary revolt aimed at his dethroning, all the way to his execution in Constantinople.

In over 10,000 verses of the epic, Gundulić supplemented the factual version of Osman's trajectory with different non-historical narratives, romanticised adaptations of actual accounts, as well as highly allegorical segments. For instance, the battle of Chocim was depicted as being won by the Poles, although in reality it was a draw; Osman was presented as a loyal ruler defending his great Vizier Dilaver against his rebellious armies, although in reality he sacrificed him; the chronology of some of the historical events was heavily modified, and so on.⁵⁷⁴

Alongside this 'historical' narrative, the epic featured a romantic plot, focusing on parallel stories that follow the destinies of three invented female characters, Krunoslava, Sokolica, and Sunčanica—first being a Polish warrior on a mission to liberate her fiancé Korevski who was captured and imprisoned in Constantinople; the second also being a warrior desperately in love with her Sultan; the third one being a Slavic slave brought to the Sultan's harem.⁵⁷⁵

Besides the historical and romantical thematical layer, the epic featured an eschatological aspect as well,⁵⁷⁶ best presented in the 13th canto introducing the hell as the locus of the

⁵⁷³ It is generally believed that the Dubrovnik government, dependant on its trade activities with the Ottoman empire, suppressed these two cantos that were allegedly violently anti-Turkish out of consideration for the Sultan, the protector and one of the most important economic partners of the Dubrovnik Republic. Still, some researchers do not agree with this, claiming for instance that, "if the city fathers have been afraid of Turkish reprisals, they would have destroyed the whole epic, not just the two cantos in question." See Zdenko Zlatar, "Slavic Epics: Gundulić's Osman and Mažuranić's Death of Smail-Aga Čengić," in *The Epic in History*, eds. Lola Sharon Davidson et al. (Sydney: Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1994), 197.

⁵⁷⁴ For more on the historical events concerning the battle of Chocim and the rule of Osman II, see J. Shaw Stanford, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey Vol.1 Empire of Ghazis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 191–192; Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Robin Beuchat, "Osman II ou les infortunes de la Majesté: portrait d'un sultan 'corrompu'," *Études de lettres* 12, no. 3–4 (2015).

⁵⁷⁵ The character of a brave female warrior is a "typically romantic figure copied from the *Jerusalem Delivered* by Torquato Tasso, an epic poem that was initial model for *Osman* according to several different historical research." See Pavao Pavličić, "Kozmološki aspekti Osmana," in *Hrvatski književni barok*, ed. Dunja Fališevac (Zagreb: Zavod za znanost o književnosti, 1991), 213. For more on the relationship between *Osman* and *Jerusalem Delivered* in the context of the European epic tradition see Zdenko Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic. Gundulić's 'Osman'* (New York/Washington: Peter Lang, 1995), 115–139.

⁵⁷⁶ Prosperov Novak, Slobodan: *Zlatno doba: Marulić—Držić—Gundulić* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2002), 171–173.

dramatic action, describing its setting and inhabitants in detail. The ruler of this Inferno, the “Prince of Hell,”⁵⁷⁷ resentfully comments on the outcome of the battle of Chocim, arguing how his “forces of hell,” represented by the Turkish army, were defeated by the Polish army backed up by the “forces of good.” Fearing for the future of Islam, the Satan eventually calls on the devil’s forces to fight back the united forces of Christianity, and the canto finishes off with apocalyptic visions of a hellish army taking over the sky above Constantinople.

Most of the available research identifies the focal topic of the epic as “the issue that would obsess most of Slavdom for the next three centuries: the liberation of the Balkan Slavs from the Turkish yoke.”⁵⁷⁸ Analysing the political situation of his own time and place, Gundulić was seen as wanting to write some kind of a poetic political analysis and a proclamation, “singing of the prospect of the future unity of Slavs”⁵⁷⁹ against the Turks. Thus, the main moral of the epic is considered to be situated at its very end, with the narrator of the story expressing his undeniable condemnation of Turkish conquests and the Ottoman empire, “not only on the account of its oppression of his fellow South Slavs” but also “on the account of its oppression of Christian religion.”⁵⁸⁰ More precisely, Gundulić obviously saw the Ottoman Empire as not only “unjust” but also as “evil,” representing tyranny “over men’s bodies, (...) [and] also over their Souls.”⁵⁸¹

To the same effect as Islam and its political manifestations were depicted as evil, the Poles as the representatives of the league of Christian nations under the guidance of the Polish prince Wladyslaw were given not only affirmative political traits but also traits of moral goodness. Still, while Osman was portrayed as a complex individual, Wladyslaw, “an instrument of God in history,”⁵⁸² was not depicted as “a human because [he] had to be kept above human frailties [and] could not afford to be seen having any defects, only ‘perfections’.”⁵⁸³ As some researchers argue, Gundulić did not apply this simplified dichotomy, shaping the religions and its representatives as either ‘good’ or ‘evil’ throughout the epic’s narrative in its totality—some sort of a distortion of the ‘Good vs. Evil’ generalisation was best detected in

⁵⁷⁷ “Strašnodržac” [the holder of the horrible] in original. <http://www.rastko.rs/rastko/delo/10062>, last accessed March 22, 2019.

⁵⁷⁸ Zlatar, “Slavic Epics: Gundulić’s Osman and Mazuranic’s Death of Smail-Aga Cengic,” 194.

⁵⁷⁹ Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic. Gundulić’s ‘Osman’*, 145.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁵⁸¹ “And thou... o Ottoman Tyranny/Which without justice and cause/In order to expand thy empire with sword/Hast never had any fear of God...” Zdenko Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic. Gundulić’s ‘Osman’*, 348. Gundulić actually detects the negative aspects of Islam in its invention of a man (Muhammed) who wanted to be equal to God. Furthermore, he interprets it as a fatalistic religion due to the fact that, unlike the Christian religion, it relies on the Sword and not Love.

⁵⁸² Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic. Gundulić’s ‘Osman’*, 143.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 143.

the presentation of the main protagonist, Osman, who was portrayed, quite sympathetically, as a noble and brave warrior wanting nothing more but to restore the glory of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁸⁴ However, regardless of how the main protagonist or, more precisely, this “*tragic figure*”⁵⁸⁵ was conceived by Gundulić himself, Dunja Fališevac considers his depiction as a proud ruler bearing clearly negative connotations. Namely, she argues that his pride should, in this case, be considered in its excessive form, as arrogance—which, according to the Christian moral values of the narrator himself, is actually thought to be a mortal sin and thus needs to be punished.⁵⁸⁶

Still, the epic does not end with condemning this individual sin of arrogance but rather with condemning the source or the cause of this sin, Islam, as such. The portrayal of Osman as the representative of Islam, depicted in its theatrical version in 1992, the year of growing tensions and armed conflicts between Croats and Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina, certainly activated compelling connotations.

The History of *Osman*

Before I engage in a detailed analysis of the mentioned production, I find it important to mention the significance of *Osman* and its author throughout the national history in order to establish additional referential points and to further open the research field. Although several versions of rewritten manuscripts of Gundulić’s *Osman* were found across Europe until the beginning of the 19th century, the first edition of the epic was published in Dubrovnik as late as 1826. Nevertheless, it was only in the decades that followed this publication, heavily marked by the Illyrian movement, that Gundulić’s work gained much concrete socio-political significance—parallel to their pan-Slavic agenda, the prominent Illyrians saw Gundulić as the symbol of this Slavic national and cultural unity, celebrating him as the representative of Illyrianism before Illyrianism, and “the greatest poet of the South Slavs.”⁵⁸⁷

Gundulić’s relevance for the Illyrians extended beyond him being their mere inspiration. First, he originated from Dubrovnik, recognised as the ‘Illyrian Athens’, the cradle of this

⁵⁸⁴ This sort of sympathy that Gundulić manifests towards Osman was explained by some as a result of bringing the story of the ruler in its dramatic complexity, while some identified it as “the expression of poet’s humanism” or “an ideology of a Dubrovnik aristocrat defending legitimate power.” For more see Dunja Fališevac, *Kralj od pjesnika* (Mozaik knjiga, Zagreb: 2005), 623.

⁵⁸⁵ Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic. Gundulić’s ‘Osman’*, 142.

⁵⁸⁶ “Human arrogance is such/And is so debased/That it sets Mortal Man/As equal to God.” Ibid., 346.

⁵⁸⁷ Zlatar, “Slavic Epics: Gundulić’s *Osman* and Mazuranic’s *Death of Smail-Aga Cengic*,” 198.

unified south-Slavic culture and the mythical place of political and cultural resistance.⁵⁸⁸ Moreover, Gundulić wrote in the Shtokavian dialect, the same one that Illyrians were arguing for to become the ‘standardised’ version of the communal Illyrian or Serbo-Croatian language. Furthermore, in 1844, the cultural organisation *Matica Ilirska* invited authors in Croatia to write the two missing cantos of *Osman*. Following Gundulić’s language and poetics, the most successful appendix was found to be authored by Ivan Mažuranić (1814–1890), a Croatian poet, politician, lawyer, and a linguist dedicated to the standardisation of the Illyrian language. Mažuranić’s cantos no.14 and no.15 were added to Gundulić’s epic in the next print of *Osman*, and have since then been considered an integral part of the work itself. The here-analysed theatre production from 1992 included both added cantos in its final stage version.

All these different interpretations of the Illyrian movement and its place in forming a national culture, as I am going to show, resonated within the political situation of Croatia in 1991 as well. Even as the notion of Slavic unity advocated by Illyrians was replaced with a more exclusive Croatian orientation, the ‘popularity’ of *Osman* in these different contexts testified not so much on the universality of its message, as it did to the ways in which a certain political system could appropriate and adapt it to its specific objectives.

One of the most telling examples of this appropriation of different historical narratives seen as important for constructing a certain national culture is the one concerning the ceremonial curtain of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, used in the case of the *Osman* premiere in 1992. This curtain titled “The Croatian National Revival,” authored by the prominent Croatian painter Vlaho Bukovac in 1896, features a group of prominent Illyrians⁵⁸⁹ lining up in front of Gundulić, who awaits them sitting on his throne, surrounded by the hovering muses.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁸ “Dubrovnik still stands free/With its old crown, its promise kept/Between the Lion and the Dragon.” As quoted in Zlatar, *The Slavic Epic. Gundulić’s ‘Osman’*, 1.

⁵⁸⁹ Ljudevit Gaj, Antun Mihanović, Janko Drašković, Dimitrije Demeter, Antun Mažuranić, Mirko Bogović, Stanko Vraz, Sidonija Erdödy Rubido, Ivan Kukuljević, Pavao Štoos, Petar Preradović, Antun Nemčić, Vatroslav Lisinski, Branimir Livadić, Ljudevit Vukotinović, Dragutin Rakovac, etc.

⁵⁹⁰ For Tatjana Jukić, considering the theatre curtain as a “departing point for the psychoanalysis of the theatrical visuality,” the mentioned curtain thus represents “the psychoanalytical departing point of the Croatian theatre of the 20th Century. See Tatjana Jukić, “Ilirizam i tumačenje snova: Gundulići Vlaho Bukovca,” in *Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti, Zbornik radova XIV. Romantizam-ilirizam-preporod*, eds. Cvijeta Pavlović et al. (Split and Zagreb: Književni krug Split, Odsjek za komparativnu književnost Filozofskog Fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2012), 312.

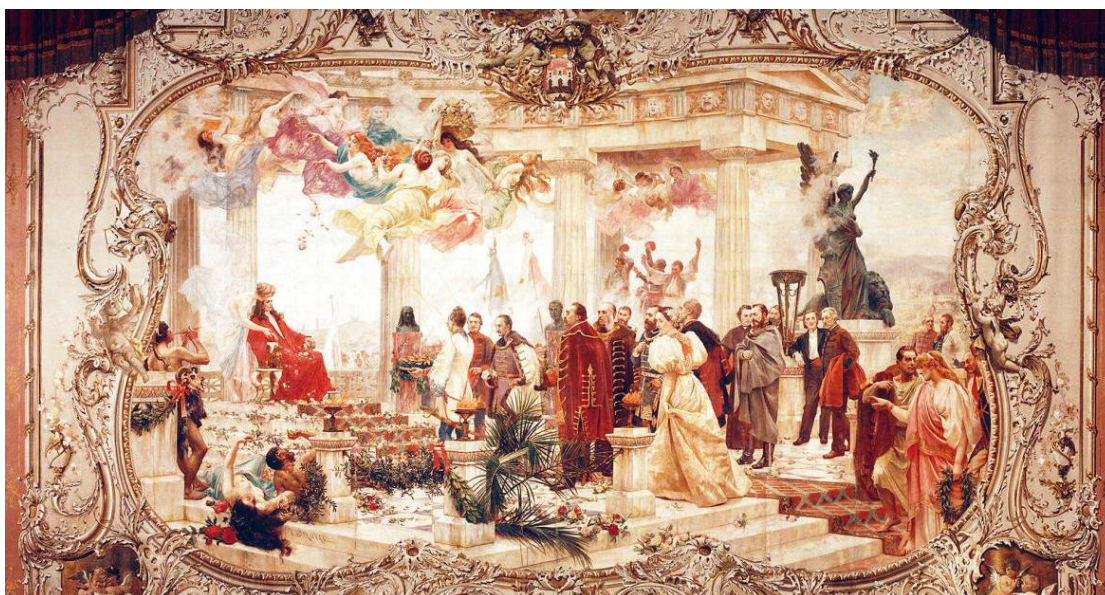


Fig. 11: “The Croatian National Revival,” ceremonial curtain, Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. Photo credit: author unknown.

Being considered as the “constitutive image of the Croatian cultural history”⁵⁹¹ bringing together representatives of cultural life in Croatia factually centuries apart, the curtain, in its origin, still commemorated a pan-Slavic movement, with its members being portrayed as faithful descendants or, moreover, ‘contemporaries’ of Gundulić himself. By displaying the curtain at the opening of *Osman*—a production announced as the pivotal cultural event of the newly established state—the theatre management evidently appropriated and ‘remodelled’ its main message to its own agendas. Once again, this pan-Slavic movement, which was initiated as “not so much a predecessor of Croat nationalism, but rather of Yugoslavism,”⁵⁹² was simply narrowed down to an exclusive national position. In line with other rather manipulative processes of unification manifesting on all the levels of political and social life, *Osman* was intended to demonstrate the longevity and the continuity of a national culture, thus contributing to the narrative of its autochthony.

Interestingly, a similar (mis)treatment of the Illyrian pan-Slavic ideas had been employed once before on the same theatre stage, namely during the WWII and the existence of the Nazi puppet state, the Independent State of Croatia [NDH]. In fact, the Illyrian authors were often staged in the National Theatre in Zagreb between 1941 and 1945,⁵⁹³ with the mentioned curtain being often used for similar motives as well.⁵⁹⁴ This kind of approach towards the

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 311.

⁵⁹² Marie-Janine Calic, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2010), 45.

⁵⁹³ *Dubravka* by Gundulić was staged both in 1941 and 1944.

⁵⁹⁴ See Snježana Banović, *Država i njezino kazalište* (Zagreb: Profil, 2012), 210.

Illyrian movement actually reflected the ways in which different ideological systems were prone to selectively adopt those concepts of the movement that contained applicable arguments to the rising Croatian nationalism. In other words, although originally not conceptualised as a vehicle for Croatian nationalism *per se*, through different methods of manipulation and altered interpretations, the idea of the Illyrian movement being one of the defining stages of ‘Croatianhood’ was similarly presented in the context of two different political setups: one being openly fascist, the other one being formally democratic. Nevertheless, this fact was never commented on in the case of the 1992 production. As will be explained in the following chapter, during the early 1990s, the political elites in Croatia officially disapproved of the historical episode of the NDH state. However, they still did not manifest a firm and transparent condemnation of its political heritage, implementing what Ramet calls a “selective reinterpretation.”⁵⁹⁵ Functioning and conditioned by this setting, the general theatre community of the early 1990s also avoided to offer a more general historical overview of (mis)use of both Gundulić’s oeuvre and Illyrian movement, probably out of fear of ‘compromising’ the national significance of the production.

Osman in 1992: Performing the Nation

In any case, according to the director Georgij Paro, prior to 1992, the epic *Osman* was never staged because of its complicated structure that was not intended for a theatre stage.⁵⁹⁶ Due to the elaborated and dense narrative of the original epic imbued with several parallel stories, locations, and more than 30 characters, Paro’s theatrical version was firstly shortened in length—out of 20 cantos (along with the added cantos no. 14 and no. 15 authored by Ivan Mažuranić), it was reported that only 15 stayed in the final version, still undergoing considerable shortening.⁵⁹⁷ Despite these significant reductions, the play was still produced as a four-hour spectacle performed by all three ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb—the drama, the ballet, and the opera.⁵⁹⁸ In effect, this concept was carried out with

⁵⁹⁵ Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-building and Legitimation, 1918–2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 390.

⁵⁹⁶ However, this was only partly true as an adapted version was staged in the scope of Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 1990. The mentioned production was in fact a puppet play for adults, produced by the Zagreb Puppet Theatre and directed by Joško Juvančić. Unfortunately, not much is known about the production itself nor the decision concerning its staging.

⁵⁹⁷ The information explaining why these cantos were actually kept in the final production is missing from the available research material.

⁵⁹⁸ Up to that point, in the overall history of the Croatian National Theatre, this was actually the first production that included all three ensembles performing simultaneously on the main stage. However, similar projects did sporadically occur but mostly in form of different commemorative programs such were anniversary celebrations or other ceremonial occasions.

the narrative of the epic being alternatively delivered either by singers, by dancers, or by actors, with the main protagonists having three different ‘versions’ of their stage persona. These genre switches were done mostly between different scenes but would also occur during a certain scene itself, or in some cases they would even overlap (for instance, a dramatic dialogue simultaneously accompanied by music or a ballet, etc.). The musical score of predominately modern-experimental characteristics with some hints of folklore was especially created by the composer Igor Kuljerić for the occasion. The musical segments of the production mainly served to intensify the dramatic plot, an approach certainly best confirmed in the case of the 13th canto delivering the scene from hell.⁵⁹⁹

According to the available research material, such are the photographs and the video recording of the performance,⁶⁰⁰ the costumes of the play were considerably lavishing and featured recognisable ethnic elements used especially in the case of the Turkish characters. The most impressive costume intervention were the dresses and suits with attached horse heads, allowing a very effective transformation of the protagonists into cavalrymen. The moral dichotomy between the Poles (Catholics) and the Turks (Muslim) was also indicated by costumes, especially by the choice of colours—while the Turks were dressed in red or black, the Poles were clothed in white or gold.

As for the stage sets, during the greater part of the play, the stage featured no added specific setting in order to give room to the luxurious costumes and the elaborated stage props (flying horses, a levitating shell/cradle, etc.) Nonetheless, several scenes featured painted sets placed in the off wings of the stage as a reference to the baroque stage scenography, depicting large-scale horse-figures, ships, historical paintings, or city panoramas.

⁵⁹⁹ This scene opens with the stage in pitch-black and musical background featuring drums and horns in crescendo. Along with the dramatic musical score, the Devil and his ‘army’ appear on the stage. While the Devil sings the lyrics from the epic in a much threatening manner, the men in his escort dance a group-dance specific for eastern Balkan called *kolo* [the circle], relating to the apocalyptic chaos depicted in the narrative.

⁶⁰⁰ Acquired by the courtesy of the archival department of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

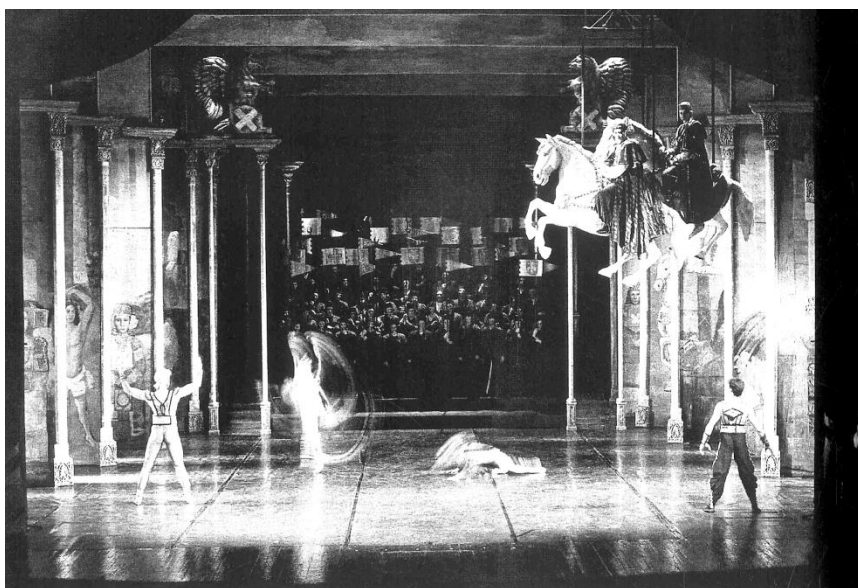


Fig. 12: A scene from *Osman*, Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, 1992. Photo credit: author unknown.

In any case, this kind of specific production model that combined several forms of art was seen as the announcement of a new performative genre, one that the director Paro, in the absence of a more appropriate definition, himself described as a “special case,”⁶⁰¹ while some critics defined it as “opera-oratorium,”⁶⁰² “moderate ballet,”⁶⁰³ or even a “scenic fresco.”⁶⁰⁴ Others justified this kind of multi-genre approach to the original text as following “more and more visible aspirations towards the overall spectacularisation”⁶⁰⁵ detected in the Croatian institutional theatre system as of 1991. In this regard, the production itself sort of followed the poetics and politics of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept, referring to the synthesis of arts famously advocated by Richard Wagner who found this form of music drama presenting folk tales as an ideal artistic expression of the ‘German spirit’. Although Wagner conceived this term in line with the specifics of German romanticism, it was famously used and adapted by many different cultural as well as political projects during the 19th and 20th centuries and, most notably, by the German National Socialism—the unity and synthesis associated with the term actually “offered ideological currency as a metaphor for national community.”⁶⁰⁶ In other words, the nationalistic ideologies saw this form of the ‘total artwork’ as an ideal model of national unity and synergy that they were also representing and arguing for. In the context

⁶⁰¹ Jakša Fiamengo, “Predstava za ‘dobru publiku’,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, October 6, 1992.

⁶⁰² Boris B. Hrovat, “‘Osman’ nalik našem svijetu,” *Novi Vjesnik*, October 8, 1992.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933–1945* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 142.

of Croatia in 1992, one could at least suspect that the similar connotations were set in action—in the described times of intense and, in some cases, even compulsory homogenisation around the concept of ‘Croatianhood’, it seemed as if this amalgamated version of *Osman* most appropriately reflected the ideological and political processes in action. In evoking such processes, even the ensemble of the play itself was to be found representable of the whole collective, with one critic stating how “the play is the product of the collectiveness of theatre workers, meaning the expression of pain, consciousness, roots and pride of this human community we call Croatian people.”⁶⁰⁷

This assumption of the play not only reflecting but, moreover, ‘producing’ the communal identity was confirmed by the fact that the premiere itself was attended by then-president of the state, Franjo Tuđman, numerous politicians, as well as the diplomatic corps. As the production opened with the Croatian national anthem played by the theatre’s orchestra and sung by all those in the audience as well as the large ensemble standing in front of the mentioned ceremonial curtain portraying the Illyrians bowing to Gundulić, it seemed as what was enacted that night in the theatre was not only *Osman* as one of the main symbols of national culture but the national culture and, ultimately, the nation itself. Moreover, it was as if the premiere initiated two parallel activities—on the one hand, it allowed the political elite to publicly manifest its authority and national affiliation, on the other hand, it sort of reaffirmed the national theatre as a space to present the ruling vision of ‘Croatianhood’.

Returning to the production, one notices that special directorial attention was given to the role of the Narrator, the main commentator, deliverer, and hence the creator of the dramatic narrative. Although his role and dramatic function could be justified as a somewhat logical consequence of adapting an epic narrative into a play, the choice of having this character more or less constantly present on the stage during the performance could also be understood as a way of further emphasising his personal significance, rendering his authority visible throughout the performance. In addition to being almost constantly present on the stage (by delivering text, physically directing the *mise-en-scene*, lurking behind the sets, etc.), the Narrator is actually the only protagonist that does not have his opera or ballet version and is hence ‘fixed’ to the medium of the spoken word.

When explaining his vision of this omnipresent character, the director, Paro, referring to his previous theatre poetics, tried to introduce him as an element of “some type of epic theatre

⁶⁰⁷ Nedjeljko Fabio, “Maestro Georgij i meštar Mirsad,” *Novi Vjesnik*, September 9, 1992.

inspired by Brecht,”⁶⁰⁸ with a purpose to “face us with ourselves here and today.”⁶⁰⁹ One could agree that, just like in the case of Brecht’s epic plays, the epic narrator delivering the plot is also established as an omniscient authority, powerfully drawing the audience into his perspective of the world. However, I would argue that, unlike with Brecht, the storyteller / narrator in *Osman* is already ‘given’ in the epic itself, created in the framework of classical literary cannon of that time, and is hence not additionally invented to fulfil his ‘Brechtian’ function of making the theatrical process visible. Furthermore, as Dunja Fališevac argues, there are considerable shifts in the position from which the Narrator sees the events that he is recounting, which makes his monolithic interpretation quite impossible.⁶¹⁰

Although Paro did not further explain his vision of this character, it could be argued that he somewhat wanted to make him resemble Gundulić himself, hinting at this in various manners, the most obvious one being the narrator’s costume consisting of a long red cloak similar to the one Gundulić can be seen wearing in existing historical portraits, as well as on the ceremonial curtain by Bukovac. In addition, this interpretation was mentioned in few of the reviews, proving that this equation, whether executed purposely or not, still managed to occur in the reception field.⁶¹¹ Although Fališevac claims that the distinction between the real author and the narrator of *Osman* should be established and maintained, some critics and historians such as Antun Pavašković saw *Osman*’s narrator as “the incarnation of the author (...) discretely introduced to the material as one of the characters.”⁶¹² Whatever Paro’s original directorial intention was, the role of the Narrator in the play could have been understood as translating Gundulić’s presence and authority into the actuality of the staging, thus further generating his significance for the times of national upheaval.

Besides locating *Osman*’s national significance in its authorship, the narrative of the play was still seen as commenting on the wartime actuality of its staging. For instance, Paro himself argued how the main message of the scenic adaptation of the epic was to be found in Gundulić’s claim of how “every power of evil or injustice is not eternal and that the power of

⁶⁰⁸ Georgij Paro, “Režirajući Osmana,” *Krležini dani u Osijeku: Hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište i hrvatska povijest* (Osijek/Zagreb: Zavod za književnost i teatrologiju HAZU, 1992), 219.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ More precisely, Fališevac notes that “this all-knowing and versatile narrator present in the first 13 cantos (...) withdraws from his position of epic chronicler of the epic tradition which sees the events from a time distance, and becomes a commentator as well as an engaged participant of the plot which is occurring in the same time from which the narrator acts.” Dunja Fališevac, *Kaliopin vrt* (Split: Književni krug, 1997), 153.

⁶¹¹ “Introducing the role of the narrator/commentator (Gundulić himself).” Hrovat, “Osman nalik našem svijetu.”

⁶¹² Antun Pavašković, “Gundulićev Osman kao antropološki problem,” *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Dubrovniku*, no. 42 (2004): 109.

good, (...) always wins.”⁶¹³ Although acknowledging this claim as a “metaphysical rather than a political explanation,”⁶¹⁴ he continues by saying that it was exactly this type of metaphysical perspective that “works healingly on the way we feel in our reality today.”⁶¹⁵ In other words, not only did the eschatological level of the epic stayed untouched, it somehow gained priority as its overall objective, especially in relation towards its contemporary audiences.

In their artistic approach to the original epic, the authors of the production seemed to willingly underline the main motives of the work already mentioned, with Paro claiming how “the play talks about the clash of the worlds, [...] this relationship between the Turks and the Poles opens up fields of associations.”⁶¹⁶ Paro himself recognised the play’s historical narrative that reflected the wartime actuality of its staging in the last verses of the play. Namely, when depicting the chaos generated by the killing of Osman, Gundulić used expressions and visions such were “the blazing of the sabres from everywhere,” “snatching, screaming, rolling and stinging without order,” “torn babies lying on the ground,” as well as “women, people, young, all arguing in bloodshed and shame.”⁶¹⁷ By connecting Gundulić’s historical accusation of Islam with the atrocities of the actual wartime, the authors, more or less consciously, appended a certain characteristic to the image of the enemy, a phenomenon which will occur in the case of many productions of that time.

Contrary to these interpretations of Islam as the source of ‘all evil’, Gundulić portrayed Poles as morally superior Christians—a motif that, in the course of 1992 and the consolidation of a national identity heavily relying on Catholic affiliation, could also be understood as confirming this nationalist agenda. Nevertheless, despite all these possible direct associations, Paro claimed how the main goal of the adaptation was “not insisting on its politisation” but wanting to “simply open up these fields in order to make some contemporary problems visible.”⁶¹⁸ In other words, he claimed that he left the actual connotations of *Osman*’s narrative to be recognised by its contemporary audiences. One such association was described by a critic who claimed how “in these times, we are also living the clash of worlds

⁶¹³ Jakša Fiamengo, “Predstava za ‘dobru publiku’,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, October 6, 1992.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ “Eto odasvud buka posta/Eto se odasvud sablje svijetle/Sve bojnika puno osta/Sve se uzbuni, sve se smete. (...) Bez milosti se i bez reda/Grabi, dere, valja i žeže/Da iz pvoja mala čeda/Rastrgnuti po tleh leže./Žene, ljudi, stari i mladi/Čas, imanja I životi/Sve se otimlje, smuca I vadi/U sili, u krvi, u sramoti.” Quoted from Georgij Paro, “Režirajući Osmana,” 225.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

with the same questions being asked in the atmosphere of war—the question of loyalty, betrayal, determination, cowardness, etc.”⁶¹⁹

Nonetheless, although announced as the most representative theatrical event of the newly established Republic of Croatia, the play received rather negative reviews, focusing mostly on the ‘unsuccessful’ adaptation of the epic for the stage. For instance, Ivica Buljan noticed that the rhetoric of the play was not successfully transformed into scenic action, adding how “the structure of the play is extremely static (...) and the progression towards the dissolution, instead of baroque plethora, is additionally anaemic.”⁶²⁰ Grgičević saw it as merely “sequencing more or less successful ballet and opera acts and dramatic recital with only sporadically reached unity,”⁶²¹ pointing to the problem of understanding the language of the epic itself, something that the authors tried to solve with detailed explanations of the text printed in the handouts for the audiences. Even the ‘elaborated’ scenography featuring lavishing costumes as well as “the flying machinery,”⁶²² where “the vastness of the empire, the cavalry, kings, conquerors, as horses, shells, ships and golden frames, all come down from the ceiling”⁶²³ was seen as unfavourable, “focusing mainly on operettic moments, not even trying to come closer to the baroque and illusionist mechanisms.”⁶²⁴

On the other hand, there were still reviews that interpreted *Osman* in an openly affirmative way, emphasising its somewhat universal significance. For instance, one of the reviewers stated how “in the times of barbaric and all-Serbian war against Europeanness of the Croatian spirit and its state, the production should be celebrated as a result of the solidarity of theatre artists.”⁶²⁵ Another review underlined how, in search for the “the reconciliation between an individual and the humanity,”⁶²⁶ the production managed to attain “the new mutual identity, new level of personal consciousness” as well as to offer “the magical, hymnally ecstatic affiliation to humanity: a humanity contemplatively and ethically purified by the catharsis of beauty.”⁶²⁷ In other words, these critics saw the staging of *Osman* as a very much needed resurrection of a simultaneously national and universal myth, whose appearance only further

⁶¹⁹ Dubravka Vrgoč, “Sraz svjetova,” *Novi Vjesnik*, October 6, 1992.

⁶²⁰ Ivica Buljan, “Prepisivačka anemija,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, October 9, 1992.

⁶²¹ Marija Grgičević, “Bogata slikovitost,” *Večernji List*, October 8, 1992.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ “Osman nalik našem svijetu,” *Novi Vjesnik*, October 8, 1992. This visual excessiveness of the production was not only explained by strict dedication to the baroque aesthetics, but was also announced as a sort of important technical achievement of the Croatian National Theatre on its way to full productional modernisation.

⁶²⁴ Buljan, “Prepisivačka anemija.”

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Fred Došek, “Arhetipske dubine,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, October 9, 1992.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

connected Croatia's cultural heritage to that of Europe or even to the vague and abstract term of 'humanity' in general.

After more than dozen performances at the National Theatre in Zagreb, in late October of 1992, *Osman* was staged in Dubrovnik, which was liberated by the Croatian army forces only several weeks prior. Withstanding a siege for a whole year (and especially after its historic town district placed under UNESCO protection was heavily bombed throughout December of 1991), the position of Dubrovnik as a city-victim became widely mediatised, leading up to concrete international actions. This and other conditions of the ongoing warfare led up to the Sarajevo Meeting which, administered by the UN, established the cease-fire on several frontlines in Croatia, including the Dubrovnik region. Although the agreement demanded for the Yugoslav People Army forces to retreat from Croatian territories in order to enable peaceful negotiations, the YPA battalions encircling Dubrovnik did not fully retreat until July of 1992, with sporadic armed conflicts in the wider city area continuing until October of that year. On October 26, the Croatian army executed a military operation called "The Liberation of Croatian South," pushing the adversaries further to the state border and thus liberating Dubrovnik and its surroundings.

Marking this event, just several weeks later, the Croatian government organised a commemorative program in Dubrovnik consisting of different cultural activities, thus apparently aiming at re-establishing the city's cultural significance. Being celebrated as one of the most valuable cultural products of the Dubrovnik literary heritage, staging of *Osman* in its 'hometown' was considered the pivotal event of this program. However, as it featured a huge ensemble and elaborated sets too complicated for transport, the production was presented in a reduced form—it was shortened to its 'dramatic' version, keeping only the spoken segments of the original piece. This adaptation found some positive response from the critics, who stated how "stripped from choreography and the musical accompaniment, [the production] gained new intensity concentrating in its expression hence emphasizing its meaning."⁶²⁸ By downsizing the "lavish spectacle [to a] suggestive two-hour performance depicting conflicts between two worlds, cultures, religions and civilisations, the production testifies on the tragical destiny of the Turkish emperor, on the passing glory of the world."⁶²⁹ Furthermore, Gundulić's 'home-coming' was also commented on with the statement: "In meeting its greatest poet, Dubrovnik experienced its own freedom."⁶³⁰ In pointing out that a

⁶²⁸ Dubravka Vrgoč, "Gundulić među svojima," *Novi Vjesnik*, October 31, 1992.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

city was to be considered truly free only then when its local authors are freely staged in it, one could again detect the postulates of cultural nationalism arguing for correspondence of the territorial borders and a specific national culture.

Although there were not many reports documenting the Dubrovnik version of the production, we know that the event was marked by a telling incident that shed some additional light on the tense relationship between the national theatre and the political elites of this period. As was reported, the production was in fact planned to be performed two times—once for the public of Dubrovnik and once for the President Franjo Tuđman, alone. This private showing of the play (later explained a result of “a mix-up in protocol,”)⁶³¹ was reportedly obstructed by Tuđman himself, doing “what was only possible: he refused that the actors perform only for him and, to general surprise, invited the actors for a drink.”⁶³² Although the explanation and the origin of this ‘mix-up’ has not been officially resolved up until today, it still testifies about the atmosphere in which this kind of an idea could actually arise, considering Tuđman, this “player-king,”⁶³³ as entitled to a private theatre show of *Osman* in liberated Dubrovnik. As I have exhibited, *Osman*’s interconnectivity to its socio-political actuality illustrates to what extent and in what way a theatre production departing from the cultural significance of its dramatic material could be compliant to the controversial nation-building processes as well as the postulates of wartime reality.

Conclusion

In search for additional aspects of theatre apt for symbolic use in times of national consolidation propelled and followed by armed conflicts, I have argued that the significance of the here-presented performances for the general national project can be found in the specifics of their authorship and/or territorial provenance. In other words, their representative implication was located in the fact that they were authored by figures connected to different settings that were ultimately seen as fundamental for the development of Croatian national culture and, moreover, its nationhood. Staging what one could call different cultural myths (focusing on the national language, the national territory, cultural movements, etc.), one could see that the national theatre in fact provided argumentative material for justifying the demand for national independence.

⁶³¹ Jagoda Martičević, “Tko je zabrljao?,” *Novi Vjesnik*, October 31, 1992.

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Term defining Tuđman as a spectator generating meaning, for more see Čale Feldman, “Within and Beyond Theatre: President Tuđman’s Birthday Celebration at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb,” 153.

As argued, the production of *Teuta* was somewhat identified as an apt theatrical manifestation of the socio-political context in the early 1990s, accurately demonstrating how certain cultural narratives were chosen and identified as bearing specific national significance. More precisely, its staging indicated the ways in which the Croatian theatre community additionally ‘nationalised’ and adapted the heritage and significance of the Illyrian movement, hence echoing similar processes of reinterpretation and historical revisions occurring throughout the entire national cultural system as of the early 1990s. On the other hand, as I have indicated, the production of *Hekuba* (re)activated and further nationalised the cultural myth of Dubrovnik and its literary heritage, hence inscribing its position to the overall process of defining national culture in Croatia. Furthermore, it also brought up the question of how theatre community positioned and expressed itself concerning the arising conflicts, thus tackling the topic of artistic responsibility in times of war.

By introducing the production of *Osman* to the analytical focus of this chapter, I wanted to detect in what way both the Dubrovnik and Illyrian cultural heritage were appropriated and given concrete political relevance in the reality of 1992. In other words, not only did the spectacular staging of *Osman* provide a much-needed argument of national cultural continuity bridging centuries, but, in addition, it also showed in what way this theatre event activated political connotations in line with the ruling ideological agendas. Besides supporting the nationalistic vision of nationhood partly rooted in the argument of the cultural continuity, all three here-analysed productions activated specific concepts and interpretations of ‘Croatianhood’ solicited in the wartime context, such as the concept of national unity (*Teuta*), the concept of righteous vengeance and justified crime (*Hekuba*), or the concept of defining the enemy along Catholic moral principles (*Osman*).

Furthermore, while securing the narrative of the historical national culture, they were also staged or understood as direct interpretations of their actual wartime context. As one could distinguish from the available material, the here-presented productions were all staged in the early years of the conflict, hence reinforcing the belief that this initial wartime phase was marked by a comprehensive definition and construction of the nationhood on all levels of its representation.⁶³⁴ Introducing the mentioned topics to the mainstream national cultural

⁶³⁴ By analysing the productions staged in the Croatian institutional theatres and national festivals as of 1992, domestic theatre material was mostly represented by modern Croatian playwrights such as Miroslav Krleža, Tito Strozzi, Ivo Brešan and Ivan Aralica, or contemporary authors such as Miro Gavran, Nedjeljko Fabrio, Lada Kaštelan, etc. Productions referring to Dubrovnik heritage or the one connected to the Illyrian movement were extremely scarce in the following years, with Marin Držić’s *Tirena* being staged in the scope of Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 1993, and Držić’s *Dundo Maroje* staged in theatre Gavella in Zagreb in 1995.

landscape (and by the power of their national authority), the national theatre system helped to establish these chosen motives as incontestable emblems of the nationhood in the making. By choosing to stage this and not some other theatrical material to present and subsequently ‘produce’ the Croatian national culture, the institutional theatre simultaneously activated various processes of exclusion that were heavily influenced by the ethnic factors of the national identity taking shape in Croatia as of 1991. This exclusion happened not only on the level of the actuality (with, for instance, those not suiting the new homogenised national community being systematically eliminated from it), it was also the national and cultural past that underwent similar processes. As explained, in times of national restructuring, the political and, moreover, the intellectual elites, were dedicated to reproducing and redefining national culture, including cultural heritage. It is in this context of distributing specific “visions of the nation”⁶³⁵ to the community, that, for instance, the Illyrian movement was somewhat ‘conveniently’ reduced and defined as the Croatian national revival; the Croatian language was ‘cleared’ from all pan-Slavic or Yugoslav origins; renaissance authors were presented as advocating for Croatian national independence defined under modern terms, etc. By outlining borders and further nationalising this local culture, the national theatre system provided additional arguments to the ‘Us vs. Them’ discourse of the wartime centred around ethnic affiliation.

In the case of Croatia in the early 1990s, as one could understand, only the cultural heritage connected to specific historical references was considered its ‘true’ construction material. Regardless of the fact to what extent this cultural material was ‘national’ in its conception, in the context of acute nationalism, it was nevertheless defined and used as such. In the conditions generated by such a nationalistic project that equalled the nation and culture (and wanting to prove the longevity of both), the premise on the continuous historical Croatian cultural community was overtly constructed and fabricated.⁶³⁶

It is exactly this process of construction that the examples in this chapter bring to light, discovering in what way the national culture (just like the nation itself) is a construct apt for concrete manipulation when seized by political elites with a nationalistic agenda. The realm of national culture in the early 1990s in Croatia was in fact shaped by different systems and

⁶³⁵ Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” 398.

⁶³⁶ Andreja Zorić posits the nation-building process of ‘Croatianhood’ as a process grounded in a lie, namely a cultural lie. As she explains, “culture of lies is a targeted usage of a cultural code by the minority which does not coincide with the cultural norm and the tradition of the collective,” meaning it dismisses any notion of pluricultural collective experiences. See Andreja Zorić, *Nationsbildung als ‘kulturelle Lüge’* (München: Sagner 2005), 29.

individuals in power dedicated to the execution of national consolidation. But, regardless of this, as I have elaborated, the Croatian national theatre system actively participated in the overall (re)defining of what national culture should be represented by, adding new approaches to these strategies. Staging national culture in the institutional theatres during the named period not only indicated different meanings and repercussion its actualisation could stimulate but also, in a way, further confirmed national theatre system as one of its most active 'generators'.

3.3. Staging the Historical Controversy: Theatre and Ideological Rehabilitation

As I am claiming throughout this paper, the way that the concept of ‘Croatianhood’ upheld by the wartime homogenisation was structured during early 1990s should, to some extent, be considered as not appearing ‘out of nowhere’ but, moreover, as a result of some sort of ‘reconstruction’ or ‘renewal’. And just as the similar narratives featuring demands for national self-determination from history were to be reintroduced by the political discourse of this period, theatre stages also produced ‘repetitions’ of this type, hence (deliberately or not) fashioning arguments of both national and cultural continuity. However, in this process of different renewals taking place in the socio-political as well as the theatrical landscape of the early 1990s, some historical content being used as a constitutive model for this ‘restored’ nationhood implied highly controversial concepts. To be more specific, the most problematic historical reference that the Croatian nationalist political elites started to include when wanting to prove the continuous ambition towards national autonomy was the one referring to the existence of the puppet Nazi state Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (NDH) [Independent State of Croatia], which lasted throughout WWII and which was governed by the so-called Ustashe regime. Cautiously (albeit progressively) acknowledged as a full-fledged format of an independent Croatian national state, the rehabilitation of this historical period penetrated different levels of political as well as cultural mainstream in the early 1990s, with one of its most accurate ‘symptoms’ being the theatre performance analysed hereafter. In addition to being a supplement to the historical rehabilitation of already outlived national concepts just by the fact of its staging, the named production will also be discussed as introducing another symbolic level when considering staging the nation in this period, namely glorifying the Croatian peasantry as the ‘purest’ model of the Croatian nationhood.

The main focus of the chapter will thus be the play *Ognjište* [The Hearth], originally written as a novel by Mile Budak (1889–1945) in 1937, a Croatian writer and politician whose literary oeuvre was almost completely dedicated to describing and presenting the Croatian village as the most natural form of ‘Croatianhood’, in line with ethnonationalist ideologies of his time. However, Budak was more than an author: Moreover, he was known as one of the main architects of the fascist Ustashe regime as well as one of its most active and prominent officers. Considering the fact that after 1945, his work was excluded from official national culture due to its ideological burden, his theatrical and other comeback in 1991 hence carried symptomatic meanings in the framework of both processes defining the national statehood as well as the arising armed conflicts.

In order to allow a more detailed comprehension on the significance of this play staged in 1991 on the central national stage in Croatia, I will engage in a wider contextual analysis dealing with the available historical material, focusing on the ways the NDH project was rehabilitated not only by the political elites but also by the national theatre system of the early 1990s. I will further consider the way the production introduced and reflected the concept of peasantry as the symbol of the nation to the nationalist discourse of the 1990s Croatia, discussing its historical models, national specificities, and general socio-political function. In conclusion, as one of the most important links in reinstituting the NDH political and other legacies was secured by the Croatian emigration, this phenomenon of émigré communities actively preserving and ‘exporting’ nationalism will also be discussed in details. In this light, special focus will be given to the analysis of the extensive international tour of the named production presented to many émigré communities in the early 1990s, hence further tackling the question of how theatrical content helped to activate certain ideological agendas of that time.

‘Flirting with Fascism’: The Controversy of the NDH

As already mentioned, the author of the here-discussed play, Mile Budak, was one of the main ideologues of the Ustashe movement⁶³⁷ and held several essential roles in the NDH government, serving as the state minister of education, religion, and culture (1941), the special envoy in Berlin (1941–1943), as well as the minister of foreign affairs (1943–1945). In addition to many administrative responsibilities he took over during this period, it was he who officially signed the Ustashe regime’s racial laws against Serbs, Jews, and Roma, famously declaring that Ustashe have “three million bullets”⁶³⁸ for the minorities living on the territory of the newly established state entity. In short, Budak openly advocated and executed discriminating policies of the fascist regime, many of which were echoed in his literary oeuvre.

⁶³⁷ Ustashe movement (the Croatian word *ustaša* translates as ‘insurgence’) was actually formed by Ante Pavelić in Italy in 1929, where he fled from the King Aleksandar’s regime. Arguing for Croatia’s separation from the then-time Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Pavelić set up training camps modelled after and funded by the Italian fascist around Italy and Hungary. Mile Budak was actually serving as the chief commander of all Ustashe camps in Italy as of 1935, but returned to Croatia already in 1938, where he was active in publishing of the nationalist newspaper *Croatian Nation*. The Ustashe participated in the assassination of the Yugoslav King Aleksandar in Marseille in 1934, and were instituted by their German and Italian allies to execute power in the Independent State of Croatia in 1941.

⁶³⁸ Richard West, *Tito and the rise and fall of Yugoslavia* (New York: Faber&Faber, 2012), 134.

Artistically representing the fascist Ustashe ideology, its concepts, and symbols, Budak's literary work mostly dealt with positioning the Croatian village as a metaphor of a genuine, ethnically unified nation. Although delivering his elaborated realistic stories about the Croatian village and peasantry exclusively in the form of novels and short stories, one of these titles, namely *The Hearth*, was dramatised and staged in 1941, testifying on the function of disseminating ideological content that the institutional theatre held during this period. This 1941 production was envisaged and later considered to be one of the most representative cultural events of the fascist regime,⁶³⁹ proclaiming the authenticity of the Croatian *Volk* (considered an exclusive ethnic group) and its connection to the soil as the pivotal element of a 'pure' Croatian national identity. Back in 1941, the production of *The Hearth* was actually proclaimed to be "the ideological credo and victorious hymn of the new Croatia"⁶⁴⁰ as well as "a psalm of faith in the freedom and victory of the soul."⁶⁴¹ Interestingly enough, the play found its way to international stages of the NDH's political allies, thus further proving its ideological affiliation: In 1943, the adaptation of the novel was staged in Vienna's Deutsches Volkstheater (today's Volkstheater) directed by Otto Burger,⁶⁴² and its film version was planned in Germany throughout 1944 but was never executed.⁶⁴³

In June 1945, with the Yugoslav army declaring victory over the Ustashe forces in Croatia as well as in all of Yugoslavia, Budak was arrested on his way to flee the country. He was court-martialled by the military court with the highest punishment for his wartime political activities: Death by hanging. In addition, due to the controversy of his political engagements, Budak's literary work was forbidden from being published or disseminated during socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1990), but was, at the same time and for the same exact reasons, highly adorned in the underground Croatian nationalistic circles, especially those forming in the

⁶³⁹ Most prominent theatre actors and other staff members of that time took part in this production, although the ensemble was drastically reduced due to the applied racial laws. As for the significance of the premiere, the official media of that time reported that "the direction of the Croatian State Theatre has spared no cost for the production so that the premiere reaches the highest artistic level, something that this master-piece of Croatian contemporary literature deserves." Magazine *Hrvatski narod*, Zagreb, November 13, 1941, as cited in Banović, *Država i njezino kazalište*, 94.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 237.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 237.

⁶⁴² Paulus Manker, *Spurensuche: Der Theatermann Gustav Manker 1919–1988* (Wien: Amalthea Signum Verlag, Wien 2010), 196.

⁶⁴³ [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herdfeuer_\(Roman\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herdfeuer_(Roman)), last accessed May 14, 2019.

Croatian diaspora.⁶⁴⁴ It was only in the early 1990s that Budak's literary work gradually reappeared in the public sphere, parallel to the dissemination of socialist Yugoslavia, which acted as the main executor of the mentioned prohibition, as well as the gradual appearance of new ideological agendas openly promoting nationalism.

As I will demonstrate in other segments of this paper, the position of post-WWII Croatian nationalists towards the existence and the heritage of the NDH was more or less openly affirmative, as for them, the NDH actually represented the first independent Croatian state entity (after a rudimentary statehood which ended with the loss of the Croatian medieval kingdom in 1102), with national culture being considered as one of the pillars of its nationhood. As this opinion was harshly suppressed during the socialist context in Croatia after 1945, it was not until 1990 and the beginning of Yugoslavia's dissolution that the argumentation of the NDH as the successful embodiment of the 'thousand-year old dream of independence' became more and more publicly vocalised, even from the highest position of political power. However, these statements were still made quite cautiously—for instance, addressing the participants of the first congress of the Croatian Democratic Union in 1990, its president, Franjo Tuđman, famously explained how the "NDH was not only a quisling-form and a 'fascist crime' but also an expression of the historic aspirations of Croatian people to establish their own state."⁶⁴⁵ In other words, the disputed fascist 'nature' of this state was openly denounced, much along the general positions and visions of affiliation to the Western European cultural and political realm, while it was simultaneously recognised as a fully valid expression of national sovereignty.

However, one has to know that this relativisation of the nature of the Ustashe state had its wider political context—as some historians and political scientists argue, the main goal of the newly established nationalist regime of the early 1990s was to "release the descendants of the Ustashe-siding families from their historical legacy, so that they could fit into the national reconciliation project."⁶⁴⁶ More precisely, the rehabilitation of Ustashe regime was part of the 'national reconciliation project', envisaged personally by Tuđman on a similar model used by

⁶⁴⁴ For instance, in 1989, "the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts in diaspora" published 2,000 copies of the selected works of Mile Budak in Croatian language in Germany. The initial plan was to print 26 of his novels in total but when the Croatian branch of the stated institution started to gain more and more power and financial support after 1990, the plan to print Budak's works was transferred to its homeland offices. Another Budak's novel, *The Good Friday*, was published in Toronto in 1989, while his older works were often disseminated, and copied among members of émigré communities.

⁶⁴⁵ Quote from the first plenary meeting of the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ] in 1990, https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Govor_Franje_Tu%C4%91mana_na_I._Op%C4%87em_saboru_HDZ-a_24._velja%C4%8De_1990, last accessed July 20, 2019.

⁶⁴⁶ Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 50–55.

Francisco Franco in Spain⁶⁴⁷ and adopted as a political tool for executing the much desired national homogenisation. Simply put, in his pursuit to homogenise the Croatian national body, rather than opting to glorify one specific political heritage and introducing it as formative for modern ‘Croatianhood’, Tuđman started to equalise anti-fascist and Ustashe political agendas, stating how both of these movements in fact had the same purpose—attaining (or rather maintaining) Croatian national independence.

By delivering this kind of argumentation, Tuđman was actively trying to reconcile those on the left and the right spectrum of the national political system, hence fashioning a unified national body that would firstly vote for his party and then, eventually, fight the war.

Presenting this Partisan-Ustashe assimilation as fundamental to securing national reconciliation, Tuđman “on the one hand nationalised the Croatian Partisans and tamed the Ustashe fascist character in such a way that both factions could be moulded into the concept of national reconciliation (...) [with] these narratives serving to forge an image of Croatian Democratic Union as the all-embracing national movement.”⁶⁴⁸ Although it was the antifascist struggle and not the fascist Ustashe movement that was officially recognised as the foundation of the modern-day Croatia by being introduced in the preamble of the new 1990 constitution, it seems as if the positive outcomes of the Yugoslav Partisan movement were somewhat ‘Croatised’, while all its negative aspects “were ‘de-Croatised’, or (...) ascribed to ‘Serbs’, who were already conceptualised by Tuđman as a historical ‘factor of disorder’”⁶⁴⁹ when concerning the path to attaining national independence. In conclusion, the partisan movement was somewhat forcedly narrowed down to its national denominator and defined as a campaign focused solely on Croatian national independence.

Besides pushing the argument of the equal political aim of both Croatian Partisans and Ustashe, Tuđman’s national reconciliation project was also focused on specifically “forgetting of the past”⁶⁵⁰—reconciling these two political movements and their heritage was done in an attempt to somewhat erase them and move on to establishing the new national state *de novo*.

Notwithstanding the initial projections, what proved itself to be one of the most significant consequences of this reconciliation process was actually the problematic ‘normalisation’ of

⁶⁴⁷ However, some argue that the concept was actually modelled after the “Croatian Spring” movement. See Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, quoted in Ivica Radoš, *Tuđman izbliza: Svjedočenja suradnika i protivnika* (Zagreb: Profil, 2005), 38.

⁶⁴⁸ Stevo Đurašković, “National Identity-building and the ‘Ustasa-nostalgia’ in Croatia: the Past That Will Not Pass,” *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 5 (2016): 776.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 777.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 775.

the Ustashe regime which, unfortunately, lasts up to this day.⁶⁵¹ While there are ongoing academic debates on whether this revisionism of the Ustashe movement was deliberate or just an “unintended outcome of [Tuđman’s] national reconciliation politics,”⁶⁵² the fact still remains that the nationalists and right-wing sympathisers saw this “flirting with fascism”⁶⁵³ executed by the political elites as “a green light for the rehabilitation of the Ustashe, rather than ‘forgetting the past’.”⁶⁵⁴ That is to say, regardless with what aims the political leadership conceived this discourse, it was seen by many as the open call for remodelling and rewriting the national history to their rather dubious ideological likings. In fact, this is exactly what happened with “the return of [Ustashe’s] iconography, chauvinistic rhetoric, and extreme nationalist ideology to the political arena”⁶⁵⁵ as well as to the educational system, public space, commemorative and public rituals, and popular culture.

As for the rehabilitation of Budak himself, the same process slowly took effect in the early 1990s, most prominently with the national publishing house *Matica Hrvatska* reprinting his most renowned work, *The Hearth*. In 1995, the same publisher printed Budak’s selected works, while his short stories and novels entered the official literature curricula of schools in Croatia, thus fixing his position in the freshly ‘renovated’ Croatian literary Pantheon. Simultaneously to rehabilitating him as a proficient chronicler of the Croatian village via publishing his works, he was further ‘normalised’ by being entered into the Croatian public space—namely, from 1995, there were several schools, kindergartens, and streets throughout Croatia that were chosen to carry his name.⁶⁵⁶ Needless to say, none of these acts of rehabilitation were publicly explained, contextualised, or discussed, and Mile Budak somehow managed to stay immune from all the potential consequences of a wider political debate. However, one must say that his rehabilitation as a theatre author was not as successful as one would think when considering its context—after 1991 up until today, neither *The Hearth* nor any of Budak’s other works were staged on institutional theatre stages in

⁶⁵¹ For more on this see “Neo-fascism on the Rise in Croatia, Council of Europe finds,” *Dw.com*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/neo-fascism-on-the-rise-in-croatia-council-of-europe-finds/a-43792245>; last accessed September 23, 2019.

⁶⁵² Vjeran Pavlaković, “Flirting with Fascism: The Ustaša Legacy and Croatian Politics in the 1990s,” in *The Shared History and The Second World War and National Question in ex-Yugoslavia*, ed. Darko Gavrilović (Novi Sad: CHDR, 2008), 125.

⁶⁵³ A term used by Vjeran Pavlaković in *ibid.*, 115–143.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶⁵⁶ The streets named after Mile Budak can still be found in Croatian municipalities of Pakoštane, Lovinac, Pleternica, Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci, Jasenice, Klakar, and Pag. For more see Dragan Grozdanić, “Za preimenovanje nespremni,” *Novosti*, September 13, 2020.

Croatia.⁶⁵⁷ This is probably due to the somewhat ‘outdated’ poetics of his works but also due to the fact that the concept of the village and peasantry was also gradually being abandoned by the socio-political elites in their forging of the ‘Croatianhood’ for reasons which will be explained further.

Croatian National Theatre and the Legacy of the NDH

Starting in 1990, the ‘normalisation’ of Ustashe heritage began to manifest itself quite comprehensively, in different ways, and on different levels of the socio-political and cultural life. One of many such examples concerning the public rehabilitation of the NDH heritage and its cultural production (with a special focus on the state theatre production) was expressed via an article which appeared in the Croatian daily *Večernji List* on September 15, 1991,⁶⁵⁸ taking up more than two whole pages. With the title “Teze i bilješke o kazalištu u NDH” [Thesis and Notes on the Theatre in the NDH],⁶⁵⁹ the article written by the Croatian academic and theatre scholar Tomislav Sabljak was originally published in the much more academically oriented Croatian magazine *Forum* some months prior, hence actually following the premiere of *The Hearth* as some sort of contextual appendix aimed at the wider public. In the mentioned article, Sabljak first gave an overview of “seven decades of different forms of totalitarian systems of government: from the dictatorship of Karađorđević Kingdom (...) to the Bolshevik dictatorship of proletariat.”⁶⁶⁰ Extensively citing Ernst Nolte, a German historian who engaged in equalising fascism and communism, Sabljak’s article opened with a similar approach to these ideological projects but *a priori* aimed at diminishing the negative connotations of the fascist one. In addition to echoing the mentioned Tuđman’s objectives concerning the program of national reconciliation, Sabljak introduced the concept of revenge as a justified cause for doing harm, stating how Nolte sees “the horrors of Auschwitz as the continuation of Gulag (...) and the nationalistic racial extermination as an answer to the class

⁶⁵⁷ Up to this day (November 2019), Budak’s work was sporadically staged, mostly by different amateur theatre groups and collectives.

⁶⁵⁸ *Večernji List* is a rather conservative newspaper, founded in 1959 and based in Zagreb. From 1990 until 1998 it was owned by the Croatian state. With a circulation of some 150,000 copies in 1990, the paper was one of the two most popular dailies in Croatia in those time, the other being *Vjesnik*.

⁶⁵⁹ Tomislav Sabljak, “Teze i bilješke o kazalištu NDH,” *Večernji List*, September 15, 1991. During 1991, a series of articles under title “Is There a Croatian Nazi-Kunst?” appeared in the magazine *Globus* as well, presenting different cultural phenomena of NDH from an allegedly ‘objective’ perspective. However, this content still openly relativised the political and ideological context of the NDH. For more apologetic approaches to the NDH heritage see also Dubravko Jelčić, “Kulturni život u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 27, no. 3 (1995): 522.

⁶⁶⁰ Tomislav Sabljak, “Teze i bilješke o kazalištu NDH,” *Večernji List*, September 15, 1991.

extermination executed by the communists.”⁶⁶¹ In other words, the relativisation of fascist crimes was justified with the narrative of vengeance, a much beloved motif of all nationalist discourses throughout the Balkans.

Furthermore, Sabljak claimed that most of the Croatian people went on to support the anti-fascist struggle during WWII out of a particular misunderstanding of the NDH politics which was fascist, according to him, only because the allies recognised it as such. When describing the culture and theatre in the context of the NDH, Sabljak argued that, rather contradictory, they “managed to survive in very harsh conditions” but were also “developing and prospering.”⁶⁶² He elaborated this by stating how the value of different theatre productions during the NDH government should in fact be detected in their artistic and not in their political elements, commenting how the “NDH has not managed to create neither its type of theatre nor its type of theatre aesthetics,”⁶⁶³ something he inscribes to the “communist theatre”⁶⁶⁴ that followed. He concludes the article by saying that the NDH government actually “created an illusion that its ideology ruled over the culture,” stating that the “strength and the resistance of Croatian culture and theatre against all ideologies (...) occurred throughout the whole of the history.”⁶⁶⁵

Offering a very narrow rewriting of both national and theatre history, which completely ignored the examples of harsh exclusions and other ethnic or racial conditioning occurring in theatre system as well,⁶⁶⁶ Sabljak’s text in fact echoes main referential points in the overall discussion on the normalisation of the NDH legacy, simultaneously adding arguments for denouncing the Croatian institutional theatre as an accomplice to this openly fascist ideology. It was exactly this elaborated and remodelled position concerning the state theatre system and its political potential that served as an argumentative framework for rehabilitating Budak’s work, allowing its ideological symbolism to be contextually downplayed.

The Hearth: The Political Significance

As already mentioned, *The Hearth* premiered in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1941 and was staged some 14 times up until 1942, which, in comparison to other productions of that time, does not mark an extraordinary success. In his apologetic article on theatre and

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Ibid.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ For more on racial politics executed on the level of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb see Banović, *Država i njezino kazalište*, 291–331.

culture during the NDH, Tomislav Sabljak explains that this ‘failure’ of the 1941 production was due to the “double pressure”⁶⁶⁷ that its director Tito Strozzi and its dramaturge Vojmil Rabadan had. Both were aware of “the responsibility of adapting the work of someone who had such an influence on the public and was also a political figure of the highest rank” and the need to “meet the expectations of the public, the stage, the audiences.”⁶⁶⁸ According to Sabljak, another reason for the productions’ flop was that the authors missed to connect it to the reality of its staging—namely, that they missed the chance to stage this narrative framed by WWI as a metaphor of 1941, for example failing to present Anera’s anticipation of her husbands’ return from the WWI battlefield as an “obsession that lies in all women who found themselves on the crossroads both in 1941, as well as in 1991.”⁶⁶⁹ With these and similar arguments, Sabljak evidently brought several historical narratives to the same level of significance, hence further fixating the struggle for the Croatian national independence as an ever-reoccurring process finally arriving to its full realisation.

Following the first impulses of the national uprising in Croatia in the beginning of the 1990s and, arguably, the overall ‘normalisation’ of the Ustashe legacy already explained, the management of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb decided it was time, as they stated in the official media of that time, to bring Budak’s work back to the central stage of Croatian cultural production and, by doing so, to try to rehabilitate him as a prominent author of the Croatian cultural corpus. During a press conference announcing the staging of *The Hearth* in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in March of 1991, the author of the novel’s most recent dramatisation, Pero Budak,⁶⁷⁰ and the director of the play, Jakov Sedlar,⁶⁷¹ explained

⁶⁶⁷ Tomislav Sabljak, “Scensko čitanje Budakova ‘Ognjišta,’” *Vjesnik*, November 26, 1994.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ Pero Budak (1917–2008), actor, dramatist, novelist and poet, also a cousin of the author Mile Budak. The director of the play, Jakov Sedlar, explained that Pero Budak was engaged as a dramaturge on this project “due to his knowledge on the specific dialect of the novel.” Jakov Sedlar, “Nije riječ o dramaturzima općenito,” *Vjesnik*, n.d.

⁶⁷¹ Jakov Sedlar (1952) is a film and theatre director, known as one of the most controversial Croatian authors and cultural officaries. His directorial debut in 1987, a gay-drama *Bent* written by Martin Smerman, rose much debate in the context of socialist Yugoslavia. However, he soon abandoned provocative artistic positions and dedicated himself to producing, staging and directing films and theatre productions in line with the nationalist agenda of the 1990s. Although more active in the field of cinema (the list of his feature films and documentaries is quite extensive), during the 1990s he also had a considerable career in theatre, both as director and a manager of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb as well in Split. The topics of his extremely elaborated artistic opus focused mostly on displaying affirmative concepts of ‘Croatianhood’, dealing with controversial episodes from the national history such is the glorification of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), the rehabilitation of the cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, etc. His most disputed work, provoking harsh discussion to this day, contains film documentaries dealing with ‘alternative’ facts discussing Ustashe crimes. For a more actual debate on Sedlar’s work see <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/10/22/controversial-croatian-filmmaker-made-a-movie-on-centennial-serbian-terror-10-22-2018/>; <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/item/13071-criminal-complaint-filed-against-film-director-jakov-sedlar-due-to-jasenovac-documentary>; last accessed July 29, 2019.

how their only motivation for staging Budak's play was to clear "a certain stigma"⁶⁷² off this author that he carried during 50 years of socialist rule. Sedlar himself commented that the announced production would not offer "too many allusions to the political reality of Croatia," while the actor from the production's ensemble, Tonko Lonza, continuing how "[the production] is deprived of any politics, staged as a superior classic and a cultural gesture for eternity."⁶⁷³ Put differently, Budak's oeuvre was presented as being finally 'liberated' from the socialist dogmatic censorship and was additionally 'cleaned' of any concrete political meaning by being masked behind abstract concepts depicting its general significance for the national culture. The historical significance and circumstances of Budak's life and work were completely omitted from the announcement of the production, hence ignoring the inscribed and highly problematic ideological burden he carried, parallelly redefining him as nothing more than a 'Croatian author'. Although all those involved in the production cautiously steered away from any possible affirmative relationship of this version of *The Hearth* to the Ustashe legacy, one could argue that a small detail could have pointed to this advancement—namely, the premiere was scheduled for April 12, 1991, only two days after the official founding date of the NDH state, hence narrowly escaping its 50th 'jubilee'. Although this was never expressed as a deliberate decision by the management of the theatre, one has to at least suspect that this kind of 'unspoken coincidence' reflected on the overall but still cautious rehabilitation process of the NDH legacy occurring in the early 1990s.

The original novel by the name of *The Hearth* was written in 1937, during Budak's exile in Italy, and contains more than 800 very densely written pages of text. As mentioned, the material was not originally written for stage but was dramatised and staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb both in 1941 and in 1991.⁶⁷⁴ The 1991 version of the adaptation was done by Pero Budak, but further details on the adaptation are unfortunately not available as the video-recording of the production is somewhat tellingly missing from both the theatre archive as well as the archive of the Theatre History Institute in Zagreb. Presuming that the adaptation process implied a shortening of the original novel and regarding the fact that there were no mentions of new parts being written and added to this dramatic version, the following analysis of the production's content will hence focus on the original novel, further

⁶⁷² Nevenka Mikac, "Vrhunska klasika," *Večernji list*, April 9, 1991.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ Budak never intended the text to be staged but in 1941 he did however "checked, corrected and allowed" the adaptation of *the Hearth* written by Vojmil Rabadan for the Croatian National Theatre's performance. As cited in Banović, *Država i njezino kazalište*, 94.

comparing it to the archival material, such as the available media reports, photos, subsequent analysis, etc.

The plot of this tragedy in four acts, as Budak himself defined its genre in the first edition of the novel, is placed in the setting of a small village in the remote Croatian region of Lika, sometime before, during, and after WWI. Families living in this unnamed village are depicted as being extremely poor, caring mostly for their stock and land in extremely harsh conditions. At the centre of the story is Anera, a beautiful young village woman who gets married to a boy named Mića, against his father's will. In a very dramatic dispute, his father, Blažić, throws the young couple out of his house, and the two are left to themselves to build a new home. After years of suffering, sacrifice, and bringing up two small children against all odds, Anera and Mića eventually succeed in building a small house. However, WWI begins, and all village men have gone to combat, some of them returning home as the war ends, except Mića.

Now a young widower, Anera denies the fact that her husband is dead and spends years in hope of his return, taking care of their home meticulously built during the precarious years of their mutual life. The only help she gets throughout this long period of her mourning is provided by the neighbour Lukan, himself a widower living with his small grandson. Anera takes pity on him and the boy and, together with her own children, moves into his house. In the meantime, Anera's ex father-in-law, Blažić, manifests violent emotions towards her, blaming her that she has mired the name of his son Mića who could still be alive. At the same time, Blažić expresses jealousy towards Lukan for having Anera's full attention and tries to break up their relationship by plotting against them.

Once Anera moves into Lukan's house, his baby grandson dies and Lukan suffers from acute grief. Driven by the fear of being violated by Blažić and in need of protection, Anera takes pity on him and proposes that they marry so she could bear him children. Lukan accepts her suggestion and although their marriage was never officially administrated (as Anera's first husband was never officially found dead but was still missing), they eventually have two children together. After several years, a few soldiers are announced to be coming back from Russia, and Blažić puts out a rumour that his son Mića is among them. This information sets Anera in a panic, and she runs to her former house to wait for her missing husband, fearing the encounter under new conditions. At the same time, Lukan goes out to meet the returning men and, once realising that Mića is not among the returnees, goes back to look for Anera but finds out that she has been violently killed. He subsequently finds out that it was Blažić who killed her and, in an act of revenge, murders him.

Although the novel was mostly focused on depicting the story of Lukan and Blažić as the symbolic conflict between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, according to the archive material concerning its theatrical versions staged in 1941 as well as in 1991, it was the character of Anera that emerged as the focal point of the dramatic narrative. This is somewhat explicable due to the fact that the novel of 800 pages had to be shortened to its most ‘representative’ core for the purpose of its staging, and Anera’s character somehow functions as a multilevel platform for different concepts tackled by the play. In addition, being the most psychologically elaborated character in the novel, she obviously offered enough material to be given the central position in the dramatisations. This is why the character of Anera and its symbolical function to both the context of the nationalistic narrative as well as the wartime will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter of this paper.

In this elaborated family saga set in a rural setting and spanning decades, in line with his own ideological framework, Budak portrayed an unnamed village and its population as the symbol of the ideal and ‘natural’ Croatian identity. However, there are quite a few thematic concepts that are presented throughout *The Hearth* with the similar referential significance and political potential, which is the topic of the earth/soil/home and its relation to the community; the rootedness of the community in folk culture; family as the elementary nucleus of life and the model for national community; the concept of justice and revenge in the context of both Catholic religion as well as village norms; etc. As I am going to show, all of these topics heavily coincided not only with their original ideological conditioning set in the 1940s but also with the nationalistic narratives of the early 1990s in Croatia, activating some compelling interpretations.

As one could understand from the plot of this “ethnopsychological novel,”⁶⁷⁵ the most important conceptual thread that has been interwoven into the narrative was the one concerning the relationship between this village community and the earth/soil which they were cultivating and living on for generations. The significance of one’s own territory (be it the field, the house, or the hearth) was thus “very much emphasised,”⁶⁷⁶ with this territorial affiliation shown as the pillar of belonging to a certain community. This position, although

⁶⁷⁵ Krešimir Nemec, *Povijest hrvatskog romana od 1900 do 1945* (Zagreb: Znanje, 1998), 145.

⁶⁷⁶ Maciej Falski, “Identitet iz krvi i zemlje: o romanu Ognjište Mile Budaka,” *Republika* 60, no. 7/8 (2004): 29.

obviously stemming from the ‘Blood and Soil’⁶⁷⁷ concept which was implemented by different fascist regimes during WWII, was also vocalised by the political elites in the wake of the war in Croatia in 1991 along the lines of reinstituting the already explained national myths of antiquity and *sui generis*. Furthermore, the ruling political discourse not only presented the defence of the Croatian territory as the priority in preserving the Croatian nation itself, but this territory was being determined by the fact that it was inhabited by the ethnic Croats. The named argument was especially put to use in reference to Croatia’s territorial pretensions towards Herzegovina, a region with a high percentage of Croatian (or rather Catholic) population.⁶⁷⁸

In *The Hearth*, Budak in fact depicted this village as a ‘safe haven’ from the perils of the outside world which threatens to radically change its immanent order as well as one’s relationship “with ancient tradition and customs.”⁶⁷⁹ These ancient rural customs are highly valued, while the contact with other ways of life is shown as provoking viciousness and moral corruption of the peasants.⁶⁸⁰ It is the village, fixed in this certain timelessness and unimpaired by the outside influences, that is detected “as the fundamental category of the world,” alongside “the eternal character of the earth/soil which in the novel appears as the symbol of constancy”⁶⁸¹ and is maintained by the community itself. This interpretation of the village as one of the primordial sources of the ‘Croatianhood’ only reflected the highly congruent process of identifying the historical model and source of the Croatian nation happening on the socio-political level in Croatia in the early 1990s. Besides resorting to the symbolic significance of the Croatian kings and other historical myths, the political elites resorted rather often to the concept of village to render the ethnic character of this ethnogenesis even more apparent. The idealisation of peasantry and its introduction as the ideal form of nationhood was thus often ‘staged’ in different political rituals (see Fig. 13 and

⁶⁷⁷ Rooted in the 19th century German romantic nationalism, the concept of ‘Blood and Soil’ (or ‘Blut und Boden’ in German) was put to practical use by the Nazi government in Germany. This ideology brought together two aspects of the German identity: genealogy/descent and the territory/the land. Along these lines the new, Third Reich state entity, was envisaged as a perfect union of ethnic nationhood and state formation. In addition, the concept idealised the German peasant as the most accurate and uncorrupted representative of German nation.

⁶⁷⁸ For more see pages 165–166 of this dissertation.

⁶⁷⁹ Falski, “Identitet iz krvi i zemlje: o romanu Ognjište Mile Budaka,” 29.

⁶⁸⁰ This is best shown in the portrayal of Blažić whose moral corruptness is explained by the fact that he was for some time ‘torn out’ from his homeland, living in the United States. Describing the impressions of Blažić’s wife upon his return to Lika in a new suit bought in America, Budak writes how “she immediately noticed that he changed a lot, as if a devil entered the baptised child, as soon as he put on this coat and pants (...) as if he was not our man, from our region and our moors.” Mile Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1941), 230.

⁶⁸¹ Falski, “Identitet iz krvi i zemlje: o romanu Ognjište Mile Budaka,” 32.

14), presented in the advertising material (Fig. 15), and verbally expressed throughout political speeches by the governmental representatives, etc.



Fig. 13 & 14: Women in folk costumes, performing the ritual of ‘baby-shower’ for the ‘new-born’. Croatia at the main public celebration of the proclamation on Croatia’s independence, May 30, 1990 (source: YouTube video).



Fig. 15: The electoral poster for the Croatian Democratic Union in 1992, featuring a woman wearing a traditional Croatian peasant garment and a man in the official uniform of the Croatian Army forces. „Zna se!” (translated as ‘It is known!’ or moreover, ‘Everybody knows: HDZ’) was the official slogan of the party throughout the early 1990s, claiming the vote for this political option to be some kind of a widespread and eternal axiom. Photo credit: author unknown.

Besides establishing the importance of the territory or the soil, another motif depicted and further glorified in *The Hearth* was the village community, and especially the kinship that was seen as its main constitutive element. Budak especially focused on depicting the “survival of the kin, the family and the fire on the hearth as an allegoric picture of this

community.”⁶⁸² The metaphor of the hearth or the home was actually presented as the nucleus of the novel, “determining almost every specific action, it’s an obsession of every character, it dictates the specific ethic dimension of the work itself.”⁶⁸³ The extinction of the fire from the hearth represented the extinction of the family itself, but more than that, it served as a metaphor for the extinction of the genus, the nation, explaining how this preservation of the hearth is both an “obligation towards the ancestors and parallelly the perseverance of the eternal order.”⁶⁸⁴ The village community depicted in the novel was defined by the fact that they “share blood with their ancestors, live on the land inherited from their ancestors and need to remain faithful to this heritage”⁶⁸⁵ in order to survive. In Budak’s own words, “this hundred-year old hearth, on the palm of this black, hard soil—this is their community, this is their Home, this is their Homeland, it is this invincible and eternal connection that relates them to life and death with inexplicable love.”⁶⁸⁶ The symbolical connection between the kinship and the national community was also a very much exploited concept on the level of the socio-political discourse in Croatia in the early 1990s. For example, President Tuđman’s public speeches throughout this period almost exclusively began with him addressing the gathered crowds with ‘braćo i sestre’ [brothers and sisters] hence “referring to ethnos as an extended family which is linked not only by mutual culture, language or customs but also concrete blood ties.”⁶⁸⁷ Moreover, in the context of the wartime, these notions of blood connections forming the national community should be seen as being used to emotionally engage the members of this nation either in actual combat or its justification.

Although depicting a specific local community and propagating regional affiliation, taking into consideration Budak’s politically engaged approach to his own political reality focused on defining the Croatian nation, one should also consider this village populace described in *The Hearth* in its wider symbolical potential. In other words, if seen as epitomising a much larger community such is a nation, what Budak did in fact was to promote a biological definition of national affiliation based on the concepts of the territory and kinship so essential to fascist political projects. As these exact sets of arguments were also used in the case of defining the ethnically exclusive ‘Croatianhood’ during the 1990s, the rehabilitation of Budak’s political vision as depicted in his literary work should come as no big surprise. For

⁶⁸² Falski, “Identitet iz krvi i zemlje: o romanu Ognjište Mile Budaka,” 31.

⁶⁸³ Nemec, *Povijest hrvatskog romana od 1900 do 1945*, 146.

⁶⁸⁴ Falski, “Identitet iz krvi i zemlje: o romanu Ognjište Mile Budaka,” 34.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁸⁶ Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života*, 61.

⁶⁸⁷ Janko Bekić, “Između demosa i etnosa-koncept hrvatske nacije u govorima predsjednika Franje Tuđmana,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 48, no. 1 (2016): 15.

example, ethnic exclusivity was one of the main foundations of the ‘newly’ established nationhood, with dominant socio-political discourses becoming extremely ethnicised. A similarly ‘translatable’ notion found in *The Hearth* that was very much applicable to the official 1990s discourse was Budak’s introduction of some kind of a ‘natural’ or ‘organic’ moral stemming from this community—acts that challenge systemic as well as religious laws and morals (such as Anera living with Lukan out of wedlock) seem to be allowed as they preserve these concepts of duration and progeny.

In a direct relation to this, another concept that was propagated by Budak and was recognised as actual by the national discourse of the 1990s was the notion of revenge and justified crime. Anera’s tragic ending where she is avenged by her man on the pretext of protecting her ‘peasant honour’ actually reflected the myth of the fight for Croatian state’s independence as provoked by the events from history and the historical national hatred, with one act of crime being justified by the other. For example, on the level of the story itself, Lukan’s brutality towards Blažić is legitimised by Blažić’s own brutality towards Anera as he suffers no legal or moral consequences for eventually killing Blažić. In other words, the crime of killing Blažić is depicted as a justified crime, thus escaping moral condemnation. Moreover, it is seen as an act of defending and ultimately preserving this community, hence attaining higher significance. Transferred to a wider socio-political discourse, this concept of a justified crime in fact became a very powerful tool for justifying future or committed crimes in the early 1990s, with Croatian authorities presenting arguments for the armed ‘defence’ not only as being provoked by the attack on its national sovereignty but also by the injustices committed throughout the nation’s history.⁶⁸⁸ In this light, the final message of *The Hearth* could have resonated with its socio-political context by activating some sort of symbolical justification for combat activities about to be executed by the Croatian armed forces or individuals.

Glorifying the Village: Peasantry as the Ideal Symbol of a Nation

Ultimately, in his literary vision of the village community, Budak unquestionably promoted peasantry as the ideal symbol of the nation. This idealisation of peasantry was actually something intrinsic to the Ustashe regime, which Rory Yeoman detects as “one of the few

⁶⁸⁸ For instance, during the wars of the 1990s, the Yugoslav and Serbian armed forces were referred to as ‘Chetniks’ by Croatian media or politicians. In that manner, they were connected to the armed movement operating during the WWII throughout Yugoslavia that promoted Serbian nationalism along with Yugoslav royalism. By attaching this specifically historical appellation to the 1990s armed formations, Croatian political and other elites apparently wanted not only to put a moral stamp on the enemy (Chetniks were notorious for their use of extremely violent terrorist tactics in fighting against both Ustashe and Partisans during the WWII), but to provide additional ‘revenge-material’ as well.

[European fascist movements that] were so intimately connected in the popular imagination with the cult of rural life and the peasantry.”⁶⁸⁹ This was even administratively confirmed—in the founding document of the NDH project called *The Principles of the Ustashe Movement*, the peasantry was emphasised as “not only the base and the source of all life, rather it itself constitutes the Croat nation.”⁶⁹⁰ In addition, due to its fixated and isolated positions, Croatian villages were seen as the symbol of the ethnically and racially exclusive community, hence serving as a pertinent model for a homogenous and somewhat ‘genuine’ nation. Besides following obvious ideological models considering the rural populace as the ideal representative of the nation, this glorification of the village, its people, and its customs was additionally explained by the fact that so many of the NDH high-ranking officials originated from small Croatian (or Bosnian) villages,⁶⁹¹ and were hence prone to include the romanticised context of their own upbringing into their own ideological agendas. Whatever the initial cause, Ustashe interpreted the Croatian peasantry as the source and the guardian of ‘Croatianhood’, even providing administrative implication to this role by officially stating that “those living in Croatia who do not originate from a peasant family are, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, not of Croat descent or blood but are foreign settlers.”⁶⁹²

As already demonstrated, the political discourse of the 1990s was also using the notion of peasantry as an example of the pure, ethnically uncompromised and ‘uncorrupted’ community that should be considered as the founding model of the ‘new’ nationhood. The exclusive ethnic nationalism propagated by the Croatian Democratic Union and Franjo Tuđman prior to the first democratic elections of 1991 was heavily armed with peasant symbolic, such were rural rituals, folk costumes used on the promotion material of the party, etc. However, one needs to know that this political acknowledgement of the Croatian peasantry was not necessarily and exclusively referencing the NDH project but was also pointing to other narratives from national history detected as important for the overall ethnogenesis of the Croatian nation, namely that of the Croatian peasant movements from

⁶⁸⁹ Rory Yeoman, “Urban Visions and Rural Utopias: Literature and the Building of a Nationalist Consensus in Croatia, 1924–1945,” *Ethnologia Balcanica* no. 10 (2006), 111.

⁶⁹⁰ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941.* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest/Školska knjiga, 2006), 128.

⁶⁹¹ Ante Pavelić was born in a small Bosnian village called Bradina; Andrija Artuković in a Bosnian village of Klobuk; Budak was born in Sv. Rok, a tiny village in Croatia; etc. Ivo Bogdan, a prominent nationalist ideologue, declared that the “Lika region was the purest region of the nation, a Croatian Sparta uncontaminated by the influence of foreigners, and an area which has given birth to healthy strong men, heroic and significant.” As quoted in Yeoman, “Urban Visions and Rural Utopias: Literature and the Building of a Nationalist Consensus in Croatia, 1924–1945,” 121.

⁶⁹² Nevenko Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia: Origins and Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 128.

19th and early 20th century represented by political figures such as Ante Starčević⁶⁹³ or Stjepan Radić⁶⁹⁴ and his Croatian Peasant Party. Put differently, repeatedly presenting the motive of the Croatian village as the ideal national symbolic in the political discourse of the 1990s did not automatically refer to the national fascist heritage and its concepts.

Nonetheless, in the case of *The Hearth*, this kind of argumentative ‘bypass’ was somewhat impossible—by cause of the notoriety of its author and the ideological system he represented, the productions’ appraisal of the village could not have been explained with any other historical references other than the one its author stemmed from.

However, the interpretation of the novel as a glorification of the village community in an attempt to create an ideal model of a nation was not so unanimous. That is to say, another set of opinions argued how Budak’s novel actually depicted all of which is bad, regressive, and corrupt in the rural community. Authors who engaged in this kind of argumentation claimed that Budak in fact painted a version of the Croatian village where everything was “black and grey, stupid and narrow minded,” being the “source of debauchery, drunkenness and criminality.”⁶⁹⁵ In one of the most interesting analyses of the novel advocating this position, writer and literary critic Antun Barac proclaimed it as “one of the most immoral books,”⁶⁹⁶ that, “instead of ethically invigorating its reader, actually glorifies cunning and physical force.”⁶⁹⁷ Reading Budak’s novel while imprisoned as a communist in the Stara Gradiška concentration camp during WWII, what Barac detected in *The Hearth* were “the most disgusting scenes of incest, betrayal, deceit, and vicious murders.”⁶⁹⁸ However, one has to keep in mind that these comments were heavily influenced by Barac’s personal experience and the fact he was directly suffering under the brutality of the Ustashe regime and, to some

⁶⁹³ Ante Starčević (1823–1896) was a politician and writer, considered by many in Croatia as being the ‘father of the Nation’ and the founder of Croatian nationalist thought. Arrested many times by the Austrian regime for expressing his anti-monarchic and pro-Croatian political ideas, he openly argued for reintegration of the Croatian land, and promoted the idea of Croatia as the land of one people with the same blood, language, past and future. In both his political and fictional writings, he depicted Croatian village as the cradle of the Croatian national identity.

⁶⁹⁴ Stjepan Radić (1871–1928) was a politician and the founder of the Croatian People’s Peasant Party. Arguing for Croatia as a social state, he simultaneously strongly opposed any kind of political and other unity with Serbs. He was eventually shot in the Yugoslav parliament by a Serbian radical nationalist Puniša Račić (dying from the wounds several weeks after the assassination), hence becoming one of the most celebrated symbols of the Croatian quest for political sovereignty. For more on the symbolic significance of Stjepan Radić’s see pages 64–67 of this dissertation.

⁶⁹⁵ Ivo Balentović, “Vraćanje selu,” *Hrvatska Smotra* 3, no. 7 (1935): 345–347.

⁶⁹⁶ Antun Barac, *Bijeg od knjige* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1965), 173.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

extent, actually recognised (or, moreover, wanted to recognise and further acknowledge) his own perpetrators in some of Budak's characters.⁶⁹⁹

Some 50 years later and parallel to Budak's 'comeback' to the Croatian cultural mainstream, another author detected Budak's novel more as a denouncement rather than glorification of the Croatian village. In one of the most critical approaches to the narrative of *The Hearth* written in the times of its 1991 re-staging, the renowned journalist and commentator Igor Mandić argued that Budak in fact did not glorify the rural mentality but moreover defamed it by presenting this setting as a "wild, neglected region (...) in which people live like cattle (and even worse than it), dirty and putrid."⁷⁰⁰ Furthermore, he stated that, despite the author's wish to celebrate the region of Lika, the novel should actually be seen as "the biggest insult. This is not a picture of the heroic and morally healthy individuals, but rather a gallery of degenerates, criminals, with pathological inclinations."⁷⁰¹ Continuing, Mandić does not recognise *the Hearth* as painting the ideal picture of 'Croatianhood' whatsoever, concluding how "it's not a symbol of our past or future, it's rather the bloodiest expression of our time in which pathological types are governing the masses of butchers, in which criminal mottos become the beliefs of the masses."⁷⁰² In other words, what Mandić detected as 'problematic' in the novel is the implication it held for the context of its staging, representing a terrifyingly accurate reflection of this perturbed and, in many ways corrupted, reality on the verge of a wartime conflict. However, contrary to Mandić, who somewhat generalises the narrative of the novel according to his own agenda and political position, I would still argue that the novel did carry elements and concepts reflecting the positive image of the nationhood in its core, as explained and denominated above as well as in the chapter dedicated to the symbolic of the character of Anera.

***The Hearth* in 1991: Production and Reception Analysis**

As for the detailed analysis of the 1991 theatre production of *The Hearth* itself, one unfortunately has to rely exclusively on written reports, comments, and rather scarce photo

⁶⁹⁹ When depicting the crime of Lukan who kills Blažić as a revenge for Anera's death, Barac seemingly depicts him as pure criminal: "Lukan kills with so much deviousness and covers his track with so much sophistication that one has to think such thing could be done only by a professional criminal and not the executor of justice." Barac, *Bijeg od knjige*, 174.

⁷⁰⁰ <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/non-serviam-igora-mandica-je-li-teatarska-glupost-bezazlena>. Last accessed September 23, 2109. In this text, Mandić claims that he actually authored the first negative review of *The Hearth* theatre production in 1991.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 174.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 174.

material dealing with this dramatisation, as the video recording of the production is not available and, most probably, does not exist in contacted public and theatre archives. In other words, while aiming towards an analysis according to the above-elaborated concepts, the interpretation of the production will be considerably restricted and patchworked from the gathered data. The most important fallacy of this analysis is the fact that one cannot reconstruct the dramatisation method, namely, one could not know what dramatic material from the 800 pages of the original novel eventually made it to the national stage in 1991. Be that as it may, in the following analysis and alongside the mentioned sources, I will resort to a video recording of *The Hearth* produced and staged by the students of the Franciscan Classic Gymnasium in the Croatian town of Sinj in 2017⁷⁰³—a stage version that is reportedly based upon the adaptation done by Pero Budak and Jakov Sedlar for its 1991 staging in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb (see Fig. 16). Despite the fact that one cannot state if the same material was used for its Zagreb premiere, the mentioned adaptation, as shown in the amateur production dating from 2017, still served me as a relevant research material.



OGNJISTE - Mile Budak

Fig. 16: Video still from the YouTube recording of the *Hearth* by Mile Budak, 2017 (translation of the opening credit: Adaptation of the novel-Pero Budak and Jakov Sedlar).

Comparing the totality of these collected and available materials to the original novel, it is obvious that the 1991 adaptation was entirely based on the original text but featured a great

⁷⁰³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IUU3IXntg8>, last accessed October 13, 2019.

deal of reductions and shortenings.⁷⁰⁴ For instance, the plot was condensed to the point that out of the whole plethora of characters introduced in the novel, only a handful of characters have been left to present the story on the stage. As suggested, the most evident and traceable result of this adaptation was condensing the dramatic narrative to its tragical but also most representative core, that of the main female character, Anera.

Although eventual textual appendixes were not so easy to trace and are thus left to a much more detailed analysis, there were some original additions to the 1991 production that were detectable from the available research material, the most interesting one being the introduction of the choir, presented by the ethno-musical group “Ladarice,” which reportedly performed different traditional Croatian songs between scenes dressed in folk costumes. The involvement of this group character to the 1991 production could be interpreted as the authors’ intention to procure an additional element of connecting the narrative of the play to the national community, here presented by the folk music ensemble.

As for the visual aspects of the production, according to the accessible photo material, the stage sets were extremely minimal and consisted of only few props, probably referring to the poverty and modesty of the Croatian village between the two World Wars (the stylised hearth, wooden rugged furniture, scattered straw, and apparently, a live turkey).⁷⁰⁵ Additional historical and factual significance of the play was secured by the costume design consisting of real folk costumes originating from the Lika region.



Fig. 17: The scene from *The Hearth*, Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, April 1991. Photo credit: author unknown.

⁷⁰⁴ What still stays unclear in the scope of this research is the question whether these authors in any way used the 1941 dramatisation of the novel written by the dramaturge Vojmil Rabadan and under direct supervision of Mile Budak as their artistic inspiration. The comparison of these two productions would be an interesting task and would most probably result with some additional relevant findings.

⁷⁰⁵ As claimed by Snježana Banović, transcript of the panel discussion “Theatre in War; War in Theatre,” Sarajevo International Theatre Festival MESS, October 7, 2016.

Although announced as a theatre event deprived of any politics, this intention was somewhat betrayed already on the level of the production's own presentation. More precisely, the back cover of the leaflet handed out on the opening night featured what appears to be an advertisement for the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ] (see Fig. 18), attaching the prefix of political to the production in a way that could hardly be any more direct.⁷⁰⁶ Parallel to being aligned with a concrete political option, in return, the production actually offered HDZ some kind of a platform to a more covert nod to the Ustashe legacy, thus allowing this political option to connect itself to this controversial heritage in a rather 'indirect' manner. Although the real nature of this 'cooperation' between the soon-to-be ruling party and the Croatian National Theatre, as presented in the leaflet of *The Hearth* in 1991, was never publicly elaborated, it still undeniably pointed to the mutual and somewhat even interdependent effort in the process of rehabilitating a debatable historical legacy.

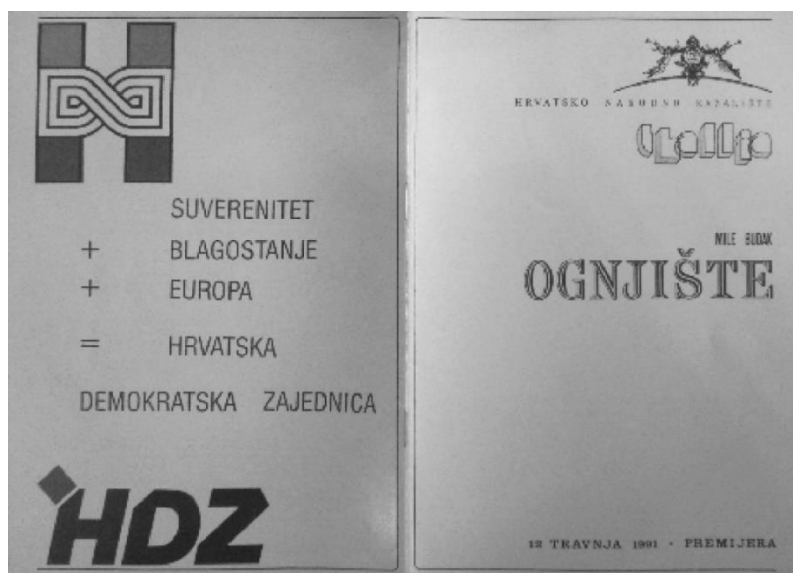


Fig. 18: The covers of the productions' leaflet, *Ognjište*, Croatian National Theatre April 12, 1991. The translation of the text would be "Sovereignty + prosperity + Europe = Croatian Democratic Union." Photo credit: author unknown.

The context of this cover seemed to reflect the overall interpretation of the production, with its value and significance being found somewhere 'outside' its formal content, namely in the framework of its creation and staging. Put differently, theatre reviews of the revisited 1991 production did not so much discuss the aesthetics and the subject matter of the production but were mostly concentrated on the significance of its author and the need to "break the taboo of

⁷⁰⁶ At that point in 1991 Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ] was just one of the political parties aspiring to enter the Croatian political scene via general elections planned for 1992.

this play. The thundering applause given at the end of the night was obviously intended to the author of the text.”⁷⁰⁷ Moreover, the play was celebrated as a true example of a theatrical representation dealing with the love for one’s nation, by stating that “the nostalgia for home (...) emerges from this novelesque saga, building a certain monument to true patriotism.”⁷⁰⁸ In addition, most of the critics of that time unanimously saw something “pure” and “simple” in that play, “far away from any kind of political propaganda,” especially in the case of Anera through whom “the author tried to reconcile the traditional women susceptibility and authentic human dignity.”⁷⁰⁹

However, there were a few independent voices which recognised this repertory choice as an attempt to hide or mask general rehabilitation and (re)introduction of the Ustashe legacy, providing the ruling political discourse with arguments for attaining the long-desired national independence. For example, the already mentioned Igor Mandić saw the staging of *The Hearth* as a blatant confirmation of the Pavelić’s Principles of the Ustashe Movement⁷¹⁰ “in which the peasantry is the foundation of the state,”⁷¹¹ while another journalist stated how “the premiere of *The Hearth* will enter the history of Croatian culture with high fever and the concealed fear of its commentators not to error,”⁷¹² obviously hinting the potential censorship that criticising this kind of material could provoke in that context. In addition, the same author reproached the director of the play for ‘misusing’ a renowned ensemble “in vain,” with “eminent and knowledgeable actors (...) limping around several stage props delivering the dialogues as some kind of a lament, away from their partners, either a bit hesitantly, either too loud.”⁷¹³ Still, rather interestingly, the same author saw the play as “a big injustice to Budak himself as his work is by no means so superficial, so folkloric, so modest,” asserting how “luckily, this time the content stayed stronger than the result, something good for Budak

⁷⁰⁷ Marija Grgičević, “Obrisi tragedije,” *Vjesnik*, April 14, 1991.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁷¹⁰ Authored by Ante Pavelić, the main architect of the Ustashe movement in 1933, this pamphlet featured 15 (subsequently 17) elaborated principles of the campaign. The program was actually an amalgam composed from extreme Frankist and Croatian nationalism, Nazism, Catholic clericalist authoritarianism, and included some ideas vocalised by the Croatian Peasant Party. In addition to defining the Croatian nation and the unity of its lands, the document exhibited the myth of the uninterrupted statehood from the 7th century and proclaimed that only those Croats “by origin and blood” could be considered political subjects of the country. It also advocated the primacy of nation over the individual, and the centrality of religious life of the family as the moral power of the nation. For more on the principles see Bartulin, *The racial idea in the Independent State of Croatia: origins and theory*, 127–143.

⁷¹¹ <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/non-serviam-igora-mandica-je-li-teatarska-glupost-bezazlena>. Last accessed October 23, 2019.

⁷¹² Viktorija Koprivnjak, “Hopsanje oko ognjišta,” *Globus*, April, 1991.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

but very bad for serious theatre.”⁷¹⁴ In other words, a wider, comprehensive, and subsequent contextualisation of Mile Budak and his work went missing, with only sporadic or rather undocumented reactions originating or coming from the theatre community in Croatia.⁷¹⁵ Considering the available material documenting the production itself and comparing it to the overall political discourse of that time pregnant with proclaimed definitions of ‘Croatianhood’, its sources and symbols, one could conclude that *The Hearth* was a rather correct theatrical symptom of all the mentioned controversies of the socio-political context it was staged in.

The Hearth Goes to Diaspora: Exporting Nationalism

Nevertheless, another important chapter in the story of *The Hearth* and its political (mis)use that unveiled other relevant ideological constellations of that time began in the summer of 1991 with the production’s extensive tour to overseas countries with large Croat minorities. According to Tihomil Stahuljak, then-time director of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the idea to stage *The Hearth* for Croatian diaspora around the world was something that actually preceded the production itself: “we knew that the play was going to tour the world even before we actually staged it.”⁷¹⁶ The director of the play, Jakov Sedlar, went into more detail, stating how “this tour is one in the series of steps and efforts to connect our motherland and the Croatian diaspora, with a goal and a wish to bring back Mile Budak and his *Hearth* to the school textbooks, something this literature undoubtedly deserves.”⁷¹⁷ In other words, the authors and initiators of the production understood the relationship with Croatian émigré communities as a much needed step in the overall discourse of rehabilitating Budak and its ideological legacy—a concept promoted by the Croatian government of the early 1990s as well. In any case, during several weeks in the mentioned period, the original production staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb several months prior to its tour was performed to Croatian émigré communities in New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Toronto,

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ One of the few cases of theatre community directly and negatively reacting to the staging of Budak in 1991 was the demonstrative move from Sanja Ivić, then-time house dramatist in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. According to Sedlar himself, she allegedly “came into my offices screaming how it’s an embarrassment that this house stages Ustasha Budak!” Sedlar, “Nije riječ o dramaturzima općenito.”

⁷¹⁶ Nevenka Mikac, “Vrhunska klasika,” *Večernji list*, April 9, 1991.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

Calgary, Vancouver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sidney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, gathering a total of some 30,000 spectators.⁷¹⁸

The elaborated reports from the tour were published in one of the biggest Croatian newspaper on an almost daily basis, predominately recounting the reactions of diaspora audiences which, equipped with Croatian flags and other national symbols, made this theatrical event resemble more a political rally. This shift in the production's format was best confirmed by the dramaturgy of the tour which was more or less the same in all of the toured cities. The performance was first announced by a local representative of the Croatian community (in most cases, the members of clergy) and usually ended with the mutual singing of the Croatian anthem "Our Beautiful Homeland,"⁷¹⁹ after which cordial meetings between the productions' ensemble and the members of the audiences continued.⁷²⁰

When analysing these reports in detail, one eventually notices that they were permeated with affirmations of the NDH heritage, although this reference was given rather contextually and without any kind of wider political explanation. For instance, one of the reports describing the ensemble's visit to Argentina stated how the son of Mile Budak, who emigrated to Buenos Aires after WWII, saw the play in tears, expressing his contempt that Croatia finally reaffirmed an important segment of its own cultural heritage with this material.⁷²¹ Another report from Los Angeles described how the ensemble was welcomed by the local Catholic centre, with the production being staged in the Wellshire Ebell Theatre to a very enthusiastic and moved crowds composed of the émigrés. Special emotions were provoked when a Croatian actress, Vlasta Dryak, member of the original 1941 cast of the play staged in Zagreb during the Ustashe rule and who lived in USA at the time of the tour, joined the 1991 cast for the final applause.⁷²² Just like that, the narratives of 1941 and 1991 merged on the stage and were openly celebrated by the diaspora community, hence indicating its position in the overall story of 'preserving' and 'managing' the Croatian national identity throughout decades, a position I will explain further.

⁷¹⁸ As the number is an estimate stated by the play's director Jakov Sedlar, one has to handle this information with precaution. <https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/nije-problem-frljic-koji-mrzi-sve-sto-pocinje-s-h-nego-oni-koji-su-ga-izabrali-za-intendanta-970354>; last accessed July 27, 2019.

⁷¹⁹ For more on the history and the political context of the song and the official Croatian anthem see page 249 of this paper.

⁷²⁰ As reported in Marija Grgičević, "Vatre s Budakova 'Ognjišta'," n.p., June 18, 1991.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² As recounted in the report from the Los Angeles staging of the play in Marija Grgičević, "Ognjište grije dalje," *Večernji list*, July 3, 1991.

Croatian Diaspora or the ‘Exiled Croatia’

As already noted, during almost 50 years of socialist rule and due to the explained ideological shifts, the affirmative mentioning of Ustashe legacy was harshly suppressed throughout Yugoslavia and in Croatia especially. Even in different times of national upheaval, such as the Croatian Spring movement in 1971,⁷²³ any kind of material stemming from this period was considered too controversial for any kind of public display. However, the discourse celebrating the Independent State of Croatia as one of the most approving stages in the ethnogenesis of Croatian nation was not quite erased from the public memory and was sporadically celebrated elsewhere, making its eventual comeback to the political mainstream in Croatia in the early 1990s. As I am going to show in the continuation of this chapter, it was actually the Croatian diaspora that played a decisive role in depicting the Ustashe regime as proving the historical continuity of the Croatian nationhood. Moreover, as diaspora communities were very much used as a platform for showcasing different cultural material coming from the ‘motherland’, their function in the overall affirmation of NDH heritage needs to be included in the general research dealing with the concepts of nationalism and historical revisionism occurring in modern Croatia.

The Croatian emigration encompasses some 3 million of Croats considered to be living across the world today.⁷²⁴ Discussing this phenomenon, one has to bear in mind that this term is highly variable, as Croatian diaspora is traditionally divided into three socio-political categories depending on the reasons for leaving their homeland: old economic emigrants (migrating from Croatia as of the late 1800s until WWI), political émigrés (migrating as of 1945), and ‘guest workers’ (migrating as of the 1960s).⁷²⁵ Although diversified by different levels of context, at the turn of the 1990’s and the arising ethnic tensions in Yugoslavia, these groups became somewhat ‘homogenised’. While propagating different political views (depending on the reason they initially left Croatia), in the wake of the war, these groups almost unanimously attested their loyalty to the vision of new, independent republic of Croatia.

⁷²³ For more on the movement, its context and the theatre repertoire of that time, see the prelude chapter of this paper.

⁷²⁴ “Hrvatski iseljenici u prekomorskim i europskim državama i njihovi potomci,” *Hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr*, <https://hrvatiizvanrh.gov.hr/hrvati-izvan-rh/hrvatsko-iseljenistvo/hrvatski-iseljenici-u-prekomorskim-i-europskim-drzavama-i-njihovi-potomci/749>; last accessed September 30, 2019.

⁷²⁵ I will use the term as explained by Paul Hockenos, defining diaspora as “an elastic definition by which [it] includes immigrant families, and their subsequent generations, gastarbeiter, exile communities, expatriates, and refugees. Ultimately, a diaspora is made up of individuals who identify themselves, and are accepted, as its members.” Hockenos, *Homeland Calling*, 8.

This broad political potential of the Croatian diaspora was a phenomenon very well known to the homeland political elites arguing for the independent state based on claims of a continuous formation of a nationhood. One needs to know that these overseas communities had been mobilised to “aid nationalist political fractions well before the shooting started.”⁷²⁶ Already in 1977 and on his first trip to émigré communities in Sweden, Franjo Tuđman⁷²⁷ actively sought support among émigré groups, meeting with their representatives and giving sporadic lectures on Croatian history, with the “main goal [...] to create a united and cohesive ‘community’ which could be mobilised in support of Croatian independence.”⁷²⁸ In addition and according to different archives, Tuđman presented himself to these communities as a political figure aiming at personally administrating the path to Croatia’s independence,⁷²⁹ even stating that his political party, the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ], officially founded in 1989, “was born in Canada.”⁷³⁰ In other words, the effort to “awake the national conscience”⁷³¹ among and then consequently with the help of the émigrés was formulated as one of the priorities of Tuđman and his political partners. His favourable partners in this association were the members of the political emigration that left Croatia after 1945.⁷³² As this emigration group primarily featured members that left or were prosecuted from socialist Yugoslavia due to their firm belief in the nationally independent state of Croatia, their political position was simultaneously shared with the new political leadership in Croatia as of the early 1990s.

At the same time, diaspora was seen and was subsequently used as a platform for securing the financial support to a country in transition that had not had enough material resources to fight the upcoming war against a much prevalent army. As Croatia’s territorial defence forces—which were still under the authority of Yugoslav People’s Army in 1990—had to hand over

⁷²⁶ Ibid., ix.

⁷²⁷ After this visit and a series of interviews that he gave to international press concerning the Croatian position in Yugoslavia, Tuđman, at that time a free-lance historian, was sentenced to three years in prison. Upon getting back his passport in 1987, he continued with his extensive tours to diaspora.

⁷²⁸ Francesco Ragazzi, “The Invention of the Croatian Diaspora: Unpacking the Politics of ‘Diaspora’ During the War in Yugoslavia,” *George Mason University Migration and Transnational Politics Series*, working paper no.10 (2009): 4.

⁷²⁹ After seeing him holding a lecture on Croatia in Toronto in 1987, one of the local émigrés active in the Croatian diaspora circle said: “It’s hard to say if it was some kind of instinct within us or just love at first sight. (...) Somehow we knew that he was the man, that he would be the leader to finally pull the Croats together.” Hockenos, *Homeland Calling*, 44.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁷³¹ Ibid., 4.

⁷³² Most of those active during the Ustashe regime emigrated from Croatia in 1945. For instance, with the help of his connections with the catholic church, Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Independent State of Croatia, first fled to Rome, and then found refuge in Argentina and lastly, in Spain under Franco. Dinko Šakić, the commander of the Jasenovac concentration camp also found refuge in Argentina. In 1998, he was arrested and extradited to Croatia where he served his 20-year prison sentence.

all possessed weapons to the Yugoslav Army, Croatia was left without a functioning military structure prior to the war. Aiming to proceed with the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia and parallel to the imposed embargo on weapon sale affecting the whole region, the newly established Croatian government started to set up channels for the illegal import of weapons, seen in this context not as criminal but rather a “state-building”⁷³³ act. Within a few months of 1991, two of these channels were established—one procuring Soviet-built weapons via Hungary, Romania, and other ‘eastern-block’ countries, and the other procuring arms from South America and Canada. The latter network was set up and administrated by the members of Croatian diaspora (most actively by those in Argentina), with émigrés not only purchasing but also organising the transport of these ‘goods’.⁷³⁴

Another way of providing financial support to the national cause was the financing of the electoral campaign in Croatia, namely the campaign of Franjo Tuđman and his Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ]. Although one could only speculate on the amount of money that the diaspora communities ‘invested’ into HDZ and its activities, some research shows that much as eight million dollars, later injected into the national electoral campaign, originated from the ‘exiled Croatia’.⁷³⁵ Lastly, the diaspora was also very much engaged in collecting humanitarian help by securing donations for different causes, such as the renovation of the shelled cities, procuring medicine, clothes, etc. These activities were predominately administered via the so-called Croatian National Fund set up by the then Minister of the Interior, Gojko Šušak, in a Swiss bank in 1991.⁷³⁶

As mentioned, the main motive for helping its homeland was the diaspora’s wish to attain an independent Croatian state built on the same ideological values shared by most of these communities. Still, besides seeing the achieved national independence as the award for their overall engagement, the endowment for the diaspora’s support turned out to be less nominal—not only were some of the most articulate Croatian émigrés granted positions in the

⁷³³ Marko Hajdinjak, *Smuggling in Southeast Europe* (Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy, 2002), 9.

⁷³⁴ Although one cannot determine the value of the smuggled arms that reached Croatia in the period from 1991 to 1992, research focusing on the later period (1993–1995) showed that Croatia imported some 308 million of dollars’ worth of arms. Ibid., 10.

⁷³⁵ John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2000), 88.

⁷³⁶ Presumably, some 50 million dollars were donated to the fund by Croatian expatriates. See Carol Off, *The Ghosts of Medak Pocket: The Story of Canada’s Secret War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2010), 51.

first Croatian democratic government,⁷³⁷ while others were provided with lucrative business deals in the privatised national economy, but in 1995, the entire Croatian diaspora gained voting rights⁷³⁸ and was thus promoted into a valid political subject with the accorded 10% of the seats in the Croatian parliament.⁷³⁹

As these communities were more or less free to execute their own notion of nationhood far from the reach and sanctions of the socialist Yugoslavia and in the context of the political systems not being prepared to administrate their specific sets of controversies, they also conspicuously “kindled fantasies of resurgent neofascist state.”⁷⁴⁰ These mentioned Ustashe references did not merely indicate widespread support for the fallen dictatorship or its infamous deeds among the diaspora but rather presented “a deep reluctance or inability on the part of these émigrés to face the burdens of Croatian history and articulate a new political vision.”⁷⁴¹ As Paul Hockenos concludes, these communities failed to distance themselves from the past and managed to maintain and then eventually export “a virulent strain of nationalism [back] into Croatian society at a critical moment in history,”⁷⁴² without considering consequences of this transfer. In other words, the diaspora functioned as some kind of a vault, ‘safeguarding’ the most problematic episode in the story of the continuous Croatian nationhood, an episode activated and appreciated in the times of the overall national unification starting as of the early 1990s. In addition, these communities also featured a strong anti-Yugoslav (and, ultimately, anti-Serbian) position, an opinion that further assisted

⁷³⁷ Gojko Šušak came to Croatia from Toronto and in 1991 assumed the freshly created position of minister for return and immigration; the former resident of Ontario, Ivica Mudrinić, became minister of transportation and communications; Branko Salaj from Sweden became minister of information, etc. Other institutions and organisations of national significance were also presided by people coming from diaspora. For instance, upon his return to Croatia in 1992, Vinko Nikolić, a poet and a former high-ranking NDH officer, became the president of the “Croatian Heritage Foundation” [Hrvatska Matica Iseljenika] as well as the vice-president of the most important national cultural institution “Matica Hrvatska.” A year later, Tuđman himself appointed him as a member of the Chamber of Counties of the Croatian Parliament.

⁷³⁸ Croatia is one of only 11 countries in the world that grants its diaspora rights to vote in national parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as state referendums.

⁷³⁹ In relevant research, this decision was understood to be motivated by the political aim of the nationalist regime to predominately include the votes of Bosnian Croats which they saw as an ‘autochthone Croatian community’ rather than an émigré community. Mirjana Kasapović, “Tko i kako predstavlja ‘dijasporu’,” *Političke analize* 1, no. 3 (2010): 16. Hockenos argues that both “Tuđman and the émigrés believed passionately that the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was an artificial construction and that most of it properly belonged to Croatia. (...) They also believed that the Bosnian Muslims were actually wayward Croats, one-time Catholic Slavs who converted to Islam during the Ottoman rule for reasons of convenience (...) the émigrés extolled the Bosnian Muslim as the ‘flower of Croatian nation’, as had 19th century Croat nationalists, and the Ustashe’s Pavelić, too.” Hockenos, *Homeland Calling*, 40.

⁷⁴⁰ One needs to know that some of these organisations nominally focusing on the ‘preservation’ of Croatian customs were actually stemming directly from the Ustashe émigrés. Namely, associations such as “the Croatian Liberation Movement,” “the Croatian National Resistance,” and many more. *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 41.

in activating arguments for excluding the other/the enemy from the homogenised national body.

As already mentioned, the political elites rising to power in Croatia as of 1990 understood the political potential of its diaspora and included it in their vision of a new national community. For instance, one of the key components of Tuđman's national policies was the definition of diaspora as "exiled Croatia," implying that all "ethnic Croats living outside Croatia proper were in fact political exiles, (...) forcibly expelled or in some way pressured to leave against their will."⁷⁴³ In his political vision, Tuđman was trying to present the members of the diaspora as the real victims of the anti-Croatian 'terror' executed by socialist Yugoslavia in order to generate its political value and defend its significance in the context of the political community he was creating. Even further, in an attempt to secure a more "ethnically compact nation,"⁷⁴⁴ he planned to repatriate Croatia with these émigrés—the plan was accompanied with some sort of an 'open call' to the diaspora community to return to its homeland. Parallel to this, a national ministry was founded that especially focused on attaining this goal.⁷⁴⁵ Finally, the diaspora Croats were also included in Tuđman's already mentioned project of national reconciliation—by remodelling and equalising the political legacy of both the antifascist struggle and the Ustashe movement, he concertedly incorporated Ustashe emigration into the new national concept.

Finally, Tuđman saw the "creation of a spiritual unity between the homeland and the exiled Croatia" as one of the "successes of the HDZ that have contributed significantly to the hard-won democratic transformation."⁷⁴⁶ This 'spiritual unity' was administered and maintained mostly via activities of different institutions, associations, clubs, and centres active throughout the diaspora, hence sustaining "a degree of cohesion in the community."⁷⁴⁷ Out of all the mentioned reasons, the 1991 tour of *The Hearth* should be analysed and interpreted in line with the here-presented context. As one could presume, the overseas performances of the production served as an important input to the above-described concept of nationhood that was, to some extent, administrated by the diaspora. First, the tour executed by the central cultural institution openly promoted Budak as a Croatian classic to a public that has been allowed to freely express its own respect for the NDH legacy, hence matching this

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁴⁵ In securing his vision, Tuđman sought help from one Canadian émigré, certain Gojko Šušak, who became the minister of return and immigration in 1991, but was, only a year after, promoted to the position of the minister of defence, hence arguably "pursuing Tuđman's demographic project by other means." Ibid., 11.

⁷⁴⁶ From Tuđman's speech, as quoted in *ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

rehabilitation to the public's own political visions and beliefs. In a way, Budak's rehabilitation could be seen as being 'tested' in the exile communities and, ultimately propelled by the above-mentioned arguments of the diaspora's political credibility, 'sent back' to Croatia with a stamp of general acceptance. The media reports from the production's international tour could hence be seen as the tool to attain exactly these arguments—reporting in detail how the Croatian émigré community enthusiastically welcomed the production, these accounts actually aimed to provoke or welcome similar reactions in the domestic context, hence additionally marking diaspora some sort of authority for detecting and preserving the most relevant sources and symbols of 'Croatianhood'.

Secondly, by presenting a patriotic narrative based on the promotion of 'Blood and Soil' concepts, the production of *The Hearth* obviously generated the material for maintaining emotional ties with the homeland, aiming to further activate these communities in their financial and other assistance. Simply put, the production was seen as fulfilling a much greater political agenda administered by political elites of that time. The mentioned 'national awakening' of the diaspora was not initiated only via political speeches and other means of 'official' political propaganda but was further administered by exported cultural production of the newly founded state. A systematic overview of these cultural programs organised by different state institutions and associations sending folk ensembles, music groups, authors, poets, as well as theatre productions from Croatia to all five continents during the early 1990s is painfully missing from the national theatre historiography and is likewise hardly discussed or researched. Nevertheless, I consider these phenomena integral to the story of the overall political activation and engagement of the national theatrical system during the early 1990s.⁷⁴⁸

Conclusion

As I tried to show throughout this chapter, the production of *The Hearth* in 1991 introduced and detected different concepts of staging the nationhood in the wake of the Yugoslav wars pertinent to the overall argumentation of this paper. Most importantly, it opened the topic of historical rehabilitation of disputable ideological legacy via means of national theatre, pointing to different levels of its complicity in these processes.

⁷⁴⁸ The direct relationship between the Croatian diaspora and the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb as the most representative theatrical institution of the state was actually secured thanks to the engagement of Jakov Sedlar, who in 1992 eventually became the drama director of the named establishment and was personally involved in organising diaspora-tours of his theatre productions.

Furthermore, in line with the political visions of political authorities in the early 1990s, it introduced the concept of peasantry to the theatre mainstream as a valid metaphor of the 'Croatianhood', elaborately evoking and promoting nationalistic notions of kinship and territory. Simultaneously, it detected to what extent this concept of glorifying the village was being short-ranged in this contemporary setting—in the context of the 'Us vs. Them' wartime discourse, which defined Croats as a national community with strong characteristics of urbanity and west-Europeanness, the rural symbolic was gradually abandoned in the overall representation of nationhood. As of 1992/1993, the affirmation of the 'Blood and Soil' narrative as well as the glorification of the rural naiveté were less and less present, both in public discourse and on theatre stages.

Elaborating on the question of how the national theatrical system participated in the historical revisionism of the Ustashe legacy, I specifically focused on including the case of the international tour of *The Hearth*. By doing so, I managed to expose the role of the theatrical content in establishing Croatian diaspora as an active promotor of the NDH heritage presented as a valid argument in the overall story of Croatia's path to national independence. In addition, this allowed me to analyse in what way the political agendas of the 1991 reflected similar concepts created in 1941, hence referring to the notion of national identities as being nothing but revisited reconstructions.

Regardless of whether Budak's own vision of ideal nationhood embodied in the Croatian peasantry coincided with the reception of his work, as already mentioned, during early 1990s, these representations of 'Croatianhood' via rural symbolic progressively increased in the overall socio-political sphere. However, as for the national cultural production of the early 1990s, affirmative representations of the Croatian village occurred and gained importance rather sporadically, with a similar progression occurring in the sphere of the institutional national theatre of that time as well.⁷⁴⁹ As previously noted, one could think of several reasons why this discourse of glorifying the village has not been used that frequently in the national theatrical system as have, for example, the stories and topics stemming from the national past or the cultural heritage. First, this is most probably because theatre aesthetics of the institutional theatres in the early 1990s reached a certain level in the context of which

⁷⁴⁹ Besides *The Hearth*, there were no other substantial productions dealing with the affirmative presentation of the rural community in the early 1990s. The only production that probably depicts the village in this way and that I have managed to detect in available theatre archives was the play *Romeo i Julija iz Bunjišta* [Romeo and Juliet From Bunjište] by Tomislav Čadež, staged in the context of the experimental program of the Zagreb Theatre &TD in 1992. However, due to the lack of research material it was not possible to include the production in this analysis.

representing a rural setting in a realistic manner would still be considered somewhat retrograde, regardless of the ideological pressure coming from outside the theatre. In that regard, the case of *The Hearth* should be interpreted as some sort of a one-time exception—a fact that still does not undermine its contextual relevance and importance in the overall argumentation of this dissertation.

Moreover, parallel to the first armed conflicts on the territory of Croatia, the use of peasantry as a symbol of ‘Croatianhood’ gradually decreased on a very general socio-political level as well, probably due to one of the strongest myths of the Homeland War depicting the Croats as civilised and ‘urban’ fighters in contrast to the barbaric enemy.⁷⁵⁰ In addition, the same treatment was emphasised by the fact that the new political elites almost passionately inscribed Croatia to a wider European cultural heritage, thus further neglecting the Croatian village as the ‘birth place’ of the Croatian nation. In other words, with the activation of the ‘Us vs. Them’ narratives indissociably linked to the creation of ethnically exclusive nationhood and the concrete wartime discourse, the peasantry argument was somewhat lost or rather got absorbed in the more general set of concepts dealing with the described ethnogenesis.

As indicated, despite the considerable media coverage that the performance received in the time of its premiere, there was no discussion on its contextual significance. In fact, the most accurate critic of the 1991 staging and the proof of its far-reaching controversy came with a rather symptomatic delay. Namely, in 2014, it was the theatre director Oliver Frlić who, in the framework of his piece *Croatian Theatre* staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka, initiated a debate on the lack of reflection and responsibility that the general theatre community in Croatia expressed towards the production back in the days of its premiere. By publicly denouncing those artists that participated in the production and later held no responsibility for the consequences of its staging, Frlić managed to detect another ‘blind spot’ of Croatian theatre history. Also, he showed in what way this theatre event presented a major point in the discourse of ‘normalising’ Ustashe legacy, as well as to what extent it still provokes a rather heated debate.⁷⁵¹ It is exactly because of its far-reaching effects and the lasting climate of rehabilitating the Ustashe regime that this production should be considered

⁷⁵⁰ For more on the representation of Croatian soldiers as urban and ‘rock’n’roll’ fighters see Sandra Vitaljić, *Rat slikama: suvremena ratna fotografija* (Zagreb/Mostar: Algoritam 2013): 45–48.

⁷⁵¹ For more on this see <https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/nije-problem-frljic-koji-mrzi-sve-sto-pocinje-s-h-nego-oni-koji-su-ga-izabrali-za-intendanta-970354>; <https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/je-li-hnk-zagreb-devedesetih-bio-ustaski-teatar-970134>. Last accessed July 27, 2019.

as an important example of the way national theatre stage complies to ideological orders of the day.

4. STAGING SYMBOLS OF NATION

4.1. Political Myths and the Embodiments of Nationhood

As indicated throughout the previous chapters, the Croatian national past was one of the most important constitutive elements of the new nationhood, with historical narratives being (mis)used both in the socio-political and theatrical setting as arguments for attaining state-autonomy and providing concrete justification for the wartime activities. This kind of approach that considers national past as building blocks of national identity eventually also helps to define national communities, affirming old or creating new points of references for the nascent collective memory. If referring to Jan Assmann's approach to the notion of collective memory, remembrance in general has a tendency towards concretisation—in order to be settled in the memory of a group, an idea has to take on an imaginable and concrete form, such as an event, a locality, or a personality. In direct reference to this concept, Anthony Smith argued that national symbols “give concrete meaning and visibility to the abstractions of nationalism,” with these “representations and images of the nation exerting a profound influence over large numbers of people.”⁷⁵² In this regard, if we consider theatre as a representational tool, it offers a somewhat ideal platform for rendering these ideas of a nation visible, and, in consequence, more comprehensible. Being anchored in a specific time and place, heroes and leaders of the nation are in fact spatially and temporally concrete concepts, hence offering the needed ‘concretisation’ and applicability to the powerful political concepts.

Accordingly, in the relevant theoretical research, hero figures from the national past have often been interpreted as an integral part of nation-building processes. As symbols, they tend to represent “historical events that are accepted as being critical to the creation of a nation”⁷⁵³ and are therefore integrated in national remembrance. Moreover, they embody characteristics and values perceived as ‘the essence’ of the national identity, therefore simplifying the conception of the nation. As such, they are intended to serve as means of identification with the nation and tend to unify the national community around very specific concepts. By way of conclusion, the national hero as a symbol not only represents the values of the nation but simultaneously functions as a tool of consolidation for the members of a certain society.

⁷⁵² Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 73.

⁷⁵³ Samuel Brunk, Ben Fallaw, eds., *Heroes & Hero Cults in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 3.

More concretely, these symbols are not only considered as catalysts of the national identity but additionally “take on a particularly crucial importance in fusing a *nation* to a *state*”⁷⁵⁴ and are as such adapting to the processes of ‘creating’ a nation. Each time a national symbol is activated and presented, the collective is thought to stand stronger together as they are reminded of their collective history as a nation.

Furthermore, national heroes as represented both in the socio-political and artistic realm should be examined as expressions of a certain group’s characteristics, standpoints, and values. According to Istvan Povedak, a national hero emerges as a “result of socio-cultural needs and desires,”⁷⁵⁵ mostly under the circumstances in which community values are at stake and are pushed to the foreground. Therefore, they are often conceived as ‘true’ representatives of the community, i.e. symbols that embody the prevailing community’s values, ideals, and conceptions of identity. Lastly, the notion of the national hero and the way it is applied or interpreted becomes very important during the wartime initially recognised as copiously producing applicable national narratives, myths, and symbols. Namely, national heroes are often acknowledged as “ideals and motivators that the majority of people look up to and can model themselves after” or points of orientation that “can give sense to life and the individual.”⁷⁵⁶ In the context of an ethnic war where this motivation takes on a very concrete form of action, the significance of these figures occurring both in the socio-political as well as artistic systems should not be overlooked.⁷⁵⁷

Nevertheless, there are some theoretic positions that argue how the understanding of a hero in all her virtues is actually never unanimous—for heroes to be interpreted as heroes, they need to be accepted as such by the majority of an associated group. If the group fails to do that, the hero often fails to gain the status of a national one. Additionally, in order to achieve this unanimous interpretation, those administrating heroes as communal concepts (meaning the political or intellectual elites, state-owned media, etc.) very often resort to remodelling them or attaching new meanings onto them, in accordance with the dominant or official

⁷⁵⁴ M. E. Geisler, ed., *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative Introduction*, (Middlebury: Middlebury College Press, 2005), XV.

⁷⁵⁵ Istvan Povedak, “From Heroes to Celebrities. Problems and potential solutions,” in *Heroes and Celebrities in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Istvan Povedak (Szeged: Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, 2014), 13.

⁷⁵⁶ Jurij Fikfak, “Leaders and Heroes of the Nation,” *Traditiones*, 43, no. 1 (2014): 7.

⁷⁵⁷ Self-evidently, these national symbols and their presentations should also be understood and subsequently analysed as being charged with affective power. However, as I’ve explained in the introduction of this paper, this direction of research implies a more detailed approach referring to different affective theories which will be considered for some future research.

interpretations. By actively adjusting these heroes to impactful political agendas, they once again effectively participate in the construction and negotiation of the concept of nation. When discussing the general ‘function’ of national heroes, the common interpretations these and similar figures generate is that they risk their personal happiness in order to help the affirmation of their respectable community. In other words, they are often described in their suffering or decline for a ‘higher cause’, hence commonly activating the myth of personal martyrdom as the most relevant one in attaining national homogeneity. As already stated throughout this dissertation, national mythologies very often remember or mythologise certain ‘traumatic’ events in which a national group faces various obstacles on its way of attaining full sovereignty. As I am going to demonstrate in the course of this chapter, this concept actually translates to the notion of a suffering but also a morally superior hero, a feature that makes her trajectory more tragic and thus more condemning. When located in the concrete wartime setting, this condemnation often transforms into a valid argument for direct action against the ‘immoral’ war enemy. Following this interpretation, any kind of emancipatory conduct executed by the members of a nation in war is declared and presented as being morally fair and appropriate since it is provoked by unjust misconduct. In conclusion, one could say that national heroes, and especially those giving their lives for their country or nation, were often used as symbols of national suffering as they frame and, to some extent, justify the combat itself. As I am going to elaborate in the section that follows, the strategies of presenting heroes on the stages of Croatian institutional theatre in the early 1990s explicitly pursued this approach.

Heroes of War, Heroes of Theatre

During the early 1990s and in times of concurrent processes of constituting an independent nation-state and fighting the war, the assortment of heroic figures presented in the overall socio-political setting in Croatia was composed of both past and present historical figures with one evident common feature—they were all found to be promoters of national autonomy either by political, cultural, or other means. Regardless of their conceptual origin, many of them were introduced to the ‘refurbished’ pantheon of national heroes, mainly because their activities and destinies resonated with the dominant political agendas. Furthermore, they were given such symbolic value by different means of representation. For example, some of the heroes symbolising the myths of nationhood (such as the already mentioned Nikola Šubić Zrinski, Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan, Stjepan Radić, Ante Starčević, Josip

Jelačić, Eugen Kvaternik, Mile Budak, etc.) were featured on official Croatian banknotes;⁷⁵⁸ were introduced to different state ceremonies or were given other official significance;⁷⁵⁹ were commemorated in the form of centrally positioned statues and monuments; were given their own streets or squares throughout Croatia;⁷⁶⁰ their biographies and political trajectories became discussed and mediatised; etc. In this way, their national significance was being imprinted in the collective consciousness, activating possibilities of further communal identification.

In addition to the historical figures, this assembly of national heroes was updated with several figures from the ‘homeland war’ such as successful army commanders⁷⁶¹ or those who sacrificed their life while fighting for the autonomous Croatia.⁷⁶² Although the methods of their glorification were much less elaborated, they nevertheless assisted the mentioned national myth of victimhood and suffering. Noteworthy, some members of the theatre community who joined the ranks of the Croatian army and who fought actively in the combat also gained a somewhat heroic status and were often celebrated in their choice to leave their ‘comfortable theatre lives’ and fight the war instead. The surprisingly large number of these reports documenting and reporting on combat activities of certain theatre professionals found in the available media archives demonstrates just how comprehensively the wartime discourse penetrated the cultural and artistic realm.

⁷⁵⁸ Ante Starčević is featured on the most valuable Kuna banknote (1,000 Kunas), Stjepan Radić is featured on the 500 Kuna banknote, Josip Jelačić on 20, Zrinski and Frankopan on 5.

⁷⁵⁹ For instance, the state medal given for bravery was called “The Medal of Nikola Šubić Zrinski,” and was awarded by the Croatian president. The “Medal of Ante Starčević” as well as the “Medal of Stjepan Radić” are awarded for merits in promoting and defending the Croatian state-forming idea, Croatian culture, science and economy; etc.

⁷⁶⁰ In 2008 there were 265 streets throughout Croatia that carried the name of Stjepan Radić.

⁷⁶¹ One of the most celebrated wartime hero in Croatia was Ante Gotovina, one of the generals who directed the “Operation Storm” in 1995. Although publicly presented as a highly professional soldier and a man of principles, he was still sentenced to several years in prison by the ICTY court in the Hague on charges of crimes against the humanity occurring in the aftermath of the “Storm.” Declared as innocent, charges against him were eventually dropped, and his position of a morally just hero was further fixated.

⁷⁶² For example, Goran Lederer, a cameraman of Croatian National Television who died in first months of war while filming the conflict, or Siniša Glavašević, a journalist who was reporting from sieged Vukovar before being assassinated by the Serbian paramilitary troops, etc.



Fig. 19: The actor Sven Lasta photographed on the battlefield (the title reads “the Actor with a sniper.”). Photo credit: author unknown.



Fig. 20: The actor Žarko Potočnjak photographed at the frontline (the title reads “I have been waiting for my tank!”). Photo credit: Romeo Ibršević.

As for the national theatres and their repertoires during the early 1990s, besides staging national myths in ways already mentioned in the previous chapters, they also featured plays and theatre productions that touched upon some ‘personified’ symbols of nation as simple material to recall “the myth for members of the community.”⁷⁶³ In the general overview of the repertoires of Croatian institutional theatres during the period between 1991–1995, one specific ‘category’ stands out, namely theatre productions with a personal name in their title. While staging heroes and historical figures as symbols of certain political or social agendas is by no means a specificity of Croatian theatre of the early 1990s but is inherent to theatre history, this chapter will be dedicated to discovering the distinct elements of this occurrence, especially focusing on the way these personifications of nationhood were adapted to the prerequisites of their actuality.⁷⁶⁴

Throughout the chapter that follows, I will introduce and analyse how theatre performances presenting selected figures of national significance activated certain national myths in the scope of the institutional theatre system during the early 1990s. Relating to the referenced body of national myths already presented throughout this paper, the section that follows will

⁷⁶³ George Schöpfli, “The function of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths,” in *Myths and Nationhood*, eds. George Schöpfli and Geoffrey A. Hosking (London: Co&Ho, 1997), 20.

⁷⁶⁴ Even in the socialist period the ruling ideology resorted to representations of its political myths as embodied in historical or semi-historical figures. However, these figures were rather rare as not many were found to would embody a supra-national Yugoslav identity.

be focused on detecting exactly how were these figures promoted to national heroes and, more precisely, whether they only reflected or perhaps added some new reference points to the overall strategies of representing 'Croatianhood'. Moreover, I will compare these theatrical tactics of providing concretisation and embodiment to specific political concepts to the ones manifested in the socio-political context of that time, searching for similarities and/or differences, hence outlining the general consequences of their actual application. I would like to point out that the here-presented assemblage of selected plays could have included several productions already disclosed in other chapters of this paper (such as *Zrinski*, *Katarina od Frankopana*, *Stepinac-glas u pustinji*, *Osman*, etc.). However, for methodological reasons and due to the stratified relevance that these productions activated in the context of their actuality, they were introduced in other segments of this work accordingly. In addition, two of the three performances displayed in this section have already been analysed in the prelude chapter of this paper, albeit in their premiere versions. Nevertheless, this phenomenon of reintroducing plays originally staged in the period of the 1970s needed to be pointed out as, once again, it validates the 'recycling' nature of this 'new' nationhood forming in the early 1990s.

By analysing the following theatrical examples in which the personal trajectories of the featured figures were symbolically transferred to the level of communal, I will further investigate what specific national myths were propagated by this approach (namely, that of the 'suffering nation') and with which repercussions. Ultimately, I will also demonstrate how the protagonists presented in these plays, regardless of the fact that they were predominately historic and were thus substantiated with factual material, were exposed to overt remodelling and appropriation according to specific political objectives, with varying degrees of success.

Andrija Hebrang: The 'Transitional' Symbol

One of the most relevant examples of staging a political figure as a symbol of national significance during the early 1990s in Croatian institutional theatre refers to the production *Andrija Hebrang*, staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in March of 1991. As I am going to demonstrate, although using similar motives and provoking similar interpretations as other productions that will be mentioned throughout this chapter, this production actually revealed in what way the dominant theatre system operates as an authority in national mythmaking, constructing narratives and forging national heroes from scratch. It also exposed what prerequisites a certain political myth should hold in order to

become 'valid' or functional, i.e. suitable to answer and promote the dominant political doctrines of the time. Furthermore, it reflected a rather transitional period of forging and representing 'Croatianhood' with all the 'controversies' this episode included.

With reference to the available list of productions staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb at the very outbreak of the war (1990 and 1991), one could witness how this institution went through some especially telling shifts during these two years, undoubtedly influenced by the acute political, social, as well as economic shifts. Furthermore, the conditions, which were the rising threat of an armed conflict, the ethnic segregation, and the overall atmosphere of uncertainty, presumably imposed a direct impact on the general cultural production, theatre included. As already indicated in this dissertation, one could remember that March of 1991 featured the first open confrontations between the Croatian Army forces⁷⁶⁵ and Serb 'rebels' in those Croatian municipalities with a Serb majority. More precisely, the first in a series of these battles that would subsequently lead to a more or less total war, the battle of Pakrac, took place on March 1, a date which in some archives marks the day when the "Croatian Homeland War" actually started. The Serb rebels actually took control over the Croatian city of Pakrac by appropriating the weapons from the local police station, arming only fellow Serbs, and proclaiming this territory an integral part of the Republic of Serbia. The Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) responded to the events by sending tanks and troops to the city in an alleged attempt to restore some sort of a tampon zone between the two sides of the conflict. However, their troops backed Serb agitators, hence initiating a scenario that would repeat itself in most of the conflicts which followed throughout that year. Parallel to the progressive warmongering atmosphere and sporadic armed conflicts, the Republic of Croatia, in 1991 still being part of the Yugoslav Federation, searched for a strategy to definitely leave this supra-state structure and attain full state sovereignty. While Franjo Tuđman at first advocated for peaceful alternative scenarios in the scope of the Federation, as of March 1991 and with a growing number of armed incidents, the Croatian government started to shift its political focus towards the realisation of total and final state autonomy.

In the midst of the described frictions, open armed provocations, and in the process of establishing the foundations of a new national identity, on March 3, the Croatian National

⁷⁶⁵ At that point Croatian Army was actually consisting of special police forces and local volunteer squadrons. It was not until April 20, 1991, that the official Croatian National Guard was to be founded and set in motion (thus preceding the official establishment of the Croatian State on June 25, 1991). On November 3, 1991, it officially changed its name to Croatian Army.

Theatre in Zagreb ceremonially opened its 1991 season with the play *Andrija Hebrang* presented on its central stage. The play was authored by Anđelko Vuletić⁷⁶⁶ sometime in the late 1980s and, in general terms, aimed at introducing and inserting the historical figure of Andrija Hebrang (1899–1949) to the central cultural system. Hebrang had actually been a member of the Yugoslav Communist Party since 1919 and gained a certain hero status in the pre-war movement due to his repeated arrests by the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (in 1928, he was sentenced to 12 years of prison on charges for communist agitation). Upon his release in 1941, he was sent back to Zagreb by the Communist Party officials to lead the anti-fascist underground movement, and after being nearly shot to death in an Ustashe raid, he landed in a prison camp. The Party managed to execute his liberation by exchanging him for a few top officials of the Ustashe movement and, once they had transported him to the ‘liberated territory’,⁷⁶⁷ declared him Secretary of the Croatian branch of the Yugoslav Communist Party. In 1942, Hebrang and his associates initiated the foundation of The State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH in Croatian), imagined as the bearer of the Croatian statehood and the main organisational agent of the Croatian Socialist Republic. Most importantly, ZAVNOH defined the after-war borders of the Croatian Republic—including the liberated territories of Istra, Dalmatia, and Baranja—which were, as of then, considered the official borders of the modern Croatian Republic. In addition, in 1944, ZAVNOH introduced religious education as a mandatory subject in Croatia, a move that especially angered Tito who, soon after, transferred Hebrang to Belgrade, ‘promoting’ him to the position of the State Minister of Industry. Around the time of the Tito-Stalin split and Yugoslavia’s expulsion from the Communist Information Bureau in 1948,⁷⁶⁸ Hebrang was thought to be Stalin’s choice for Tito’s replacement—following this assumption, he was blacklisted and expelled from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia under charges of being a spy plotting against Yugoslavia together with both the Soviets and the Ustashe émigrés. In 1949, he was arrested and taken to

⁷⁶⁶ Anđelko Vuletić (1933) is a Croatian as well as Bosnian-Herzegovinian author. A prolific poet and novelist, he wrote only two plays. He was politically active during the early 1990s as a fonctionnaire of the Croatian Democratic Union in Herzegovina. He was imprisoned in Sarajevo for his nationalist views in 1954 and while in prison, he read and was deeply impressed with the book *The Case of Andrija Hebrang* written by Mile Milatović, Hebrang’s actual interrogator.

⁷⁶⁷ These ‘free territories’ or ‘Partisan Republics’ were areas in Yugoslavia during the WWII that were under direct control of the Yugoslav Liberation Army and governed by the Communist Party.

⁷⁶⁸ In short, although sharing ideological foundations and guidelines, socialist Yugoslavia decided to officially break ties with the Soviet Union in 1948 in order to pursue its own political and economic agendas. The split allowed Yugoslavia to position itself between the “Western and Eastern Blocks,” initiating and heading the “Non-aligned” organisation of states.

a high security prison, where he allegedly committed suicide after admitting that he had plotted against the state. However, this ‘official’ story of his suicide was never confirmed, as his body was never found, and the reports from the interrogation process were kept secret for more than 30 years. It was only in the late 1980s and parallel to the upcoming crisis of the Yugoslav project that these reports by the Yugoslav state police and secret services became available to the general public. The documents discovered some telling ‘blind spots’ in the official narrative of his suicide⁷⁶⁹ pointing towards his assassination and hence further solidifying his position of a “political mythologeme”⁷⁷⁰ among the Croatian nationalists. As Ivo Goldstein noticed, the “tragic end of Andrija Hebrang became, as of 1990 and the establishment of the multiparty system, one of the most exploited topics in the Croatian public,”⁷⁷¹ with the Croatian Democratic Union even founding “the Committee for Truth Concerning Andrija Hebrang.”⁷⁷² The activities of this body resulted in his official rehabilitation in 1992, formally marking him an innocent victim of the communist regime.⁷⁷³ However, this restitution of Hebrang as the symbol of ‘Croatianhood’ in fact implied a few telling misunderstandings that were witness to the way the Croatian political elites of the early 1990s adapted historical material to their own political agendas. More precisely, Hebrang was officially represented as the “Croatian hero and martyr (...) dedicated to attaining the holy goal: the ancient desire of Croatian people for freedom and autonomy.”⁷⁷⁴ In addition, he was celebrated by some as the main architect of the national territorial borders, which became overtly contested by the representatives of the Serb minority living in Croatia as of 1991. Still, the details of his communist-oriented political thought were harshly omitted from this celebratory narrative. For instance, he personally never considered the Croatian Republic to gain its independence outside of the Yugoslav project; he often emphasised and praised the role of the Serb minority in Croatia in its commitment to the anti-fascist struggle; he argued that the Serb population in Croatia should be equal to the Croatian

⁷⁶⁹ For instance, it was reported that he committed suicide by hanging himself from a radiator although the mentioned prison facilities did not have any heating system, etc.

⁷⁷⁰ Branimir Donat, “Socijalistička tragedija: Slučaj Hebrang kao politička mitologema,” *Republika* 48, no. 11/12 (1992). In 1988, a book discovering omissions in Hebrang’s trial written by Zvonko Ivanković was published, followed by two books by Ivan Supek on Hebrang’s innocence published in 1990 and 1992.

⁷⁷¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918–2018* (Zagreb: Europapress Holding/Novi Liber, 2008), 779.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, 779.

⁷⁷³ However, the Committee was not supported by any opposition party which argued how “they have no wish to renew the long-lasting ominous practice in which political organisations make historical judgements.” Ivo Goldstein, “The Use of History: Croatian Historiography and Politics,” *Helsinki Monitor* 5, no. 3 (1994): 92. Furthermore, they’ve claimed that “Hebrang committed no sins, and therefore needs no penitence nor dispensation from sin.” *Ibid.*, 92.

⁷⁷⁴ <http://www.andrija-hebrang.com/deklaracija.htm>; last accessed February 10, 2020.

one; he advocated for both Catholic and Orthodox catechisms to be introduced in Croatian schools; he also supported the Cyrillic script being official in those regions where Serbs were in the majority; etc. In other words, deliberately neglecting these political visions alien to the ruling nationalist discourse of that time, the political elites of the early 1990s focused on interpreting selected Hebrang's activities as proving the continuous and consistently oppressed fight for national independence.

Despite such a complex and controversial narrative, which obviously required major adjustments to be (mis)used by the political discourse of that time, why was Hebrang chosen as a national symbol of 'Croatianhood' in the first place? Evidently, because his overtly tragic destiny was caused by the "communist and hated Yugoslavia,"⁷⁷⁵ defined as the crucial opponent of the Croatian political establishment arguing for state independence in the early 1990s. That is to say, the history of Hebrang actually secured additional material to the overall production of 'the enemy' as executed by those advocating for Croatia's national autonomy outside of the Yugoslav Federation. More precisely, in the period leading up to the actual conflict, it was the Yugoslav Federation and the ruling Communist Party that became overtly criticised and denounced by Croatian nationalists for not allowing Croatia's unconditional secession. These and similar tactics of denouncing 'the enemy' should be seen as a part of the political strategy to defame the socialist past and supra-national identity in order to 'make space' for the ethnically renewed national state and national identity. In line with this approach, describing in detail how this political system treated and punished Hebrang for his supposedly nationalist views not only elevated him to a position of a national martyr and the newly established symbol of 'Croatianhood' but parallelly exposed the communist state system as oppressive towards any form of exercising specific national membership.

In the context of these and similar efforts presenting Hebrang as an innocent victim of a ruthless political system, the theatrical "penetration into the mystery of this key Croatian figure of the 20th century"⁷⁷⁶ could thus be seen as one of the supplementary operations leading to his full political rehabilitation. However, as any documentation explaining the choice of staging this play in 1991 is unfortunately missing, the actual intention of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb is open for further speculation. Whether this repertory decision was executed as some sort of a political strategy or not, welcoming Andrija Hebrang

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ Boris Gregorić, "Edipov kompleks Josipa Broza," *Globus*, January 24, 1991.

in the central theatre institution of the country irrefutably contributed to his position in the refurbished pantheon of national symbols.

When explaining the genesis of the play itself, its author Vuletić confirmed that he wrote it extensively using the available historical material consisting of various documents and reports. Nevertheless, as in many theatrical productions mentioned in this paper, the factual material was, in this case, also employed as a foundation upon which the author created his own visions of the event. “The historical facts are here, but what happens in the prison cell where the accused and the accuser are to be found alone is a thing for the writer to fantasise, upgrade or make up if you will.”⁷⁷⁷ In this way, the boundaries between the factual and fictional elements of the narrative were erased, hence enabling its interpretative manipulations. In regard to this, in Vuletić’s own words, the play was written “as to finally say how Hebrang ended, to show what was his final destiny.”⁷⁷⁸ In other terms, Vuletić saw theatre as a tool able to successfully ‘correct historical errors’, showing active potential not only in interpreting but also in generating the past. As I am going to show in the continuation of this chapter, the staging of the play in 1991 testified greatly to the displayed conceptual strategies and interpretations.

Consulting the acquired video recording of the play,⁷⁷⁹ the eponymous performance from 1991 depicts the final days of Hebrang’s confinement in the state penitentiary Golubnjača, in Belgrade. The majority of the scenes reproduce different episodes directly connected to the investigation executed by three state officials headed by Milorad Milatović. The scenes portraying interrogations are all carried out in the forefront of the stage marked with rudimentary sets that imitate the official interrogation cell, consisting of one table and two wooden chairs. The stage lighting is very dim with only one spotlight being focused on the actor playing Hebrang, emphasising the uncomfortable interrogative atmosphere of the story. Musical motives that accompany the scene changes are actually comprised of typewriter sounds, hence probably suggesting the importance of written documentation concerning the archiving and the historical significance of Hebrang’s case. Throughout the production, Hebrang is portrayed as a calm but nevertheless uncompromising individual, presenting his own defence in a calm voice of a man who is aware that his inquirers could not be brought to reason by rational arguments. While answering Milatović’s accusations and justifying his

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ The video recording was provided to me by the courtesy of the archival department at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

political choices, these recounted stories from his past life are being staged on the elevated level at the back of the stage, thus providing a clear visual divide between these different temporal settings. However, the difference between the existing documentary and the added material of the narrative could in no way be differentiated by simply watching the production. By merging facts and fiction into one dramatic narrative without providing any kind of indication of the difference between them, Vuletić in fact pursued the conception of theatre as a tool for producing historical reinterpretations.

Special emphasis in the performance was given to the process of ‘preparing’ false witnesses of Hebrang’s collaboration with the representatives of the Ustashe regime. Forcing them to denounce Hebrang, these witnesses were portrayed as rehearsing false testimonies with the main inquirers. These characters, who were forced to cooperate out of their precarious position in the prison, were not only being shown as undergoing psychological blackmailing in order to secure ‘proofs’ of Hebrang’s collaboration with the enemy but were subject to overt physical torture as well. More specifically, by portraying the representatives of the socialist system as sadistic brutes prone to ruthless physical punishment, they became not so much motivated by their position or responsibilities towards the political system but, moreover, by some kind of inherent or, as Franjo Tuđman argued, “pathological hatred.”⁷⁸⁰ This morally condemning behaviour was further defined by ethnic categories as, for instance, the Yugoslav state-apparatus represented by Milatović and his helpers was elaborately ‘nationalised’—all three officaries present on the stage spoke in Ekavian dialect⁷⁸¹ and openly expressed their animosity towards Croats, considering Hebrang as their most ardent representative. Revealing the ‘ethnic core’ of this enemy positioned against Croatian independence, the production’s narrative coincided with the mainstream political discourse defining Serbs as the ‘real’ enemy hidden under the mask of Yugoslav project.

As for Hebrang himself, interestingly enough, his portrait of a national hero was not given in already debated straightforward terms but, moreover, reflected the controversies of his actual ideological position. In fact, his challenging ideological position was to some point reflected in the production itself—he was not represented as expressing exclusive nationalist concepts but was, instead, depicted as a ‘true’ believer in the worker-class revolution and pan-

⁷⁸⁰ <https://dalmatinskiportal.hr/vijesti/dan-drzavnosti-franjo-tudman--ne-mozemo-vise-podrzavati-zivot-u-zajednickoj-drzavi-u-kojoj-postoji-patoloska-mrznja-i-zloca-prema-svemu-izvornome-hrvatskom/13500>. Last accessed on June 19, 2019.

⁷⁸¹ While Milatović was actually a Serb, one does not know whether the other two characters were a product of author’s imagination. However, if he portrayed all three representatives of executive power as Serbs, this would reflect the common conception occurring in Croatia in the late 1980s how the Communist Party had a very high percentage of Serbian representatives on top executive positions.

Yugoslav unity, stating that “if a Serb hand should kill me, I wouldn’t really care as this would still be a hand of my brother.”⁷⁸² In other words, the character of Hebrang as constructed in the play’s narrative was actually and in some regard escaping the nationalist interpretation he gained in the overall political and historiographical community of the early 1990s in Croatia, which portrayed him as the uncompromised advocate of Croatian independence. Nevertheless, just as in the socio-political discourse of that time, his position of a victim was still much welcomed as he perfectly embodied the much-adorned national myth of victimhood.

The final scene of the production presents Vuletić’s own vision of Hebrang’s death, depicting him being fatally beaten by the prison guards. Parallel to the beating executed by one of the guards, in the foreground of the stage, his inquirer Milatović is dictating his own version of the brutal event happening behind him, reporting how the “prisoner hanged himself by the radiator located in the cell.”⁷⁸³ Upon realising that what he writes is not actually true, the guard typing the report asks Milatović why and for whom is he deviating the facts of detainee’s death, with the latter answering: “For history!”⁷⁸⁴ In this way, Vuletić exhibited and openly criticised the mechanisms of appropriation and construction of the ‘history’ according to the ruling socialist ideology. Nevertheless, concerning the play itself, what he actually incited was not so different from the same method of reinterpreting history he reproached to the socialist censors—by introducing this never proven version of Hebrang’s final end, Vuletić also created a specific historical narrative. Being staged in a theatre institution of the highest national importance, this production still undoubtedly contributed to Hebrang’s overall political rehabilitation.

When resorting to the relatively scarce reviews of the production, one could understand the controversies of rendering Hebrang a national symbol even further. For example, in one of just few reviews I could find discussing the production, its author actually declared dissatisfaction with Vuletić’s interpretation of Hebrang’s tragic destiny, describing how “in style of a servile literature that predicts the past, the author bored us with the multiple-innocent Hebrang.”⁷⁸⁵ Burdened with the aim of depicting the investigation in its fullest details as well as the innocence of the main protagonist, the same author found that Vuletić detected “only a part of his human suffering, but the play does not contain the whole

⁷⁸² As transcribed from the video recording of the production.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Donat, “Socijalistička tragedija: slučaj Hebrang kao politička mitologema.”

injustice,”⁷⁸⁶ as his suffering was “of political nature, a suffering of the nation being denied its own path and past.”⁷⁸⁷ In other words, the critic understood that the position of Andrija Hebrang as a symbol of nationhood was not staged to its full potential—an opinion that was, to some extent, confirmed by the fact that the production was staged a dozen times throughout 1991 and has not been shown in the national theatre ever since.

In other words, it seems that Hebrang as a national symbol failed to answer the social-political requirements of time, his political engagements being too controversial or simply too entangled in the complex political history of Croatia in order to be employed for a unanimous mobilisation of a specific national group. In the ideological setting of the early 1990s characterised by strong anti-communism processes, Hebrang’s own communist past turned out to be too problematic to be erased and too complicated to be simply absorbed into the new concept of nationhood. In addition, if compared to the actuality of the staging, it seems as if the production echoed the conceptions present in the official socio-political discourse of that time, explaining the arising conflicts in Croatia with the overt inclination of Yugoslav state structures towards anti-Croatian nationalist agendas. Depicting Hebrang as a victim of the previous political system, his symbolic function in fact served as a tool of its open denouncement, directly pointing towards the actual ‘enemy’ of Croatia’s independence taking form. In conclusion, the here-presented production demonstrated certain limitations (or certain requirements) of promoting political figures as national symbols and, once again, explicitly demonstrated ways in which theatre engages itself in the overall process of (re)constructing national history.

Smrt Stjepana Radića: Old Heroes, New Realities

Another theatre productions that tackled the essential political myth of ‘Croatianhood’ presented by a tragic political figure was the play *Smrt Stjepana Radića* [the Death of Stjepan Radić] staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Split in April, 1992. Written by Tomislav Bakarić in 1970 and performed in the context of the nationalist movements of 1971,⁷⁸⁸ its staging 20 years later once again proved the analogy between these two periods publicly articulating Croatian national identity, therefore also insinuating the continuous demand for national sovereignty. Since the available documentation material following the 1992

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ See pages 64–67 of this dissertation.

production is extremely scarce,⁷⁸⁹ the analysis that follows will mainly concentrate on the production's general position and relations to its wartime setting as expressed in available media reports. Although the research of the actual performance is missing, I nevertheless insisted on including it in the main core of my research as it initiated some relevant interpretations in the context of my main analytical framework.

Considering the context of its staging, the spring of 1992 was predominately marked by the arrival of UNPROFOR peace forces to Croatian territories, engaged to establish a ceasefire between the Croatian army on the one side and the Yugoslav People's Army together with Serb paramilitary units on the other side. Parallel to several minor conflicts still occurring in Croatia, the war operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina were launched, hence shifting the majority of acute armed activities to its territories. In April of the same year, Croatia's state autonomy was further fixated, with the USA officially recognising its independence.

In the depicted circumstances of wartime and the denotation of the 'new' national identity, the general political and artistic course of the second largest theatre institution in the country, the Croatian National Theatre in Split, was administered by its president at the time, Ivo Sanader. Although he was a literature and theatre theorist by profession, in the late 1980s, Sanader became politically active and founded the branch of the Croatian Democratic Union [HDZ] in Austria where he lived and worked for several years as an 'entrepreneur'. Upon returning to his hometown of Split in 1990 and due to his connections with the local political authorities gaining overt nationalistic orientation, he was appointed director of the National Theatre in January of 1991, heading it only until August 1992. As a member of the ruling party with clear political ambitions in the scope of the ongoing conflict, parallel to his function at the Croatian National Theatre Split, Sanader was also active as one of the main negotiators in several exchanges of prisoners between the Yugoslav People's Army and Croatian Army forces at the wake of the war. In addition, he was also the founder of the company "HBH" that nominally organised cultural and economic cooperation between Croatia and Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina but, as it later turned out, actually functioned as a cover-up for financial malversations. In December of 1991, Sanader also founded the "Division of Croatian Artists Split," a military squad composed of local artists that toured the

⁷⁸⁹ According to the answer I have received by the staff at the Croatian National Theatre in Split, the video recording of the play apparently does not exist.

nearby battlefields presenting different cultural programs to the soldiers, wounded, and refugees in the Split region.⁷⁹⁰

During his presidency over the Split Croatian National Theatre, Sanader introduced a set of new management strategies tailored to answer the constraints of this transitional period between socialism and capitalism—for instance, the planned repertoire of the house was executed by resorting to co-productions as well as direct sponsorships of the productions by local companies, etc. However, his era of presidency was mostly marked by several controversial executive policies. For example, in line with the extensive ‘witch hunt’ aimed at the members of the Serb ethnic minority living in Croatia as well as those politically ‘unsuitable’ to the ruling ideology, Sanader personally initiated expulsions or professional disparagements of some 14 employees from the theatre on the basis of either their ethnic or political affiliation.⁷⁹¹

In his ambition to make the Croatian National Theatre in Split an institution that represented the political agendas of its actuality as accurately as possible, Sanader and his collaborators were also closely involved in choosing the theatre’s repertoire. As of 1991, this repertoire started to feature more and more productions in line with the dominant ideological guidelines, with *The Death of Stjepan Radić* as one of their most appropriate manifestations.

As already indicated in the prelude chapter, the play itself premiered in the theatre “August Cesarec” in Varaždin in 1971 and was identified as one of the most important theatrical expressions of demands for national autonomy executed during the “Croatian Spring” movement. Just as in 1971, when the main protagonist of the play was understood to represent “the Croatian history itself,”⁷⁹² in 1992, Radić was again found to be the “symbol of true aspirations of one nation, or even the general mankind”⁷⁹³ and not only “a historical figure but also an idea.”⁷⁹⁴ Yet again, he was identified as such regardless of the fact that the character itself, as already explained in the previous chapter, was not present on the stage at

⁷⁹⁰ Sanader’s political career progressed and in 1992 he left the National Theatre in Split to become Minister for Science and Technology. In 1993 he served two mandates as Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and was voted president of the Croatian Democratic Union in 2000. He served as Croatia’s prime-minister from 2003 till 2009 when he abruptly left this position due to two state charges for corruption. He is currently (2020) serving his sentence in Croatian state penitentiary.

⁷⁹¹ When one of the fired Serb employees asked Sanader why he was let go, the director apparently answered “because that’s the times we are living in.” For more see <http://feral.audiolinux.com/tpl/weekly1/article.tpl?IdLanguage=7&NrIssue=926&NrSection=1&NrArticle=4045>, last accessed January 19, 2020.

⁷⁹² Branka Brlenić-Vujić in 1993, as quoted in Senker, *Hrestomatija novije hrvatske drame, II. dio (1941–1991)*, 335.

⁷⁹³ Marija Grgičević, “Bez glavnog junaka,” *Večernji List*, April 26, 1992.

⁷⁹⁴ Jakša Fiamengo, “Politika kao sudbina,” n.p., n.d.

all—a dramaturgical tactic that was, in 1992, explained by the impossibility of staging such a “great symbol” following the overt risk of his symbolical “pauperisation.”⁷⁹⁵ Considered as pure embodiment of an idea or a concept, it seems as if Radić did not actually need to be present on the stage as a character, as he was already inscribed in the communal memory of the audiences.

Nevertheless, the tragic destiny of Stjepan Radić (as witnessed by other protagonists of the play) was still interpreted to symbolise modern-day Croatia, blurring the borders and further equating the individual and the communal suffering. This conceptual ‘overlap’ was explained by the director of the play, Joško Juvančić, who stated that the authors of the production were “interested to see the private destiny of a person in which the destiny of the nation is being reflected.”⁷⁹⁶ Furthermore, “in the production, [they] tried to detect the conditionalities and connections between the politics and the destiny of not only an individual, but of nations as well.”⁷⁹⁷ These destinies were seen to coincide, in their tragic trajectories, with “the shots fired at Stjepan Radić being the same shots that are fired at today’s martyrs,”⁷⁹⁸ along with “the Croatian soldiers continuing the fight that Radić started some 70 years ago.”⁷⁹⁹ In other words, it was the play’s direct meaning for the wartime actuality that was underlined—Radić was not only depicted as the symbol of the long awaited nationhood but, by the agency of his assassination, he also came to symbolise all those dying in the name of the nation on the actual frontlines.

Apart from this, another relevant aspect of the direct contextual relevance has been detected in the production itself. More precisely, recognising it as outlining “the principal hatred and antipathy (...) simultaneously in the past and in the future,”⁸⁰⁰ some commentators seem to have hinted the endlessness of this almost mythical enmity between the main political camps as presented in the play. In fact, the acute symbolism in the case of the play was not exclusively restricted to Radić. The individual traits of these opponent historical figures were also understood to represent a specific community, namely a certain national group.

Embedded in the wartime context, staging representatives of this everlasting “hatred and antipathy”⁸⁰¹ between Croatian autonomists (Radić) and Serb nationalists (Puniša Račić or

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Anatolij Kudrjavcev, “Političko umorstvo teatra,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, April 26, 1992.

⁸⁰¹ Fiamengo, “Politika kao sudbina,” n.p., n.d.

Nikola Pašić)⁸⁰² aimed at surpassing the simple display of historical facts. By staging ‘the source’ (or just one of the stages) of the enmity having concrete and deadly consequences in reality of its performance, the production potentially generated direct interpretations of the conflict. This interpretational strategy was already inscribed in the production itself, best confirmed by Juvančić declaring how “[Radić’s] death exposed an enemy who is not interested in peacefully solving conflicts,”⁸⁰³ hence reflecting the general discourse in Croatia which defined the existing conflict as primarily ‘defensive’ and provoked as an answer to actions of an utterly immoral opponent. In addition, staged “in the moment when the evil threats of the despot from this play, together with the nightmarish premonitions of bloodbath that it expresses, are becoming the unsupportable reality,”⁸⁰⁴ it would seem as if the mythical significance of Radić’s assassination narrative was increased by proving itself to be a warning for times to come.

Although most of the available reviews openly celebrated the production in its overt symbolic for the context of its staging, there were some that saw it as some kind of a ‘betrayal’ of theatre art, claiming that “everything in [the production] was so much adjusted to the historical actuality that the scenic event, which aims at surpassing the facts, was hence seen as a violation and a nuisance.”⁸⁰⁵ In Kudrjavcev’s view, the main objective of the play as staged in 1992 was to present the historical facts and not artistically engage in their interpretation, hence losing on its ‘artistic value’. As I have already stated throughout this paper, the early 1990s in Croatia were marked by rediscovering and adapting narratives from national history, and emphasising the factuality of these histories was considered an important stage in this process. Recognising this in the case of the mentioned production, Kudrjavcev also gave a negative evaluation of other elements of the play, calling the characters “superficial,” the acting “empty and dry,” the set design as “barely satisfying,” thereby expressing his content that Radić himself did not appear in all of this because this would undoubtedly cause “the desecration of the most important and holy Croatian legend.”⁸⁰⁶ Nevertheless, despite this negative assessment, Kudrjavcev ended his review with a suggestive statement, arguing that “one should not be unfair in the given conditions and this tragical-comical situation,” ultimately declaring this production as “more than significant.”⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰² For more on the detailed narrative of the play, see pages 64–67 of this dissertation.

⁸⁰³ Fiamengo, “Politika kao sudbina,” n.p., n.d.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

In other words, the recognition and enhancement of Stjepan Radić as a potent national symbol was regarded as the most relevant aspect of his theatrical ‘comeback’ in times marked by intense socio-political crisis. By staging Stjepan Radić as a sign embodying the political myth of statehood as well as the concept of the nations’ everlasting heroic martyrdom, the theatrical system once again proved its ability in not only disseminating but also constructing national myths that generate direct consequences in the interpretation of reality. Moreover, considering the way the production focused on detecting and depicting ‘the enemy’ of Croatian sovereignty, which was being fought on the actual front lines, the possibilities of its contribution to the actual wartime context should be considered in its practical effect.

Domagojada: ‘Common Man’ as a Symbol of Nation

Another example of a theatre production dedicated to personified symbols of a nation as staged in the Croatian institutional theatre during the wartime is a rather ‘bastard’ one, as its main protagonist is not actually a historical or political figure from the nation’s past.

Although to some extent based and referenced to one,⁸⁰⁸ the main character of this play was nevertheless conceived and interpreted as a symbol of the nation. To be more specific, the authors of the play explained how *Domagojada* was in fact imagined to execute a certain conceptual shift, subverting the traditional form of presenting historical figures as national heroes by introducing a ‘common man’ as the symbol of nationhood. As I am going to discuss hereafter, this approach generated relevant contributions to the main topic of this segment, pointing towards some additional strategies of symbolising the nation on stage. Although the chosen performance was not staged in an institutional theatre but was executed by the ‘independent’ acting group “Histrioni,” knowing that the director of the play, Zlatko Vitez, was actually serving as the state minister of culture at that time, the autonomous position of this collective should, once again, be taken with open reservations.⁸⁰⁹

Another argument explaining the nature of their ‘independence’ from the political agendas of the wartime years is presented in the fact that the production was eventually executed in one highly governmental and official setting, hence providing direct relevance for this study. Namely, in the summer of 1995, the production was included in the elaborated cultural program celebrating the end of the military operation “the Storm”⁸¹⁰ in the liberated town of

⁸⁰⁸ For more details on the relation of the play to the historical figure of Croatian King Domagoj see page 66 of this dissertation.

⁸⁰⁹ For more on the political symbolism of Zlatko Vitez see pages 121–123 of this dissertation.

⁸¹⁰ See pages 137–138 of this dissertation.

Knin. Considering the production's involvement in these festivities directly administrated by the state authorities, questions about its specific political significance consequently emerged. As discussed in the prelude section of this paper, *Domagojada* was first performed in 1975 by the same 'histrionic' acting group and was detected as a play openly generating the concept of 'Croatianhood'⁸¹¹ by promoting the main character as the metaphor for the nation itself. In short, in the three acts of the original play authored by Boris Senker, Tahir Mujičić, and Nino Škrabe, the character of Domagoj represented three different historical stages of Croatian nationhood marked by foreign rule and consequential suffering, thereby confirming the national myth of victimhood as its main functionalist factor. Recognised as producing open criticism towards the socialist government, the original production was 'censored' and, due to being labelled as politically subversive, was not staged until the early 1990s and until the radical shifts in the socio-political context had occurred. With one failed attempt of its staging in the Croatian National theatre in Split in 1991,⁸¹² it was only in 1995 that *Domagojada* was restaged by the "Histrioni" theatre group in the scope of their regular repertoire. Although produced by the same theatre company that premiered the text in 1975, as I am going to show, the newer rendition featured some intriguing adaptations.

Although the premiere of the 1995 production in Zagreb did not garner that much attention by the media or the theatrical community, its guest appearance in the scope of the festivities marking the liberation of the Croatian town Knin was a bit more discussed, probably due to the strong political significance of the whole event.⁸¹³

Considered the capital city of the medieval Croatian kingdom under King Zvonimir in the early 11th century, the town of Knin held special significance in the mythical narrative proving Croatia's ancient and continuous nationhood. Whilst serving as a mythical *topos* of Croatian ethnogenesis, the city and the region continuously featured a large Serb minority. In

⁸¹¹ For more on this, see pages 63–66 of this dissertation.

⁸¹² In 1991, Croatian National Theatre in Split wanted to stage *Domagojada* in their own dramatisation, even starting with rehearsals. However, the authors of the play (Senker, Mujičić and Škrabe) decided to those who wanted to adapt the play, wanting to forbid its staging. Apparently, the authors of the adaptation changed the language of the 2nd part of the play making it more 'local', while the third act was "textually re-arranged as to, by the words of its authors, avoid the monodramatic narrativity and the politic moment that sounded completely different in 1976." Available media reports stated how the authors of the Split dramatisation and the whole ensemble of theatre stood behind this production and its performance. In addition, the authors stated how all adaptations and changes that were employed in their version of the play "of important significance and range," could not be understood as "massacre against the original text, raping of the text or destroying the 'cultural heritage'," terms obviously used by the authorial trio in their accusations. All quotes from Dubravka Vrgoč, "Priobalni skandal 'Domagoj'," *Nedjeljni Vjesnik*, July 11, 1991.

⁸¹³ The accompanying cultural program was staged on the city fortress few weeks after its 'liberation'. It consisted of several cultural performances with segments from the opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinski* as its focal point. The excerpt of this performance is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08R4UjztkT0>, last accessed February 20, 2020.

the midst of the first ethnic clashes between Serb rebels and the Croatian army in 1991, Knin actually became the capital of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, a semi-independent state entity which declared its affiliation to the Republic of Serbia. In the years to come, the town was governed by the provisional Serbian government more or less focusing on the deportation of ethnic Croats from the region—for example, in that period, some 93.9% of the Croatian population was expelled from the town and municipality of Knin. On August 5, 1995, the Croatian Army liberated Knin and the surrounding territories as a part of the self-administered military campaign called “the Storm,” which marked the final phase of the war activities in Croatia, leading to the Dayton peace agreement signed on November 21 of the same year.

Holding such an important symbolic place in the nation’s ethnogenesis, reclaiming Knin as the Croatian ‘hero city’ became one of the most important tasks of the war campaign. One of the accompanying policies in the scope of this overt ‘re-Croatisation’ of the city and its symbolic relevance was executed by providing cultural content to this agenda. It was exactly this approach of inscribing national relevance that served as a reference point in the discussion about the mentioned production and its staging in 1995.

Unfortunately, due to the absence of video material documenting either this production or its Knin performance, the analysis that follows will be based exclusively on available reviews, media reports, as well as the original and the updated versions of the play. In fact, when comparing the original and the edited version of *Domagojada* (written by the same authors), what one initially discovers is the existence of a completely new fourth act, set in the reality of the early 1990s. In freshly added scenes that take place 20 years after the third part of the play (meaning in the real-time of its staging), Domagoj comes back to his small island directly from the homeland war, dressed in a uniform of Croatian Army and equipped with a rifle. Comrade Mate, who represented the socialist government in the previous segment, is now called ‘sir Mate’ and is still holding local power due to his talent for political mimicry. Unlike other acts of the play, which are set centuries apart from each other, hence positioning Domagoj as some sort of a ‘travelling protagonist’ transcending different historical eras, the association between the third and the fourth act is more causal, with the added plot directly resulting from the previously described events.

In an effort to regain his authority in the context of the newly established governing system on the island, Domagoj confronts Mate, reclaiming the money he had given for several unrealised projects of communal significance 20 years ago. Faced with Domagoj’s resoluteness, Mate ultimately invites Domagoj to become the ‘leader’ of their small island,

allowing him to decide in what way to invest the financial funds collected during the war. Although Mate is trying to be conciliatory and invites Domagoj to forget their previous disagreements, Domagoj resolutely claims that he and Mate will never be friends due to their political past. Nevertheless, at the end of the scene, they leave the stage together as little Cvita, the daughter of the older Cvita with whom both Domagoj and Mate had relationship with prior to her pregnancy, invites both of her ‘fathers’ over for lunch. Their exit is followed by the final song of the play sung by all characters, summarising this adapted narrative and pointing towards Domagoj’s symbolic position:

Hungarians and Venetians couldn’t hurt him / nor grenades, cluster bombs, bellflowers or bullets. / He wasn’t screwed neither by Turks nor Serbs / Don’t pity him or care for him, people. / But we are leaving behind these stories of past glory / only he could hurt himself now / but despite everything he will know how to pull through / from the 7th Century this is how, we Croats, do it.⁸¹⁴

If analysed from the perspective of its already established symbolic meaning (Domagoj as the metaphor for the Croatian nation), I would argue that, besides providing Domagoj with the most direct and accurate symbolic potential for the immediate setting of the performance, another important aim of the added scene was to present a vision of national reconciliation as some sort of an affirmative consequence of the fighting. Referring to the after-war setting marked by open discussion about the future of the achieved independent state, the described end of the play in fact offered a trope that depicted the ‘reconciled’ representants of the nation: Domagoj as its uncompromised patriotic defender and Mate as the communist-turned-capitalist, another important figure of the wartime reality.⁸¹⁵

Moreover, if we remember how the original play outlined Domagoj’s decline as an autonomous subject oppressed by different rulers by the agency of the newly written segment which depicts him returning from the frontlines of an autonomous Croatia he voluntarily helped to liberate, it seems as if he finally acquired the freedom to manage his own destiny according to his own plans and wishes. In other words, he somewhat regained his position of

⁸¹⁴ “Nisu ništa mogli mu ni Ugri ni Mleci / Granate, kazete, zvončići ni meci / Njeg nisu sjebali ni Turci ni Srbi / Ne žali ga puče, nit za njega skrbi. / Al puštamo priče od povijesne slave / sam sebi jedino doć on može glave / Al unatoč svemu izvuć će se znati - / od stoljeća sedmog takvi smo Hrvati.” Mujičić, Senker and Škrabe, *3jada*, 153.

⁸¹⁵ One needs not to keep in mind that the wartime period of the early 1990s in the former Yugoslavia was heavily marked by the overall process of ‘transition’ from communism to capitalism. In Croatia, the main protagonists of this transition were either members of Croatian emigration that returned to their native land or the former Communists that created successful businesses on account of their prior managerial experience and the ‘ability’ to adjust to different political settings.

an active subject that he was given at the very beginning of the narrative. On a more general symbolic level, this could have been interpreted as the Croatian nation returning to the position of independent statehood that it had in ancient times by regaining full autonomy. Being set up on a stage overlooking the historical Knin fortress, the production very likely helped in securing these and similar renditions. Regardless of whether the production itself actually activated all the named interpretations or not, one should not doubt that by generating such a strongly national narrative, the story of Domagoj, a prototype of a ‘common’ Croat occurring in different historical periods, was rendered accessible for additional communal identification.



Fig. 21: *Domagojada*, Knin, 1995. Photo credit: Dubravka Vrgoč.

Considering the performance in Knin itself, as one could find out from the available material, the staging actually took place on the terrace of the House of Croatian Army in front of an audience consisting predominately of soldiers (see Fig. 21). Consulting the available reviews, Domagoj’s position as a theatrical sign of utter national symbolic was almost unanimously affirmed and emphasised as its most important characteristic. Namely, some authors defined the production as “a play about historical misunderstandings of Croats”⁸¹⁶ which “testifies about the harsh conditions we are faced with, and the will to pertain,”⁸¹⁷ while others saw

⁸¹⁶ Sanja Nikčević, “The Comeback of Political Drama in Croatia,” in *Political Performances: Theory and Practice*, eds. Susan C. Haedicke, Deirdre Heddon et al. (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2009), 178.

⁸¹⁷ Vrgoč, “‘Domagojada’ u oslobođenome Kninu.”

Domagoj as “[facing] almost the same tragic situation over and over again only because he’s a Croat (...) a loser just like the nation he personifies.”⁸¹⁸ In conclusion, unlike its interpretations in 1975, which more or less focused on the production’s anti-socialist criticism and the concept of eternal suffering as an argument for cultural and national independence, in the context of 1995 and with the newly added scene, it seems as if Domagoj was ‘updated’ in order to be recognised in its full symbolical and actual potential, namely as a metaphor for the attained national autonomy. While during the 1970s, *Domagojada* was seen as a satirically disguised anti-regime critique, restaged in the period of new ideological and political constellations, its narrative apparently reflected and further validated the dominant political discourse and its nationalist orientation.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, in the scope of the Croatian institutional theatre’s dedication to staging national myths during the early 1990s, these repertoires rather often featured historical figures from national history representing visions and stages of nationhood apt for specific political application. In an effort to encourage the contemporary audiences to identify with these figures and their destinies, the narratives featuring them were often adjusted and tailored in reference to the dominant political concepts of that time. By staging embodiments and personifications of the ‘proscribed’ national identity, theatre of that time actually provided the solicited concretisation of nationalist political concepts, hence not only reflecting them but, as some of the here-analysed productions demonstrate, also forging them ‘from scratch’.

As I have established by analysing these selected productions, the approach of using historical figures from the national past as metaphors of nationhood took somewhat specific forms. In the case of *The Death of Stjepan Radić*, his restitution as a symbol representing the idea of an independent statehood occurred without the main character even being represented on the stage. Furthermore, in the case of the mentioned play, its added significance was provided by the fact that it premiered during “the Croatian Spring,” thus once again confirming this period of overt demand for national independence being a strong reference point to the political and national agendas of the early 1990s.

In the case of *Andrija Hebrang*, his destiny and political significance was openly updated and adapted to the newly established concepts of nationhood. Mixing the factual and openly

⁸¹⁸ Branimir Donat, “Domagoj u Oluji,” *Vijenac*, September 7, 1995.

fictional material, its author engaged in presenting a narrative that would establish Hebrang as a modern national hero. Nevertheless, as I argue, the factual material of his life and, more importantly, his death were found to be too controversial to simply be neglected or forcefully adapted, hence leading to a certain ‘failure’ of his symbolic potential at that time.

As for *Domagojada*, this production went on to show that the concept of nation as represented in theatre was not inscribed only in existing figures of communal importance, such as Stjepan Radić or Andrija Hebrang, but was also inscribed into imagined figures who were sometimes easier to adapt to the ruling political notions and objectives. Embodying the historical trajectory of a nation in the making, Domagoj actually presented one of the most acute and compliant applications of several national myths in the sphere of theatre, this premise being best confirmed by the fact that the production was affixed to the state-organised celebratory program in 1995. Moreover, by making a symbol of the nation out of a ‘common man’, this production enabled what one could see as a simpler identification process between Domagoj and his contemporary audience.

By introducing these three exemplary theatre performances, I wanted to outline the evolution of the concept of the nation as manifested in its metaphors, confirming its rather transitional ‘nature’. However, in addition to these productions symbolising specific definitions of the nation, they also had a direct interconnection with the concrete reality of their staging. More precisely, by staging, (re)establishing, and expanding historical conditionings of these narratives, theatre of that time also served as a direct comment and an interpretative device of its wartime actuality. For instance, the death of Stjepan Radić in the eponymous production was explained as being avenged on the actual frontline; the enemy depicted both in *the Death of Stjepan Radić* and *Andrija Hebrang* was also detected as occupying actual battlefields; while Domagoj depicted wartime reality by directly participating in it. As argued throughout the chapter, metaphorical abilities of these narratives were in fact able to provoke a direct definition of the ongoing conflict, establishing categories of morally justified revenge, etc. In sum, not only did these selected national symbols point towards an exclusive national identity but they were also able to arouse a concrete ideological or ethnic hatred, a capacity of the theatrical system that should always be put under scrutiny.

Furthermore, by focusing on tragic destinies (or describing them as such), these productions once again focused on the myth of suffering and victimhood, confirming it as one of the most engaging national myths during the wartime. Focusing on tragical endings of these protagonists (the assassination of Stjepan Radić or the imprisonment of Andrija Hebrang) or their lasting suffering position (Domagoj) caused by a distinct enemy, by the power of the

metaphor erasing the difference between the individual and the community, these narratives in fact managed to provide supplementary arguments for the moral justification of the ongoing conflicts.

4.2. Staging Women in the Context of War and Nationalism

Following the assertion of Helen Gilbert, theatre, “always a site of circulating representational forms, (...) becomes, at formative moments in the ongoing narrative of nationhood, a means by which communities register, reiterate and/or contest modes and models of national belonging.”⁸¹⁹ In this chapter, I will further pursue the concept that the representation of a certain national identity in Croatian theatre during the wartime happened by resorting to different symbols, metaphors, and allegories as well. More specifically, I will focus on the question of women figures as symbols or allegories of nation, as these figures and their interpretations further develop the analytical field tackling the concepts of war, nationalism, and its representations.⁸²⁰ By detecting and analysing the available material relevant to the topic of representing the Croatian nation on stage, I consider the position and significance of women in a war as a very relevant framework for further research, leading to pertinent intersectional conclusions about the way gender was used in generating or confirming a homogenous national body.

Following these methodological settings, this chapter will be dedicated to the study of the most relevant examples referring to the question of gender in the context of the wartime, as well as its connection to nation-building processes as represented in the Croatian institutional theatre. Although treated as the most telling examples of this phenomena, one has to bear in mind that the chosen productions—as well as the majority of the productions mentioned in this paper—simultaneously represent different approaches to staging a nation and should thus be considered in the totality of interpretations they generate. On that note, other productions presented in this paper could also have been added to this chapter as they featured much relevant understandings. However, they were deliberately omitted either for not having female figures as central protagonists or due to the lack of available documentation.⁸²¹ Finally, the main methodological approach in this chapter is formed on the analysis of the available material concerning the presented theatre productions, consisting mostly of the original texts, photographs, and media reports, as well as existing theatre research. Aiming to further investigate the representational modes of women in the context of the nation-building

⁸¹⁹ Gilbert, Foreword to Jacqueline Lo, *Staging Nation: English Language Theatre in Malaysia and Singapore*, vii.

⁸²⁰ For a concise overview and history of using women as allegories of nation, see Reana Senjković, “Motherland is Female Gender,” *Narodna umjetnost* 39, no. 1 (2002): 133–150.

⁸²¹ One of such examples, for instance, would be the woman characters in Gundulić’s *Osman*, especially those of Krunoslava (the Polish woman-warrior) and Sokolica (her Turkish counter-part) which probably served as literary role-models for similar figures in Croatian dramatic literature. Another such example would be the play *Ondine* by Jean Giraudoux staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb in 1991 with yet another central woman character which might have provoked pertinent questions in time of its staging.

process in the context of war, I will compare the imagery employed by national theatre systems to the one constructed and disseminated by political elites. This kind of correlative approach will detect additional political potential of national theatre institutions and will manifest their compliance or even ‘obedience’ to those politically governed practices creating a solidified and mutual national identity.

Gender and War

As I have tried to argue throughout this dissertation, the war in Croatia more or less served not only as a context but also as a pretext for national unification, a process that took over the socio-political reality of the country as of late 1990, along with the first political transformations followed by the ‘sabre rattling’. Although hardly apt for any attempt of generalisation, as a socio-political circumstance, a war most often denotes a wider social homogeneity and consent, intrinsically implying the patriarchal culture and the rule of hegemonic masculinity that is constructed upon ideals of masculine heroism. The war fought on the territory of Croatia (extending from 1991 until 1995) showed high congruence to this notion—presented and perceived by its main perpetrators as a defensive homeland war fought with the main goal of creating an independent state based on a centuries-long national aspiration of gaining national sovereignty, it featured numerous examples of following patriarchal codes of building the (re)imagined national community.

As different studies dealing with the position of gender in the times of war debate, war in general tends to socialise citizens into present gender roles. In addition, the main model of war culture tends to promote a very traditional and deeply patriarchal division between these roles, promoting hegemonic masculinity for warrior men and a traditional model of femininity in which women are home keepers and bearers of children.⁸²² This kind of division to binary definitions of gender occurred during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s as well, which comes as no surprise, as the conflict was “closely related to the nationalist ‘revival’ of the pure traditional cultures, allegedly endangered during the times of Communism and the shared history of living in a common country.”⁸²³

In war, what comes forth is a certain hegemonic masculinity constructed upon “the myth of masculine heroism which is inscribed in the very foundation of Balkan patriarchal

⁸²² Jasmina Lukić, “Gender and War in South Slavic Literatures,” in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Volume IV: Types and Stereotypes*, eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2004), 253.

⁸²³ Yugoslavia was envisaged as an emancipatory project, with emancipation of women as one of its core elements. Lukić, “Gender and War in South Slavic Literatures,” 253.

cultures,”⁸²⁴ a process detected in the repertoire of the national theatres of that time as well—staging national heroes became a repertoire feature of most national theatres throughout the post-Yugoslav region during that period. By introducing and securing this hegemonic masculinity, the official political system usually legitimises patriarchy and further secures the dominant position of men, while simultaneously generating a subordinate position for women. Even though the realities and conditions of war have throughout that history often subverted the mentioned gender divisions,⁸²⁵ as Jasmina Lukić argues, even then “they do not make [these divisions] less strong.”⁸²⁶

Following the significant research of Dubravka Žarkov, who focused on distinguishing several prototypes of representing women in the wars in Yugoslavia, the different representational modes of women during the war could be divided into three main categories, each one relating to specific ideological and political objectives as prescribed by the political elites of that time: the woman as the victim, the woman as a mother, and the woman as a fighter. These categories and sub-categories of imagery and interpretation will serve as the main theoretical framework for my further analysis in this chapter, aiming to detect in what way the representation on women on national theatre stages corresponded to the overall display of women during the war.

Gender and Nation

Considering the war in Croatia as happening simultaneously to the processes of national unification, the concept of nation should obviously be included into the overall research on the topic of representing gender in wartime. As most relevant sociological and anthropological theories argue, gender and nation are both social constructions which influence each other in various ways.⁸²⁷ But, more importantly, traditional gender roles are often being used as starting points in constructing different national mythologies—the nation or the national ‘soil’ have often been feminised in official and cultural narratives, and images of nation or land as a woman have been perpetually presented by different cultural and

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 254.

⁸²⁵ I am referring to the work-emancipation of women workers in the industry of war, etc. However, this phenomenon “which could perhaps have influenced the awareness of the individual (...) failed to produce long-lasting change since the battlefield—primarily the domain of the man—had economic and cultural priority.” Senjković, “*Motherland is Female Gender*,” 135.

⁸²⁶ Lukić, “Gender and War in South Slavic Literatures,” 253.

⁸²⁷ For more on this topic see Jon Mulholland, Nicola Montagna, Erin Sanders-McDonagh, eds., *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender and Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Chizuko Ueno, *Nationalism and Gender* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004); Tamar Mayer, *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2000); etc.

artistic narratives. In the times of defining a communal identity, the concept of nation sort of confirms and further fixes the binary gender positions as it “often naturalizes constructions of masculinity and femininity: women physically reproduce the nation, and men protect and avenge it.”⁸²⁸ Needless to say, in times of war, this distinction becomes even more evident as the physical combat, traditionally reserved for men, becomes the prioritised approach to securing the construction of a nation-state.

Besides this division to ‘natural’ positions and stereotypes, the war simultaneously absorbs individual identities into a mutual, national one—in other words, during a war, which is generally considered to be a process of harsh and direct social and all other cohesion, the personal identities are somewhat erased or, better yet, ‘over-written’ by this collective one. The self-determined identities (ones that each individual is free to make for herself) suddenly come in the abrupt relation to a certain “determined, depersonalised identity,”⁸²⁹ an assemblage of constructed and problematic collective characteristics proscribed by the institutional authorities and disseminated via different channels of representation. The identity attributes such as gender, class, age, family, or city affiliation, thus become somehow overshadowed or absorbed into group identities, either national or ethnic ones.

Regarding the common claims of ethnic-based nationalism, the ethnic groups “often specify membership as a ‘natural’ right of being born into them”⁸³⁰ and are “usually premised on an assumption concerning a unity of origin among the subjects, whether cultural, historical or biological.”⁸³¹ In the case of Croatia, this ‘unified’ national identity, with its powerful myths of nationhood apt for mobilising collectives for war activities, presupposed a certain ‘ethnic purity’. In order to be considered as a legitimate member of a new national identity propagated in Croatia as of 1991 and the first democratic elections that marked the end of Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, one had to clearly declare one’s ethnic affiliation to the Croatian nation.⁸³² As the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s were conflicts fought for ethnically exclusive territories, it was exactly this ethnic identity that gained priority in wartime reality, defining so accurately the demarcation line between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

⁸²⁸ Julie Mostov, “Politics of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia,” in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 89.

⁸²⁹ Džemal Sokolović, *Nacija protiv naroda* (Belgrade: Biblioteka XX Vek, 2006), 121.

⁸³⁰ Nira Duval-Davis, Floya Anthias, eds., *Women-Nation-State* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1989), 2.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸³² This process of expressing and presenting national identity was mostly done in administrative way, through official census or election process. In the same time, it was also indicated by promoting and performing certain characteristics of this identity like, for instance, regularly going to church, etc.

Following the most relevant research tackling the concepts of gender and nation, the position of women in constructing this newly established ‘ethnonation’ could be considered as decisive. Following the arguments of Jane Mostov, women or, more accurately, women bodies “actually become boundaries of the nation, for not only are they symbols of the fecundity of the nation and vessels for the nation’s reproduction, but they also serve as territorial markers.”⁸³³ Women, considered in their natural relation to other members of society (as mothers, wives, and daughters) somehow designate the space of a nation and, at the same time, stand as its property, defended and protected by their patriotic sons, husbands, and fathers in the case of an outside threat. As I outline in this chapter, the same set of the above-mentioned ‘identity measures’ was being applied on the representational level of the wartime reality in Croatia as well—reflecting, continuing, or even defining it.

As already mentioned, the nation was (and still is) very often represented by an image of a more or less abstract woman figure, simultaneously carrying characteristics of bravery and pride as well as femininity, nurture, justice, and empathy. In the case of Croatia, throughout different historical periods, the symbolic level of its representation also contained some of this gendered imagery. To a certain degree, this was conditioned via pure linguistic circumstances, as the words ‘Hrvatska’ [Croatia] and ‘domovina’ [motherland] are both of the female genus, thus initiating quite obvious gendered interpretations. A more official and unquestionably more affective confirmation of the female gender of the motherland⁸³⁴ was generated by the official national anthem called “Moja domovina” [My Motherland] featuring lyrics describing this motherland as bearing attributes of a woman.⁸³⁵ In general, the allegoric femininity referring to the concepts of nations was mostly used to affirm the ‘blood ties’ of members and their imagined community, transferring the ‘purity’ of the mother-children bond onto a more political level, resulting in communal sentiments of affiliation or protection. In the times of ‘threat’ to a certain nation, this tendency of personifying and representing the nation as a motherly figure becomes additionally emphasised, as it thereby aims to secure and somewhat normalises its protection and defence. As I am going to show,

⁸³³ Mostov, “Politics of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia,” 90.

⁸³⁴ The terms ‘motherland’ or ‘fatherland’ are generally employed “to emphasise a sense of genealogical rootedness and exclusivity to a place.” Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson et al., eds., *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: Politics of National Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 96. Nevertheless, I tend to consider these terms closer to the concept of the ‘domovina’ [homeland] which not only implies the place of someone’s residency but holds other firm connotations of this genealogical rootedness as well.

⁸³⁵ The original lyrics of the song written in 1835 describe the beauty of the land as if portraying the physical attributes of a woman (heroic, fearless, gracious, gentle breasts, clear forehead, clear eyes, etc.). In addition, Croatian official press often described the Serbian aggression as the violation and raping of the homeland.

in the context of the war fought on the territory of Croatia as of 1991 and its correlated socio-political consequences (or prerequisites) such as nationalism, this genderising of nation featuring specific political and other objectives did not bypass the national theatre system. On the other hand, not only the nations or ethnic groups “became personified or symbolically represented as female or male bodies”⁸³⁶ but this correlation was also reciprocal—analysing the way women were represented in the sphere of national media during the wars in Yugoslavia, Dubravka Žarkov concludes that it was also the notions of “manhood and womanhood [that] were suddenly associated with matters that concern state territory, politics, and—last but not least—ethnicity.”⁸³⁷ In other words, Žarkov posits how the gender and sexuality were very much linked to the concepts of nation, state, or ethnicity in an interdependent relationship that was, accordingly, echoed in the media representations of that time. Actually, Žarkov postulates that, throughout the representational modes, this ethnicity was not just rendered visible but was actually “produced,”⁸³⁸ with bodies of both men and women being the primary sites of this production—an interesting position that questions the compliance of theatre as a mode of representation in not only reflecting but also producing certain concepts apt for concrete national and ethnic identification or exclusion. For Žarkov, representing national myths and narratives “through familiar gendered and sexualized imagery”⁸³⁹ is in fact one of the most important processes of nation-building, generating overt nationalism.

As for the position of women in a nationalist context, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias claim that “the central dimensions of the relationships between collectives and the state are constituted around the roles of women,”⁸⁴⁰ further categorising this assertion. According to them, there are several ways in which women have been positioned within national discourses: women as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectives; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collective and as the transmitters of its culture; as signifiers of ethnic/national differences; and as participants in national, economic, political, and military struggles. Needless to say, these positions should not be considered as exclusive—in the case of wartime Croatia, as I am going to argue, women as representative figures simultaneously

⁸³⁶ Dubravka Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁴⁰ Yuval-Davis and Anthias, *Women-Nation-State*, 1.

featured several of these functions and interpretations, sometimes even shifting from one to another. These elaborated positions will also serve as my theoretical guidelines in the ensuing analysis concerning the wartime repertoire of Croatian national theatre featuring elaborated female protagonists, thus generating some relevant additional interpretations.

The Hearth: Anera and Motherhood as a National Concept

As already explained in one of the previous chapters, parallel to tackling a controversial feature of nationhood, the production of *The Hearth* introduced the ‘rural’ or essentialist motif in the overall national discourse in Croatia as of 1991. As I will argue, this ‘natural’ concept that generates affirmative characteristics for conceptualising a nation was situated and interpreted mostly by and via the main female character of the play, Anera. Furthermore, depicted as a figure who is ultimately punished for featuring exactly these virtues, the position of the woman as the victim in both wartime and processes of national homogenisation will also be further elaborated. As the video material of the analysed production from 1991 is missing,⁸⁴¹ the research will be focused on the original novel by Mile Budak as well as on the available written and visual material documenting its 1991 staging.

As already stated in the introduction to this chapter, both war and the nation-building processes were defined by many as producing more or less ‘naturalised’ concepts of gender, with men considered and represented as defenders and women as producers of this national collective. In the case of wartime Croatia, this argument was only further confirmed, as during this period, the “conservative Balkan nationalism (...) reasserted the theme of the ‘home and hearth’ as women’s natural location,”⁸⁴² suggesting this concept as a much-needed prerequisite for constructing an ideal nation-state. As I am going to argue, this nationalistic argument was very much reflected in the case of the production of *The Hearth* in the Croatian National Theatre of Zagreb in April, 1991, ultimately opening new fields of interpretation considering the interdependent relations between this institution of national relevance and its socio-political context.

While most of the other characters of the play were depicted as dependent of certain ‘animalistic’ urges and morals, throughout the novel, Anera is presented as the ideal

⁸⁴¹ Until this day (April, 2020), I have not received any kind of an answer concerning the existence of this material from several contacted departments of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

⁸⁴² Silva Meznaric, “Gender as Ethno-Marker: Rape, War, and Identity Politics in the Former Yugoslavia,” in *Identity, Politics and Women*, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 76.

prototype of rural women celebrated by the author for her unquestionable love for her partner, their children, and their modest home. She is depicted not only as physically beautiful, “firm, proud, full of determination and faith,”⁸⁴³ but also extremely emphatic, helpful, “clean and hard-working,”⁸⁴⁴ willingly sustaining sacrifice for her partner’s and her children’s sake, as well as passionately dedicated to the land. In addition, she is depicted as a devoted worshiper, establishing a rather personal relationship with God and the Catholic church, considering the Catholic belief system to function as the final authority of all things. On the first level of interpretation, this idealistic portrayal of Anera as an incorrupt peasant girl, devoted wife, hard-working and selfless mother with a developed notion of pride and moral integrity stemming from the religious practice, actually mirrored the political and ideological positions of the time when *The Hearth* was initially staged, namely the period of the Ustashe rule (1941–1945). According to different research related to the topic of the women’s position in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), it comes as no surprise that the “women in this national struggle were invisible or in the background, relegated to roles defined by nature.”⁸⁴⁵ In other words, they were sentenced to their private roles of nurturing and reproducing the nation by bearing children and taking care of the household/home. Moreover, the NDH regime “connected the discussion on the women’s role in the nationalist enterprise with the view that the new social order could be based on the ‘natural’ society of the peasantry.”⁸⁴⁶ As already explained in the previous chapter dedicated to this play, it was peasantry that was acknowledged as a unique national community on the basis of which the Croatian national identity was being defined in 1941—the Ustashe regime designated the women to resuscitate and reproduce exactly this way of life. During the short existence of the NDH, countrywomen were officially celebrated as “true martyrs, self-sacrificing and hard-working, not [fighting] for individual, liberal rights, but for the nation’s life and future.”⁸⁴⁷ Following this proclamation, one could interpret Anera’s decision to live and have children with Lukan out of wedlock as Budak’s way of showing the ideal of a woman who puts her role of a mother and nurturer above all other social or moral codes. Correspondingly, her devotion to religion and the institution of the Catholic church should also be interpreted from the perspective of the Croatian Catholic Church gaining further political importance as of

⁸⁴³ Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života*, 107.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁴⁵ Kevin Passmore, *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe 1941–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 119.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 119. Needless to say, this ideologically imprinted vision of women was in total contrast to the overall inclusion of women as executed during the anti-fascist struggle throughout Yugoslavia.

1941 in Croatia, simultaneously affirming this religious affiliation as the element of the ‘Croatianhood’.⁸⁴⁸

As already commented, *The Hearth* was not staged during socialist Yugoslavia, not only due to the ideological controversy of its author but also, I would argue, because the narrative of the play and especially the portrayal of the characters, including Anera, were not relatable in any way to the ideological assumptions of the period. As the socialist regime focused on the overall political as well as social emancipation of women—although maybe just declaratively⁸⁴⁹—this kind of representation, where a woman voluntarily and passionately ‘reduces’ herself to the essentialist functions of her gender, would be seen as compromising the socialist system of values. In line with this argument, staging the play in 1991 should not only be understood as the proof of rehabilitating a certain ideological system focusing on the nation’s autonomy and identity but also as concurrently reintroducing a rather retrograde or ‘pre-modern’ patriarchal mode in the scope of which the position of woman should be analysed as the initial generative point of ideologically defining this unified national and ethnic community.

By analysing the existing documentation concerning the staging and the reception of *The Hearth* in 1991, one realises that the interpretation of Anera as the symbolical representation of the ‘motherland’ itself was not much different from the similar interpretation she had as a figure back in 1941. As already mentioned, although the reviews of the 1991 production were mostly concentrated around the restoration of Mile Budak as a national author, Anera still gained special recognition as “a girl that tried to reconcile the traditional woman’s submissiveness and the authentic human dignity”⁸⁵⁰ and a character “that holds the central place in the play, one of the most beautiful women characters in the Croatian literature, rich with symbolic significance.”⁸⁵¹ This symbolic significance was almost unanimously recognised in her representing the Croatian nation focused on preserving its territories from the external usurpation. As indicated in the previous chapter and following the general ‘Blood and Soil’ concept of the play, Anera is depicted as having a deep connection with the land. According to Budak, “Anera (...) would go to the field with all of her heart (...) so that one

⁸⁴⁸ The role of Croatian Catholic church during NDH as well as from 1991 will be discussed in detail in the further chapter of this work.

⁸⁴⁹ Some researchers and historians argue that this political and social equality of gender was implemented ‘on the paper’ but not in the day to day practice. For more on the topic, see Sabrina P. Ramet, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States* (University Park: the Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

⁸⁵⁰ Boris B. Hrovat, “Simbol pučke životnosti,” *Vjesnik*, April 15, 1991.

⁸⁵¹ Marija Grgičević, “Obrisi tragedije,” *Vjesnik*, April 14, 1991.

could not know what belongs to the earth and what to Anera, as she was a part of this fostering earth.”⁸⁵² In other words, she was found to be identical to the earth/soil she is cultivating, both being described by ‘motherly’ attributes. The elaborated relation she has to the land and her home thus not only constructs the pure, pre-political, or natural state of community ‘proscribed’ by the ideology of the NDH but additionally genderises this concept—not only is Anera identified with the soil/land, the land itself also receives Anera’s characteristics and virtues.

Moreover, depicted as a dedicated protector and defender of her ‘home’ and all those that populate it, Anera was outlined as a metaphor of a community purposefully preserving its borders. In the context of the arising inter-ethnic conflicts throughout Croatia during April 1991 being progressively construed and presented by the term ‘defensive war’,⁸⁵³ it seems that this narrative concerning Anera’s protective position was served the dominant political discourse.

Anera’s connection to the home/soil is additionally supplemented with her portrayal as a mother and the connotations that this function eventually produces. As mentioned, upon losing her husband in a war, Anera moves in with the widower Lukan to help him with the household and eventually has two more children with him. In fact, their relationship is depicted as a rather practical one, where children are born not so much out of love but more to continue cultivating the land and securing the continuation of the family lineage. In this light, emphasising Anera’s motherly function resonated in great deal with the role that women are traditionally given in the context of the nationalist discourse. Of course, this fixating of Anera as a motherly figure initially followed the ideological constructs of 1941 with Budak being the official of “Ustaše movement (...) especially appreciating the Croatian mother,”⁸⁵⁴ and “recognizing the mother as the base of forming the nation.”⁸⁵⁵ Considering mothers to be the “guardians of ‘Croatianhood’ (...) by giving a physical life to a child,”⁸⁵⁶ women during the Ustashe regime were designated as “the source of continuous restoration of Croatian people.”⁸⁵⁷ Echoing these positions and extending them to a more general moral

⁸⁵² Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života*, 65.

⁸⁵³ The term ‘defensive war’ was used by the Croatian state media even when defining the Croat-Bosniak conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina although it was fought on a territory of another country. See V. P. Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁸⁵⁴ Irena Javor, “Majka čuvarica hrvatstva-Uz prvi ‘Hrvatski tjedan majke i djeteta’,” *Spremnost* 1, no. 14 (1942).

⁸⁵⁵ Olga Osterman, “Udio hrvatske žene u stvaranju i održavanju hrvatske narodnosti,” *Ustaškinja* 1, no. 11 (1941): 3.

⁸⁵⁶ Javor, “Majka čuvarica hrvatstva-Uz prvi ‘Hrvatski tjedan majke i djeteta’.”

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid.

perspective, Budak himself writes in the novel how “Anera worked for the eternity as a God’s envoy in this eternal, continuous act of creation, restoration, fertilisation and birth.”⁸⁵⁸

Furthermore, by giving birth to Lukan’s children to enlarge their family and work collective, Anera is not just securing the continuation of this kinship, but by committing to a man from her own community, she is presented as the bearer of its ‘ethnic purity’. In the socio-political context of the NDH, this ethnic purity was officially implemented by the institution of racial laws which, in order to secure the production of an ethnically homogenous nation, also prohibited marriages between persons of “Arian and non-Arian blood.”⁸⁵⁹

However, this reduction of the woman to her role and significance of a mother was not an exclusive consequence of the fascist ideology but is defined as being somewhat general to all nationalist movements. More precisely, as argued by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, one of the main two elements of the nationalist discourse relating to the position of women considers them as either “biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities,”⁸⁶⁰ either “as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups.”⁸⁶¹ When analysing the actuality of the 1991 staging of *The Hearth*, it becomes evident that the official conceptualisation of womanhood followed the same arguments presented in 1941, thus only further emphasising the levels of ideological overlapping of these two socio-political contexts.

When referring to Croatia in the context of defining the nation fuelled with the arising war as of 1991, women were found to be “not only used as objects in symbolical creating and recreating of the national imagery but were also used in practical sense: as to keep the national body alive and demographically renewed.”⁸⁶² In other words, they not only gained a status of national symbol but were also constructed as the reproducers of this communal body, simultaneously marking its boundaries. The conception of women as “reproductive machines”⁸⁶³ was further confirmed as a ‘priority’ of the new nationalist political dogma as of 1991 by means of approaching different relational agendas. More precisely, referring to women as actively securing the continuation of the nation, the question of abortion suddenly became considered as an act of ‘national betrayal’. For example, at the outbreak of the 1991

⁸⁵⁸ Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života*, 4.

⁸⁵⁹ Ana Benačić, “1941: Godina kada je Zlo ovladalo katoličkim medijima,” *Lupiga*, April 12, 2016. <https://www.lupiga.com/vijesti/1941-godina-kada-je-zlo-ovladalo-katolicnim-medijima>, last accessed April 29, 2019.

⁸⁶⁰ Duval-Davis and Anthias, *Women-Nation-State*, 1.

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁶² Biljana Bijelić, “Žene na rubu rodne jednakopravnosti,” in *Demokratska tranzicija u Hrvatskoj*, eds. Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matić (Zagreb: Alineja, 2006), 246.

⁸⁶³ Meznaric, “Gender as Ethno-Marker: Rape, War, and Identity Politics in the Former Yugoslavia,” 94.

conflicts and parallel to processes of national and political identification, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman called women who have abortions “mortal enemies of the nation”⁸⁶⁴ and blamed the ‘tragedy’ of the Croatian nation on “women, pornography, and abortion.”⁸⁶⁵ The phrase “everyone has the right to life” was inserted into the new Croatian constitution,⁸⁶⁶ which local feminists believed to be an obvious preparation to outlaw abortion, a legal right in Croatia as of 1952.⁸⁶⁷ Needless to say, the anti-abortion political campaign was significantly influenced by the Croatian Catholic Church, which was given a more important political significance as of 1991 and was thus acting as an official arbiter in this case as well.⁸⁶⁸

This political agenda that defined woman as ‘supplying’ the nation with new members became likewise represented in everyday life during early 1990s. For instance, the streetcars in Zagreb carried posters reading “each unborn baby is an unborn Croat,”⁸⁶⁹ whereas after several political meetings, attendees were urged to “go home and make new Croats.”⁸⁷⁰ This overall orientation that was shaped via different modes of reproduction and representation was eventually administratively fixed in the spring of 1992, when the Croatian Ministry for Reconstruction and Renewal established a Department for Demographic Renewal, with Ante Baković, a priest, and one of the most passionate advocate against abortion as its head. The Croatian government’s “Program for Demographic and Spiritual Renewal” actually proclaimed motherhood as the highest vocation and profession for women and sought to develop strategies to boost an ‘ethnically clean’ birth rate in Croatia.⁸⁷¹ Among other things, this policy for demographic renewal called for a definition of womanhood that attempted to compel women to make household and family their priorities in life. In their efforts to ‘assist’

⁸⁶⁴ Renata Salecl, “Nationalism, anti-Semitism, and anti-feminism in Eastern Europe,” *New German Critique* no. 57 (1992): 59.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁶⁶ “Ustav Republike Hrvatske,” *Narodne Novine*, December 22, 1990. https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/1990_12_56_1092.html; last accessed April 15, 2019.

⁸⁶⁷ The abortion in socialist Yugoslavia was legal as of 1952 and the right to abortion entered the Constitution of 1972 as one of the basic human rights. In Croatia, abortion up to 10th week of pregnancy is still legal, but more than 50% of the medical staff in the country trained to perform them use their right of conscientious objection hence are not executing them. In addition, the abortion question became one of the political battlefields in Croatia as of 2016 and the first “Walk for Life” organised by the initiative “In the Name of Family.”

⁸⁶⁸ For more on the role of the Croatian Catholic Church and religion prior and during the Yugoslav wars, see the next chapter of this paper.

⁸⁶⁹ Mirjana Morokvašić, “The Logics of Exclusion: Nationalism, Sexism and the Yugoslav War,” in *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*, eds. Nickie Charles and Helen Hintjens (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 76.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁷¹ Patrizia Albanese, *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 117.

women to become mothers, the Croatian government even passed a law in 1995 that aimed to recognise women with four or more children with the paid status of ‘mother educators’.⁸⁷²

Introducing Anera in a national theatre institution, prior or parallel to these processes defining womanhood in a strict interdependence to the mentioned concepts of the nationhood, should therefore not be interpreted outside of them.

On the other hand, as said, women were not only seen as reproducers and carriers of the nation but were also seen as defining its ethnic boundaries. In the case of Croatia in 1991, this meant that the children born by Croatian mothers were to be considered as full members of the Croatian nation exclusively if they were ‘produced’ in an endogenic relationship created inside the limits of the same ethnic group. This specific qualification was detected in dealing with the phenomenon of the interethnic or so-called ‘mixed marriages’. Although these types of marriages were never officially proscribed, statistics show that the number of these kinds of marital relationships drastically dropped in Croatia as of 1991.⁸⁷³ This fact testifies to the overall atmosphere of ethnic ‘purification’ of the national body and to the positioning of endogamy as one of the prerequisites of this new, ethnically ‘uncontaminated’ national identification.⁸⁷⁴

Parallel to this, as of 1991, the ‘mixed marriages’ gained an overt negative connotation, being described as a political relict of socialism. Interpreted as one of the policies more or less imposed by the Yugoslavian socialist government in fighting against nationalism,⁸⁷⁵ endogamy was thus, in 1991, seen as breaking away from the proscribed regulations of this ideological setting identified as being ‘foreign’ to the ‘true Croatian nation’. In this light, bringing back Anera to the central national stage, a woman recognised as a symbol of the nation and portrayed as having exclusive and ‘productive’ relationships with men from her

⁸⁷² For more on the program that included this measure see Marijan Križić, “Demografska politika u Hrvatskoj u uvjetima suvremenih demografskih kretanja,” https://www.pilar.hr/wp-content/images/stories/dokumenti/zbornici/28/z_28_353.pdf; last accessed on February 2020. This administrative act echoes one of the positions accorded to women by nationalistic politics which considers them as primary educators that pass on knowledge of heritage and national culture to their children.

⁸⁷³ During the period between 1991 and 1993 one in every five marriages between Croats and Serbs in Croatia ended in a divorce. This trend was mostly concerning marriages between Croat women and Serb men. For more see Snježana Mrđen, “Etnički miješani brakovi na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije (1970–2005),” *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, no. 131 (2010): 255–326.

⁸⁷⁴ In one of his speeches prior to the first democratic elections in Croatia, Tuđman himself allegedly said how he’s “happy that his wife is neither Jewish nor Serb,” but as this declaration was apparently taken out of the context and was later disputed by Tuđman himself, it should not be considered as proof of official policies. In an interview for the French newspaper *Le Figaro* Tuđman said that “the sentence was taken out of its context. It’s nonsense. The Jewish friends I had are still my friends.” Somewhat significantly, Serbs were not mentioned in this elaborated explanation. Franjo Tuđman, *Hrvatska riječ svijetu* (Zagreb: Hrvatska Sveučilišna naklada, Institut za povijest, 1999), 227.

⁸⁷⁵ It was thought that interethnic marriages would minimise the potential outbursts of nationalism within a family and then, subsequently, in the overall society as well.

own locale could have been interpreted as supporting or even (re)establishing of this ethnically restrictive social nucleus as the ideal of the new nation-state.



Fig. 22: Ena Begović as Anera in *The Hearth*. Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, April 1991. Photo credit: author unknown.

As I tried to demonstrate, Budak introduced Anera as the ideal archetype of an ethnically exclusive nationhood by constructing her as the figure of a mother as its main “productive machine.”⁸⁷⁶ In order to be considered as such, Anera was appropriately coated in affirmative and ‘righteous’ characteristics, such as modesty, self-sacrifice, empathy, perseverance, diligence, dedication to her family and their household, inherent dignity, etc. Still, portraying her merits provided not only an elaborate image of the ideal womanhood required for constructing a nation-state but, at the same time, rendered the sources of her suffering more condemning and her ultimate revenge more justified. In other words, the more perfect Anera was, the more contemptible was the way she was treated by others. Throughout the novel, Anera is being progressively abused by her father-in-law Blažić, not only verbally and physically but also by different means of conditioning her existence—he is passionately opposed to her marrying his son; he throws her out of his family home; he forbids her to be the part of his work cooperative; etc. When analysing the motives of this cruel abuse executed by Blažić, the novel explains them in terms of his unfulfilled sexual yearning

⁸⁷⁶ Meznaric, “Gender as Ethno-Marker: Rape, War, and Identity Politics in the Former Yugoslavia,” 94.

towards Anera.⁸⁷⁷ By introducing this motif of sexual lust, she actually withstands a process of sensualisation that, according to her symbolic function, could refer to the concept of “sensualising the nation and the national imagery”⁸⁷⁸ in what Mostov recognises a ‘seductive’ strategy aimed at potential ‘protectors’ of the nation. In other words, parallel to constructing representational allegories of “de-eroticized (...) chaste and faithful wives and patriotic mothers as pure, wholesome figures,”⁸⁷⁹ nationalistic discourse also introduces this eroticised imagery in order to “enhance military recruitment.”⁸⁸⁰ Simply put, in the times of national consolidation, the eroticised representations of women as national symbols address the men as their protectors from those ‘other’ men now seen as potential sexual aggressors as well. In the case of *The Hearth*, by ‘sexualising’ Anera, it is not only she who becomes even more fixated in her position of a concept that needs to be protected or defended—by means of his sexual desire, Blažić is also tied up in his position of an outsider enemy.

Besides the seductiveness, another representational strategy that Mostov detects when discussing women as allegories of nations is the concept of vulnerability. Departing from the symbolic meaning, the vulnerability of a woman, the potential threat that she endures, identifies every violation towards her a violation against the collective identity she is thought to represent. Although Anera is depicted as trying to fight off her aggressor Blažić (in one point of the narrative she even wounds him with a razor in an act of self-defence), she ultimately decides not to disclose him as her bully to the village “because of my husband, my hearth and God”⁸⁸¹ and thus continues to suffer from his forceful behaviour in this position of “pure helplessness.”⁸⁸² In other words, although being a moral ideal, she is simultaneously depicted as a victim of sexual and other bullying, and her tragic ending—getting murdered by Blažić in cold blood—only confirms her tragic position. On the final level of the narrative, Anera is additionally embedded in her victimhood by being avenged by Lukan, her partner and the father of her children, who kills Blažić upon realising it was him who killed her. In this sense, Anera’s vulnerability initiates vengeance, which, because of the fact she has been

⁸⁷⁷ In the novel itself, Blažić is depicted as being sexually aroused by the young Anera who, after working in his field, drinks water from the well not aware that her shirt has been unbuttoned. As he sees her breasts through the shirt made of “the authentic home-made canvas,” he is depicted as being struck by a lightning, finding himself not able to control his lust. Blažić even compares Anera’s breasts with his wife’s breast which he had seen “only when she was breast-feeding” and which he now finds to be repulsive. By denouncing the figure of the mother as the ideal woman, he is even more pushed outside the ‘morally’ unified community. Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života*, 110–111.

⁸⁷⁸ Mostov, “Politics of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia,” 90.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁸¹ Budak, *Ognjište: Roman iz ličkog seljačkog života*, 86.

⁸⁸² Tomislav Sabljak, “Scensko čitanje Budakova ‘Ognjišta’,” *Vjesnik*, November 26, 1994.

steadily abused, is perceived as morally just. As already stated throughout this dissertation, the concept of revenge and the 'justified punishment' were frequently used concepts when trying to 'legitimise' different conflicts raging throughout the Yugoslav region.⁸⁸³

A similar strategy referring to the concept of revenge was already being set in motion on the level of presenting the arising conflicts in the overall political discourse in Croatia as of 1991—namely, the nation-state was elaborately depicted and objectivised as being attacked, 'penetrated', or 'raped' by the enemy, with "the female body as crucial in producing Croatia as the ultimate victimized Self"⁸⁸⁴ that would be defended or even avenged by men. In Budak's vision, the act of the 'rightful' revenge of the victimised Anera is executed by Lukan, not only a member of the same community but also a man of moral status more or less equal to Anera's. The narrative of revenge is thus not only presented as a prerequisite for a 'justified punishment' but additionally even prescribes by whom should it be executed. In the wake of war and parallel to the process of constituting an ethnically exclusive nation-state, this narrative of the legitimate vengeance or revanchism could have resonated or even confirmed the general political and media discourse dealing with the actuality of April 1991. The fact that this narrative was presented on a central national stage, which implicates a certain interpretative authority, unquestionably highlights these potential interpretations. Ultimately, considering Anera's and Lukan's religious devotion from the perspective of the Catholic dogma, her violent death is in fact described by Budak as some sort of a religious sacrifice, rendering her a martyr or even a saint. This transformation of Anera to the realm of sanctity obviously introduced religion as the final moral horizon and authority, reflecting the actual political significance of the Croatian Catholic Church that was to be detected in 1941 as well as in 1991.

However, the most accurate confirmation of Anera's ascension to the sanctimonious significance occurred in 2014 when the parish of the small Croatian village Sveti Rok—actually the birthplace of Mile Budak—erected a monument of Anera in front of the local church as "the embodiment of the goodness and holiness of the local mother."⁸⁸⁵ As explained by the initiators of this event, the monument was erected to the 'real' Anera, of

⁸⁸³ This causal interconnection where one conflict was explained as provoked by an earlier one was also part of the political narrative during the existence of the Independent State of Croatia. For instance, different anti-Serbian laws imposed by the NDH government were seen as revenge for the twenty years of subjugation, terror, and police methods of rule that the Croatian people suffered in the previous regime, namely the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1929–1941).

⁸⁸⁴ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 103.

⁸⁸⁵ As cited in <http://www.ika.hr/index.php?prikaz=vijest&ID=163768>, https://www.franjevcisplit.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4962&Itemid=5, last accessed May 2, 2019.

whose existence there were testimonies given by the local people and after which Budak allegedly modelled his literary creation (see Fig. 23 & 24). By resorting to this ‘historical’ version of Anera, those mounting the statue⁸⁸⁶ in fact intended to ‘bypass’ its direct connection with Budak’s Anera, probably avoiding the potential controversy of rehabilitating the author. By materialising narratives of the ‘real’ and the fictional Anera in Budak’s birthplace and staging them in front of the local church, this monument functions as a true reminder of Budak’s ideological positions connecting the native soil, the continuous history, and the institution of Catholic church.

Following the here-presented argumentation, staging Anera in 1991 activated different symbolic relations to its socio-political reality, serving the contextual objectives of nationalist ideological constructs. In addition, by detecting the similarities in the way two historically different contexts resorted to Anera as the ideal image of a nation as well as a motivation for its ethnic homogenisation, I further demonstrated how defining the Croatian nation in 1991 moved along the lines of highly controversial concepts of ‘Croatianhood’ formed during the fascist government in 1941.



Fig. 23 & 24: The blessing of the monument to Anera, village of Sv. Rok, Croatia, August 16, 2014. Photo credit: author unknown.

Hekuba: The Mother of Tears / the Fierce Mother

Just few months after *The Hearth* premiered in Zagreb, in July of 1991, another play featuring a woman character provoking and reflecting different concepts of national imagery was staged, this time in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival. Although not performed in a national theatre house, the fact that it was produced by the most important

⁸⁸⁶ The erection of the statue was initiated by the local clergy with donations for its execution secured by many private donors. See *ibid.*

national theatre festival in Croatia still renders this production relevant to the overall topic of my dissertation. Alongside the already mentioned references to the actuality of its staging based on the authorship and cultural significance of the original play,⁸⁸⁷ the embeddedness of the play *Hekuba* in the reality of its 1991 staging was further explained by the director Ivica Boban herself, when she stated how

today, we are witnessing the occurrence of what is the most elementary, coming directly from the gut, from the scream, from the cry of Hecuba that is right here, very near, likewise irrational, absurd, unbelievable, just as it always is when a mother loses her child, one of them, or like Hecuba, 50 of them.⁸⁸⁸

In other words, Boban pointed to a certain affective currency of Hecuba's character, emphasising how "every verse and every action on the stage [was envisaged] to swirl emotions among the audiences."⁸⁸⁹ Undoubtedly, this supplementary interpretation, which was not mentioned in the media reports following its staging, recognised the position of "a mother who lost all her children, her country and ruler's honour, and is now witnessing a senseless revengeful war"⁸⁹⁰ as relevant for decoding different relationships between this theatre production and its actuality. In other words, the emotions that were considered to be propelled by the staging of Hecuba as a mother were actually activated by the concrete context of this staging—and it is exactly this symbolic connotation carried by a motherly figure in times of overt nationalist consolidation that will be further analysed.

As already suggested in the case of Anera, the concepts of nation or state are often identified with a female figure embodying and symbolically representing the ideal community, hence 'the Motherland'. Aside from the nation often being symbolised as a maternal figure in the context of nationalism, following the same logic, the figure of a mother becomes interpreted as the producer and reproducer of this nation. As Žarkov argues, what makes motherhood or the maternal body so important to nationalism are exactly these "ambiguities of the maternal body, and all the multiple roles of the real and imagined Mother in the production of national(ist) subject that these ambiguities create."⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁷ See pages 155–164 of this dissertation.

⁸⁸⁸ Jagoda Martinčević, "Aktualna Hekuba," *Vjesnik*, July 30, 1991.

⁸⁸⁹ Vladimir Stojisavljević, "Hekuba naših dana," *Vjesnik*, August 9, 1991.

⁸⁹⁰ Martinčević, "Aktualna Hekuba."

⁸⁹¹ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 69.

In the case of the *Hekuba*, her symbolising of the nation is somewhat firmer for reasons that I will attempt to explain. On one level, as Lada Čale-Feldman notices, *Hekuba*'s symbolism was built upon "the dearest of all ancient Croatian literary myths, the motif of the enslaved and taciturn maiden concerned with her chastity,"⁸⁹² operating as a symbol of "Croatia's territorial integrity threatened by the Turkish invasions."⁸⁹³ In addition, the shift in Hecuba's 'maternal nature' transforming from a lamenting to a revengeful one accurately referred to the official discourse defining the arising war, with Croatia being described as the victim provoked to fight the enemy of this suffering. Unlike Anera who, by her tragic destiny, becomes an argument for the revenge, Hecuba initiates the vengeful act of blinding Polymestor and murdering his children herself, enforcing this punishment with the help of other Athenian women prisoners. In this way, she embodies both the concepts of suffering and revenge, hence standing as a very concrete allegory of the nation on the verge of an armed conflict.

Analysing to what extent Hecuba's role and function of a mother could actually symbolise the nation in this kind of turmoil, I will compare the production with a certain socio-political phenomenon of that time, which also had a mother as its central figure, namely the initiative "The Wall of Love: Mothers for Peace." Officially founded in the summer of 1991 and organised by the Committee of Mothers for the Return of Soldiers from the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA), this organisation consisted mostly of mothers with sons serving in the ranks of the mentioned army. Throughout the early months of the conflict, this civil initiative not only managed to gain growing media presence and overall socio-political importance but also generated different interpretations of motherhood in the context of war and nationalism. Advocating for the eventual dissolution of the YPA⁸⁹⁴ and the cessation of all wartime activities on the territory of Yugoslavia, the "Mothers for Peace" presented their positions mainly in the form of different public actions proclaiming their motherhood as the ultimate argument of their anti-war position.⁸⁹⁵ Besides organising protests locally as well as

⁸⁹² Lada Čale Feldman, "Women Corpuses, Corpses or (Cultural) Bodies: Example of Croatian Theatre," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Volume IV: Types and Stereotypes*, eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2004), 274.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁸⁹⁴ The main argument of the "Mothers for Peace" when advocating for the dissolution Yugoslavia was the alleged incongruity of the multi-ethnic structure of the YPA and the rising ethnically-based conflicts which allowed, for instance, a Croatian soldier under YPA being ordered to shoot members of Croatian police, etc. Although the movement itself initially cooperated with similar movements from other parts of Yugoslavia, parallel to the more evident ethnic character of the conflicts they suspended all mutual actions.

⁸⁹⁵ "Many of the women's speeches and public addresses, the banners they carried, and the slogans they chanted were explicitly based on the pleas and demands of motherhood." See Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 43.

internationally, the main action of the “Mothers for Peace” comprised of building the “Wall of Love”—a circle made out of their (maternal) bodies positioned around the YPA army barracks in different cities of Croatia, followed by their request for dismissing and sending home the soldiers under the command of the generals located in these barracks. As Žarkov points out, in most of the initial media reports dealing with their activities and events, these women were represented as suffering mothers or as the “Mothers of Tears,”⁸⁹⁶ emphasised in their pain of not being able to save their children from going to a war or fearing over their destinies.



Fig. 25: Media representation of the organisation “Mothers for Peace.” The title reads “Generals, our weapon is-love.” Photo credit: author unknown.

To some extent, this portrayal echoed the one presented in *Hekuba*, where the eponymous protagonist was prominently described in her position of a “mother sadder from all mothers living in the world,”⁸⁹⁷ a “weeping mother, a sad mother,”⁸⁹⁸ “crying endlessly,”⁸⁹⁹ etc. On the level of the production itself, documented in the video recording broadcasted by Croatian television just several weeks after its premiere, her state of lament was additionally accentuated by different means—not only does the staging itself begin with a mighty cry “Mother!” but the interpretation of Hecuba by Doris Šarić Kukuljica features a face bathed in tears throughout most of the performance and delivers her text by a shivering, weeping voice. Furthermore, in this edited version of the production, a freeze-frame shot of Hecuba’s tearful

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁹⁷ “Majka tužnija oda svih ke živu na svitu,” my translation. http://www.knjigasvima.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/drzicm_hekuba.pdf, 9. Last accessed April 14, 2019.

⁸⁹⁸ “Majka od plača / majka od tuge,” my translation. Ibid., 24.

⁸⁹⁹ “Majka tužnija oda svih ke živu na svitu,” my translation. Ibid., 24.

eyes in fact overlaps with several other scenes of the play, hence placing her suffering and sorrow as some sort of an overall perspective of the play.

Her ‘lamenting’ position is further reinforced by the choir consisting of twelve women who, although introduced as Nereids by Držić in the original play, seemed to transgress their textual conditioning in this staging.⁹⁰⁰ Given more presence and stage time, they represented Hecuba’s alter-egos or her ‘resonance chambers’, ultimately setting up this group character to embody a single-women identity. Wearing black robes obviously referring to their position of mourning, by repeating and taking over Hecuba’s cries and screams, these women not only highlighted her suffering but also generalised it—by bringing Hecuba’s pain to an elevated position of a shared experience, they actually enabled the similar referral shift to be applied in the actual context of the staging.



Fig. 26 & 27: *Hekuba*, Dubrovnik Summer Festival, 1991 (photo still from the video recording of the TV broadcast from 1991).

As in the case of Anera, Hecuba’s suffering also needed to be presented in its excruciating details in order to justify its righteous revenge. However, portrayed as a mother losing her two children in the course of this dramatic narrative, Hecuba’s suffering was actually inscribed in her violently terminated motherhood. On another level, this kind of bereaved motherhood provided some kind of a moral authority, making the mother (in this case Hecuba) the ultimate judge on the topic of war and revenge.

Just how important and stimulating this position of a mother as a moral authority was in the times of war is again detected in the case of the “Mother for Peace” movement and its political manipulation. More precisely, although starting as a civil action exclusively consisting of mothers with sons fighting in the ranks of the Yugoslav army, soon enough, the Croatian politicians started to appear at their events, appropriating their actions and

⁹⁰⁰ In the original text of the play they appear three times: In the 3rd scene of the 2nd act, in the 3rd act, as well as the 4th act. However, in contrast to the text, in the 1991 production they actually never leave the stage and are delivering the narrative more often.

objectives and using them in their own political agendas as the main moral argument in fighting for the Croatian independence. For instance, in his famous speech given at one of these events in front of the Zagreb headquarters of the YPA in August of 1991, Vlado Gotovac, a politician and one of the most famous dissidents in the scope of the “Croatian Spring,” declared that the “generals in there certainly don’t have children as they kill other people’s children,”⁹⁰¹ as well as that “they certainly don’t have mothers as they aggrieve other mothers.”⁹⁰² Put differently, the expressed argument of the ‘enemy’ not having mothers (with all the affirmative connotations this term presents) was thus used to establish mothers as moral authorities, simultaneously defining this enemy as ‘unnatural’, cruel, immoral, and unjust.⁹⁰³

After their actions throughout Croatia in the summer of 1991, the “Mother for Peace” travelled to Belgrade where they unsuccessfully tried to address the YPA army officials with their anti-war demands.⁹⁰⁴ What soon followed was their ‘European tour’, during which they met with different bodies and representatives of European institutions, urging them to stop the arising conflicts. Following an invitation from the Parliamentary Group of the European People’s Party, some 500 mothers and their supporters from Croatia (as well as mothers from Kosovo) protested in front of the building of the European Commission in Brussels and later even met and talked to several functionaries. After Brussels, the group travelled to Bonn where they officially met with Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany at the time, and went on to pray for peace in the city Cathedral.⁹⁰⁵

The mothers addressed the European Community as they considered it to represent a higher authority apt for providing not only administrative help for influencing the ongoing turmoil in Yugoslavia but also giving a somewhat ‘impartial’ ruling on the conflict. However, in the weeks following their return from the European tour, the overall agenda of the “Mothers of Peace” somewhat shifted from being exclusively anti-war to becoming more and more pro-Croatian. According to the founder of the initiative, Slavica Bilić, this transfer was not so

⁹⁰¹ <https://kamenjar.com/vlado-gotovac-govor-ispred-komande-v-vojne-oblasti-vojnog-suda-u-zagrebu-video/>, last accessed April 12, 2019.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ For more on constructing and representing the enemy, see the following chapters of this paper.

⁹⁰⁴ For more information on the Belgrade visit see Slavica Bilić, *Prsten mira i majčinske ljubavi (prilozi za povijest ‘Bedema ljubavi—pokreta majki za mir’ u domovinskom ratu, 1991.–1993.)*, (Zagreb: Hrvatski memorijalno-dokumentacijski centar Domovinskog rata, 2013), 62–78.

⁹⁰⁵ Although the exact information on who organised these trips and under what conditions is missing, according to the testimonies of the president of the Initiative they received some 100,000 German Marks by an unnamed humanitarian organisation for the tour. See Bilić, *Prsten mira i majčinske ljubavi (prilozi za povijest ‘Bedema ljubavi—pokreta majki za mir’ u domovinskom ratu, 1991.–1993.)*, 135.

much initiated by the Mothers themselves, who persisted on their main cause being the dissolution of the YPA, as it was somewhat inscribed by the politicians themselves.⁹⁰⁶ However, once the overt political meaning was inscribed, they perpetuated it for different reasons.

Simultaneously to this co-opting of their movement into the ruling political positions, the representation of these mothers in media shifted as well. More precisely, although initially praised in media for their “motherly and nonviolent manners”⁹⁰⁷ as well as the disciplined and civilised ways of criticising their socio-political reality, at one moment, they became represented as potentially dangerous. To use Žarkov’s terminology, they were initially depicted as “Mothers of Tears”⁹⁰⁸ and then somewhat ‘revamped’ to being brave, “Fierce Mothers,”⁹⁰⁹ apt for acts of violence provoked by their enormous suffering. For instance, in one of the statements, the secretary of the Mothers’ Committee organising the gathering against the YPA explained how the Mothers

will not allow you to manipulate [our sons’] lives, and we will fight till our last breath. You will not deter us with the power of your weapons, the weapon of mothers is stronger, and this is our eternal concern for [our children’s] life. That gives us the strength to struggle, and if needed, we will give our own lives for the lives of our children.⁹¹⁰

In another report concerning the gatherings of Mothers, the author of the text published in the daily *Vjesnik* quoted a few participants of the Mothers’ gathering, stating how they will “burn down the city of Vukovar themselves if the YPA doesn’t withdraw their army forces from there,”⁹¹¹ thus presenting them as women not fearing to resort to even ‘irrational’⁹¹² solutions

⁹⁰⁶ When they returned from their European tour, the Mothers were welcomed with a public manifestation on the central Zagreb square. The program of the event featured different singers and actors performing patriotic material, as well as politicians and the President Franjo Tuđman. In a telling testimony, Bilić recounts how Tuđman enthusiastically embraced the mothers on stage but she herself refused to “look him in the eyes while shaking his hand.” In her own words, “the politics did not stay outside but instead interfered in this homecoming event.” Furthermore, she understood that “the President needed an impulse as to elevate the sense of the resistance to another level, to reaffirm the unity and raise the people’s moral. That morning, this impulse was provided by the mothers of the soldiers (...) led by our hearts and the logic of common sense. The power of us mothers was in our apoliticality and consistency.” Bilić, *Prsten mira i majčinske ljubavi (prilozi za povijest ‘Bedema ljubavi—pokreta majki za mir’ u domovinskom ratu, 1991.–1993.)*, 155.

⁹⁰⁷ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 50.

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁹¹⁰ As quoted in ibid., 48.

⁹¹¹ Ibid., 50.

⁹¹² The fact that they would burn down Vukovar, the Croatian city that was in that moment surrounded by the YPA and Serbian military forces, could be seen as some kind of a ‘suicidal’ act.

of the war. Even their general anti-war premise was eventually put under scrutiny by some critics who denounced it as being the complete opposite—while fighting for their sons to be dismissed from the YPA, they however did not advocate against these men volunteering for the Croatian army, thus only redirecting and further nationalising their army potential. Echoing the same transformation into a revengeful mother ready to commit the act of violence and accepting her own death if necessary,⁹¹³ Hecuba seems to conform to this imagery of a “fierce Mother” as a symbol of Croatia, “determined and powerful in its resistance, undefeated albeit under siege.”⁹¹⁴ As already mentioned, this trajectory from a lamenting to a “fierce Mother” produced a direct meaning for the time of *Hekuba*’s staging when put in a causal relationship. Namely, the conclusion that the more suffering one endures, the more justified her revenge becomes could have been interpreted as justification for a direct armed response. This is a narrative that could, to some extent, be tracked up to the mainstream political position and representation of the Croatian nation of that time, interpreting the ‘eternal’ suffering of the Croatian nation under foreign rules as some sort of a prerequisite for acquiring autonomy by engaging in a brutal armed conflict. As I have attempted to show, in constructing or communicating the described agenda, the different representations of motherhood were used and shaped by the political elite as to add some sort of moral significance to this aim.

While analysing the different points of interconnection between the production of *Hekuba* and the socio-political context of its staging featured by the phenomenon of the “Mother for Peace” movement, another very direct association appeared almost by chance. Describing in detail the 1991 European tour in her memoirs, Slavica Bilić, one of the founders of this association, mentions a familiar name: “our fellow passenger, theatre director Ivica Boban, found herself among the journalists. She records very meticulously every moment of this tour since she joined us in Zagreb.”⁹¹⁵ Although lacking further information on the nature of her involvement in the actions of the “Mothers for Peace,” this fact still linked the two analytical elements of this chapter to the level of mutual recognition or influence.

⁹¹³ “Make these crying eyes see revenge,” “I don’t care if I stay imprisoned my whole life/I want to see the revenge of the executioner,” my translation. http://www.knjigasvima.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/drzicm_hekuba.pdf, 60. Last accessed April 14, 2019.

⁹¹⁴ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 49.

⁹¹⁵ Bilić, *Prsten mira i majčinske ljubavi (prilozi za povijest ‘Bedema ljubavi—pokreta majki za mir’ u domovinskom ratu, 1991.–1993.)*, 145.

Teuta: Taming of the Warrior

Although generally interpreted by national theatre historiography as a historical drama that highlights the already mentioned ideologemes of unity and freedom, *Teuta* actually positions a woman character as the central point of its dramatic structure and a constitutive source of the majority of its interpretations and meanings.⁹¹⁶ It is the framework dealing with conceptual intersections between the representation of women, war, and nationalism presented above that will serve me with an analytical perspective for further affirmation of this judgement.

As I have explained in the subchapter 3.2., the dramatic plot of *Teuta* follows the story of the eponymous queen who, after the death of her husband and Illyrian King Agron, inherits the throne and decides to allow her subjects to sail the Adriatic and Aegean Sea, thus granting them permission to engage in the overall plunder of the enemy ships. Following her resolution, two Roman consuls are sent to ask her to spare their ships from these looting actions. Offended by their proposal, Teuta orders the killing of one of the consuls and, in this manner, initiates the war between the Romans and Illyrians. As a queen and the army commander, Teuta fights this war vigorously, shown as guided more by her emotions of pride and honour than by rational modes of combat, resulting in inner conflicts between the tribes that she rules. In the midst of the war, one of the Illyrian governors, Dmitar, hands over the island of Corfu to the Romans and crosses over to fight with them against his former queen. Even before her last clash with the Romans and against her own will, Teuta starts to feel attracted to the brave Dmitar, finally surrendering to him, not only as a woman but as a ruler too—she eventually hands him the crown and, albeit reluctantly, promises to marry him. The final act of the play happens few years later with Teuta portrayed as a mother of a baby boy and a loving wife of her husband Dmitar. At the same time, an illegitimate son of Agron, the former Illyrian king, claims his right to the throne, and Dmitar is intent on fighting him off. Teuta wants to join him in this combat, but Dmitar forbids her to do so by saying that a woman is not supposed to engage in a conflict of that sort. Despite her combat ambition, she submits to his decision and stays home, anxiously awaiting the reports from the battlefield. After learning the news that Dmitar was killed in the battle, in an act of desperation, Teuta kills herself by jumping from the cliffs into the sea with her son in her arms.

⁹¹⁶ As the national theatre historiography considered Teuta as a character to be “psychologically unconvincing,” she was not often analysed from this perspective, with the exception of the article by Natka Badurina, “Ukročena kraljica. Nacijska i rodne uloge u Demetrovoj Teuti,” *Slavica tergestina* 11–12 (2004): 65–81.

Analysing the evolution of Teuta's character, the most interesting feature of this trajectory is certainly her transformation that occurs throughout the dramatic narrative—presented as the fearless and ruthless ruler in the first part of the play, in the second part, Teuta is portrayed as a 'tamed' housewife, reduced to a role of a devoted wife and a mother, handing her political governance over to her husband. More precisely, in the first part of the play, she is being described as wilfully taking over the patterns of behaviour considered to be inherent to men—she rides a horse in the still of the night, she is a fearless and passionate hunter, she marvels at storms and lightnings, etc.⁹¹⁷ In the same time, she openly states her disgust towards marriage, regarding it to be a mechanism of subjection to someone else's will; she is displeased with manifestations of sentimentality by others as well as by herself (she calls it slavery);⁹¹⁸ she even commutes to reproving herself upon discovering that she is succumbing to emotions, etc. Once that Dmatar admits his admiration and love to her, she starts to wonder how to possibly commit herself to someone she fought so vigorously up to that point, fighting not only against them but also against the norms of political power which positions men as the principal defenders and rulers.

Furthermore, it is exactly in Teuta's initial unwillingness to surrender to feelings or, more precisely, to surrender to her 'woman nature' that the author Demeter positions the main tragical element of the first part of the play. Stating that, in the case of the Illyrian queen, God accidentally implanted a heart of a brave hero into the "lovely chest of a woman,"⁹¹⁹ he openly depicts her as some sort of an 'error' or 'a mistake of nature'. It is exactly because of this transgression of 'natural' laws and orders that Teuta is seen not only as a bad woman but as a bad ruler as well—a transgression for which she apparently needs to be 'punished' for in order to fulfil the inscribed didactic function of the narrative. Furthermore, because of the fact she has transgressed her 'natural' or 'essential' role of a woman, Teuta is not considered apt to be the leader and to execute the much-needed unification of her subjects in preparing for a war with the prevalent enemy.

Following the assumption that the homogeneity of the community must be constructed upon a firm and 'natural' concept, Demeter seems to detect it in the patriarchal rule—namely, it is

⁹¹⁷ Mostov, "Politics of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia," 90.

⁹¹⁸ Upon seeing Cvijeta, her maiden, hugging her lover, Teuta warns her: "You are sadly giving yourself to a man, /to be a toy of his lust and a slave of his will/ You are thus crushing the glory of our gender/ get out of my sight, you shameless slag!" [Ti se, jedna, predaješ čovjeku, Da igračka njegovih požuda I njegove volje budeš sužnja! Našeg spola tako gaziš slavu? S očiju mi, besramnice jedna!], my translation. <http://vetarsabalkana.com/d/513918/d/dimitrija-demeter---teuta.pdf>, page unmarked, last accessed April 16, 2019.

⁹¹⁹ "Kod nje se je narav pobludila:/ Ona sërce od viteza hrabra/ U dražestnu postavi grud žensku." Dimitrije Demeter, *Izabrana djela* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1997), 124.

exactly the patriarchy that he posits as the foundation of this unification of the communal identity that surpasses the private ones. Furthermore, by ‘naturalising’ both genders in the play (both Teuta and Dmetar featured traits to be ‘essential’ to their gender), Demetar actually expressed his conviction that only naturalised genders could form a naturalised community, this being a unified nation.⁹²⁰ Understanding both patriarchy and naturalised community as the prerequisites of a nation, Teuta is in fact identified as the element of risk for its successful implementation and is as such meant to be ‘penalised’.

As the presented dramatic trajectory shows, in the second part of the play, Teuta somewhat conciliatorily gives up on the idea of being a woman outside the patriarchal paradigm of the depicted time and place. Moreover, she is depicted as a submissive wife, sincerely and enthusiastically committed to the role as her husband’s escort, hence voluntarily reducing herself to being ‘only a woman’ whose function is to “love (...), to caress the worrying wrinkles on [her husband’s] forehead, / to wash the sweat from [his] heroic face,” etc.⁹²¹ Simultaneously to this taming of ‘Teuta The Warrior’, she renounces her political function by stating how, for instance, “[she] is not born for governing.”⁹²² In other terms, Demetar portrays Teuta’s surrendering of her political power to a man as a result of her realising just how ‘erratic’ her position of a woman as an executor of power actually was.

In addition to transforming into a supportive partner of a heroic soldier, Teuta becomes a mother of a boy, the future heir of the throne, and is thus also confirmed in her position of a mother as the reproducer of the community—a function that, as already explained, stands as the kernel of the nationhood.

As I tried to demonstrate, the second part of the play is communicated as some sort of a didactical treatment of a ‘rebellious’ and ‘erratic’ woman wanting to blur or even annul the borders of the patriarchal socio-political paradigm. Pursuing this conclusion, one detail in the story somewhat puts this interpretation under question, namely Teuta’s decision to commit both suicide and filicide. The dramaturgical ending that, by some researchers and historians, was seen as a certain ‘comeback’ of the rebellious and emancipated Teuta apt for heroic decisions could, however, be explained from different perspectives. First, loyal to the

⁹²⁰ Badurina, “Ukročena kraljica. Nacija i rodne uloge u Demetrovoj Teuti,” 73.

⁹²¹ “I am a woman - / To love is my destiny! To caress the worrying wrinkles on your forehead, / to wash the sweat from your heroic face, / I will nurture you, calm you, love you: / This will be my happiness and bliss; / And you go ahead and rule the world, my strong husband / This was intended to you by my nature!” [Ja sam žena - ljubav moj je udes! Brižne bore na čelu ti ravnat, Trti znoj ti s junačkoga lica, Njegovat te, blažit, ljubiti: - to će Moja biti sreća i blaženstvo; A ti vladaj, jaki mužu, sv'jetom. To je narav nam'jenila tebi!], my translation. <http://vetarsabalkana.com/d/513918/d/dimitrija-demeter---teuta.pdf>, page unmarked, last accessed April 16, 2019.

⁹²² “Ne, za vladu ja rođena nisam,” my translation. Ibid.

historical narrative, Demeter perhaps introduced the ‘killing’ of Teuta by simply following one of the many still existing folk legends stating that Teuta killed herself by throwing herself from a mountain peak. In contrast, depicting her tragic end could be explained as a pure genre obligation, positioning a tragedy as the most appropriate theatrical representational category for showing a historical narrative. Whatever the initial reasons, in conclusion, Demeter still presents Teuta’s decision to kill herself as a result of her realising that, without her husband as a referential point of her identity, she cannot exist anymore—not as a woman, nor as a wife, nor as a mother.

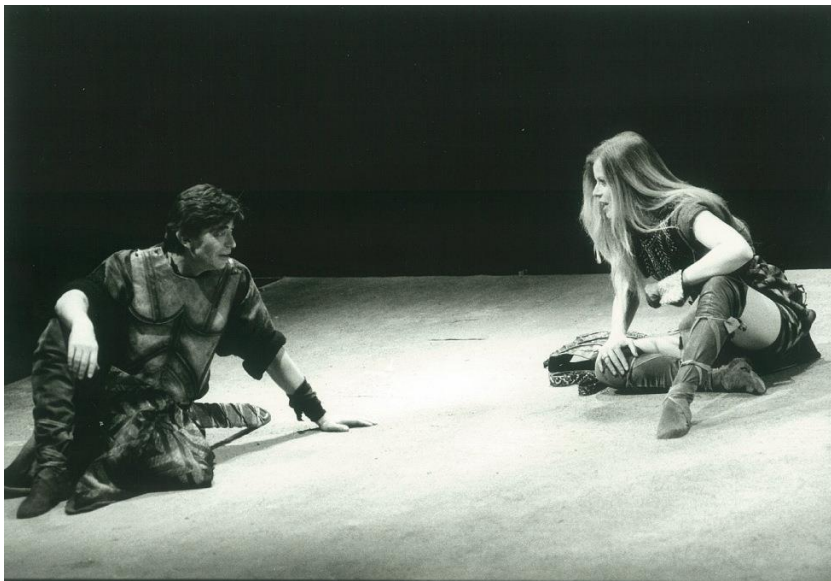


Fig. 28: Ena Begović as Teuta in *Teuta*, Croatian National Theatre, 1991. Photo credit: author unknown.

How did the story of a woman-warrior being punished for trespassing the naturalised norms of patriarchal structures resonate in the context of its 1991 staging and the accentuated national-integrative processes with parallel suppression of other private identities? As already suggested, the overall ethnic homogenisation proclaimed and then administered by the political elites in Croatia was being declared as decisive for consisting of this new nation-state, parallelly positioning the national identity above all of the ‘private’ ones.⁹²³ In this way, the different levels of individual identification—gender being one of them—were all of a sudden absorbed into a more general but primarily ethnicised one, simultaneously gaining the aura of being subversive to the national unity needed to ‘successfully’ fight the upcoming war. In this context, the message of *Teuta*, a nationalised myth in which a woman questioning

⁹²³ For instance, as Žarkov notes, media extensively started to represent women as Serb women, Bosniak women or Croat women as of summer 1991.

the heteronormativity of a patriarchal system was presented as an omission, somewhat corresponded with the mentioned political objectives of the actuality. Moreover, one could state that it functioned as a sort of ‘warning’ for all those trying to challenge these highly ‘naturalised’ norms of wartime socio-political structures.

In order to evaluate more precisely the different interpretative correlations between the production of *Teuta* and its own reality, one needs to investigate to what extent the wartime actuality was ‘sexualised’ and, furthermore, how was this represented. With the war approaching, the first process of defining and facilitating gender roles in the scope of the national community in fact occurred on the level of the participation in army combat. As of April 1991 and with the constitution of the first official Croatian Army forces, men overwhelmingly volunteered for combat, with almost 150,000 registering before January 1992.⁹²⁴ On the other hand, according to the same sources, 7,944 women joined the war as active soldiers, reservists, or members of the territorial defence units in the same period.⁹²⁵ In other words, sexual stereotyping was set in full motion, with men fighting or governing the war and women caring for the home and family, thus retaining a space outside the war, “a place [for men] to return to, or at least to die trying to protect.”⁹²⁶

Interestingly enough, although the percentage of women soldiers was considerably low, especially when compared to the massive engagement of Croatian women in the anti-fascist struggle during WWII,⁹²⁷ they were still generously instrumentalised and representatively used for different daily political purposes. For instance, in her study on the usage of the medium of photography in wartime Croatia, Sandra Vitaljić noticed that women as soldiers were being represented mostly through distinct images that depicted them as smiling, young, “full of life,”⁹²⁸ portraying them as pure ornaments to the wartime imagery. According to Vitaljić, mainstream media outlets presented Croatian women fighters as curiosities, temporary trespassers in the realm of male activity, thus only confirming it as such. The

⁹²⁴ The total number of soldiers registered as actively fighting in the ‘Homeland’ War is 489,000. See “U registru 489.407 hrvatskih branitelja od kojih 157.037 dragovoljaca,” *Vlada Republike Hrvatske-središnji portal*, September 14, 2005, <https://vlada.gov.hr/vijesti/u-registru-489-407-hrvatskih-branitelja-od-kojih-157-037-dragovoljaca/6527>; last accessed April 16, 2019.

⁹²⁵ Among them, 766 were killed in combat while 1973 were wounded. See Sanja Stanić, Katarina Mravak, “Domovinski rat—iskustva žena,” *Polemos* 15, no. 29 (2012): 12. Other sources argue there were some 23,080 women actively fighting in the war, amounting to five percent of the overall number of active soldiers.

⁹²⁶ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 301.

⁹²⁷ More than 100,000 women from Yugoslavia actively fought on the battlefields in the WWII, with some 25,000 of them dying in combats. The participation of women in WWII was on many levels linked with the socialist agenda promoting their overall social and political emancipation.

⁹²⁸ Vitaljić, *Rat slikama—suvremena ratna fotografija*, 67.

possible conception and interpretation of Teuta as a transgressor of the patriarchal paradigm conditioning the communal/national unity could very much be seen as corresponding to these claims.

While Vitaljić concentrates exclusively on the photographic material depicting women soldiers during the war in Croatia, Dubravka Žarkov argues that, according to the overall media material, the concept of representing a female soldier was not such a simple issue, “even for nationalism.”⁹²⁹ According to her research dealing with both textual and visual media reports published at that time, these women soldiers were depicted as equally feminine and warlike, often described as doing ‘womanly’ activities while dressed in their combat uniforms (sewing, cleaning for their male colleagues, etc.). Acknowledgement of these kinds of skills only “confirms women’s carefully maintained femininity and implies that their military skills are an addition to, and not a replacement for, domestic skills, much as their courage is an addition to other feminine characteristics.”⁹³⁰ As Žarkov explains, in these kinds of representations of the women warriors, “all their femininity is preserved and with it, all the difference”⁹³¹ between them and their men colleagues. It is this constant shift between the sameness and the difference that Žarkov detects as the main approach to the image of the woman warrior in the Croatian media of that time. In any case, while the women soldiers in Croatian wartime media were actually depicted as having the private feminine identity masked behind the provisory mask of manliness, Teuta was found to have hidden under “a mask of femininity,”⁹³² and this is exactly why her transformation is seen as a potentially dangerous violation of the patriarchal norms established by Demeter.

Although analysing the representation of woman soldiers in Serbia, Ivan Čolović supplemented this field of research with additional conclusions, stating that the role of a woman warrior is to actually “strengthen the appeal of war propaganda directed to men, letting them know that war may not be such a dangerous adventure after all if women venture into it,”⁹³³ as well as that “this adventure, precisely because of the presence in it of young, attractive women warriors, might even have its appealing side.”⁹³⁴ In short, these types of women warriors are not to be seen as elements of subversion but rather as elements of motivation maintaining the functioning of this system. Following this argument that inscribes

⁹²⁹ Žarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 191.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., 195.

⁹³¹ Ibid., 195.

⁹³² Badurina, “Ukroćena kraljica. Nacija i rodne uloge u Demetrovoj Teuti,” 76.

⁹³³ Ivan Čolović, *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia: Essays in Political Anthropology* (London: Hurst, 2002), 48.

⁹³⁴ Ibid., 48.

the representation of female soldiers to a wartime propaganda, the story of *Teuta* during the overall construction of national identity could be interpreted as an ‘affirmative’ one—by representing her as a warrior fighting the war which does not end once she has been replaced by a man, she is in fact established as a maintainer of this system. Dressing up in men’s clothes and taking up the fight, she is doing so “in order to fight for an order established by primarily patriarchal norms; for homeland or religion.”⁹³⁵ As Badurina argues, she is in fact not a political rebel as “she is not questioning the established collective values”⁹³⁶ but is rather “just like her fellow soldiers, guarding the freedom of her homeland she is ready to die for.”⁹³⁷ As one can see, this representation of the woman warrior does not provoke any kind of political or social transgression—in the end, she is still, just like her male counterpart, fighting the same war, pursuing the mutual objectives of exclusion, arguing for the same structure of ethnic unity. Not being effectively subversive towards the political structure, as I have tried to elaborate, what *Teuta* symbolised was just how strong and comprehensive the process of national consolidation in times of war truly is.

On the same level, *Teuta* does not function as a simple, ‘one-way’ symbol of the nation nor as a simplified sign of a certain political concept. She is not just “an allegory of the homeland”⁹³⁸ (neither from the Illyrian nor the 1991 perspective), but is rather a dramaturgic entity provoking the debate on the position of sex and gender in the context of political processes of national integration.

As the video documentation of the production of *Teuta* in the Croatian National Theatre in 1991 was unavailable for completing my research, one is left with many open questions concerning the production’s relation to the stated analysis. However, according to the available material, one can conclude that it did comply with the official narratives concerning women being used in defining national identification—more precisely, discussing the potential ‘subversiveness’ of a theatre thematising gender roles in the context of “national-integrational ideology,”⁹³⁹ Badurina states that this chance was missed in its 1991 production.

Conclusion

As stated, during the war, gender becomes greatly stratified and gender roles simplified—men are defined as the ideal defenders and women as symbols of a “place to return to, or at

⁹³⁵ Badurina, “Ukroćena kraljica. Nacija i rodne uloge u Demetrovoj Teuti,” 70.

⁹³⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁹³⁷ Ibid., 70.

⁹³⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., 77.

least to die trying to protect—a place called home or normal or peacetime.”⁹⁴⁰ Although passive and objectivised, women in the context of war are actually seen as facilitators of the militarised masculinity that maintains and executes the war, either by them defining the community in need of protection or by actually participating in combat and thus only stimulating its ‘attractiveness’.

In case of the war fought on the territory of Croatia as of 1991, the ‘naturalisation’ in terms of gender was further reinforced as it was accompanied with national-integrative processes aiming at (re)creating the Croatian nation-state. As argued, nationalism uses rather simplified and overall ideal concepts of masculinity and femininity, leading to a certain “archaization of gender relations,”⁹⁴¹ mobilising women for specific aims and delegating them to particular socio-political positions serving different ideological or political interests. As witnesses of male bravery, as producers of new warriors, as nurturers and motivators for soldiers, women were found to be complicit in the reproduction of militarised masculinity seen as a prerequisite for a ‘successful’ collective combat. In other words, they did not question or subvert the war as such, quite the contrary. Parallel to the genderisation of the manhood and womanhood appearing in circumstances of a war and national practices built around ethnic unification, these concepts have also been ethnicised, vested in specific ethnic affiliation and thus overtly excluding those defined as its ‘outsiders’.

Following the selected relevant theoretical positions tackling the intersections of war, nation, and gender, I have detected different ways in which the national theatrical system of wartime Croatia responded to this conceptual network by choosing three of the most representative woman theatrical figures. Presented either as victims, mothers, or faithful companions to their male counterparts, the figures of Teuta, Hekuba, and Teuta seem to underline the connotations that representing womanhood in this kind of context had.

By analysing these three symbolic theatrical figures and comparing the interpretations they have generated to those propagated by different institutional authorities, I determined a considerable correspondence to the official narratives imagining, creating, and representing the Croatian national identity by a woman figure—hence indicating the national theatre’s interdependence to the overall national-integrational ideology. Regardless of the different narrative positions that these characters were originally fixed in, they underwent similar

⁹⁴⁰ Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*, 301.

⁹⁴¹ Albanese, “Nationalist Revival in Post-Yugoslav Croatia,” 117.

procedures of interpretation heavily influenced by the wartime context and the nationalist homogenisation.

Besides the interpretations that these productions generated in the moment of their staging, all three selected plays also detected specific national myths considered as crucial for the 'official' national identity taking shape as of 1991—the Dubrovnik renaissance and the national literary heritage (*Hekuba*), the Illyrian movement (*Teuta*), and the Independent State of Croatia (*The Hearth*), hence even further entrenching these figures as tropes of this nation. An additional example of symbolising the nation by resorting to a specific female figure should be mentioned, as it somewhat additionally consolidates different representational levels by rendering their interdependent relation visible and testifying on the overt conformance that the institutional theatre had to its socio-political context. Portraying both Anera in *The Hearth* as well as Teuta in the eponymous play, the actress Ena Begović (1960–2000) was considered to be the emblematic figure of 'Croatianhood' in the wartime period. Prior to the war, Begović was considered one of the biggest stars of the Yugoslav cinema, featuring in some of the most important film productions of that period. Due to her good looks as well as the fact that some of her roles implied nudity, Begović soon became one of the sex symbols and an "institution of desire and sweet imaginings among the Croatian male population."⁹⁴² In 1983, she became the permanent ensemble member of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, shifting more and more from film to the stage, gradually becoming the leading female actress of this theatre house. Her status as a symbol of 'Croatianhood' was partly built on the roles of the mothers and faithful wives that she portrayed in the National Theatre throughout 1991, partly due to the fact that she voluntarily took over the 'role' of symbolising the nation via other, more concretely political means. For instance, throughout the summer of 1991, Begović apparently participated in the manifestations of the above-mentioned initiative "Mothers for Peace," reciting poems for the gathered masses.⁹⁴³ More significantly, in 1992, she starred in the electoral campaign of Tuđman's political party Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), ultimately even joining the party as a full member. In the promotional television advertisement for HDZ airing on the Croatian TV broadcast prior to the elections of 1992, Begović featured a Croatian woman anxiously waiting for her man to come home from the frontlines and then happily welcoming

⁹⁴² Senjković, "Motherland is Female Gender," 137.

⁹⁴³ Branka Vujnović, "Što to glumi Ena Begović," *Globus*, October 2, 1992.

him upon his return.⁹⁴⁴ The obvious separation of the gender roles during wartime expressed in the video—assigning women to their home and men to its protection—echoed the already described tactics of defining women in theatre of that period, with Begović bridging this semiotic positions.

In fact, this ‘naturalised’ concept concerning the position of women in a war was also her personal attitude—when asked whether would she engage in actual combat, she answered negatively, explaining that she was “terribly scared”⁹⁴⁵ of being in combat, a feeling that she in fact found “very womanly.”⁹⁴⁶ Finally, in 1997, she appeared yet again as “the allegory of the Croatian Nation”⁹⁴⁷ when performing on the occasion of Tuđman’s birthday celebrated in the Croatian National Theatre, in this way further establishing this interdependent relationship between the political regime, theatrical system as its interpretative system, and the woman figure as its metonymy.

On another note and following the comparative perspective of this paper, one needs to relate to the position that women had in the previous socialist period in order to fully comprehend in what way they differed from these representational models of female figures employed in media and theatre as of 1991. More precisely, in the times of socialism, women were “subjects of emancipation and social change,”⁹⁴⁸ nominally maintaining an equal social and political status and were in addition represented as such. With the rise of nationalism and the deafening war rhetoric, they however became either symbols of nations or reproductive machines designating the borders of an ethnically exclusive community. Advocating for this ‘return of women to family and home’, the national-ideological system of Croatia in the 1990s considered only those “women who have dedicated themselves exclusively to their families [as] capable of preserving traditional values and the national consciousness of new generations.”⁹⁴⁹ This radical shift that considered the position and role of women in two different ideological systems occurring in such a short period not only proves the pervasive

⁹⁴⁴ “Patiently, only slightly concerned and somewhat sad, his ladylove waited for him, recalling happy moments from their common past (these lyrical frames being shot through a fogged-over lens in slow-motion).”

Senjković, “*Motherland is Female Gender*,” 137.

⁹⁴⁵ Vujnović, “Što to glumi Ena Begović.”

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁷ Čale Feldman, “Within and Beyond Theatre: President Tuđman’s Birthday Celebration at the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb,” 161.

⁹⁴⁸ Tanja Renner, Mirjana Ule, “Back to the Future: Nationalism and Women in Post-Socialist Societies,” in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition*, eds. Robert E. Miller, Rick Wilford (London: Routledge, 1998), 121.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 107.

effects of a nationalistic discourse but also manifests the national theatre's complicity in this unquestionably retrogressive process.

5. STAGING RELIGION: CHURCH, NATIONHOOD AND WAR

Following Pedro Ramet's claim that, in all three ethnic communities of ex-Yugoslavia prior to the war, religion was not only "a defining factor in ethnic differentiation" but also "perhaps even the single most important factor,"⁹⁵⁰ one could argue that the wars of the 1990s were generally fought along the lines of ethno-religious affiliation. Considering that these different peoples living on the territories of Yugoslavia shared a common past, cultural heritage, and language, religion was often left to be the only element that 'differentiated' them from one another throughout their mutual history.⁹⁵¹ As I will further argue in this chapter, religion and religious institutions, such as the Croatian Catholic or Serbian Orthodox Church, played a very important role in articulating and propagating different ethnic and, subsequently, national identities during the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Not only that, but they also extensively contributed to the "sacralization of their respective nationalities,"⁹⁵² thus attributing them to a higher and more abstract authority. During this period, church masses became highly politicised events (see Fig. 29), and political messages became regular part of sermons; not a small number of religious leaders became politically active in Croatia and Serbia; church representatives were present at the most important political events, thus legitimising the nationalistic politics of government; both Croatian Catholic and Serbian Orthodox religious leaders travelled to the front lines where they blessed soldiers and weapons; some of the religious functionaries even actively fought in the wars⁹⁵³ and many of them carried arms; etc. Furthermore, this understanding of religion as the most significant marker of identity was additionally confirmed by the fact that the churches, mosques, and synagogues, were considered as symbols of nationhood by all three warring sides and were thus specifically targeted for destruction.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁵⁰ Pedro Ramet, subsequently called Sabrina Petra Ramet, "Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia," in *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 299.

⁹⁵¹ This is why in socialist Yugoslavia religion was being seen as an element of division of a supra-national political system and was thus being put under state control.

⁹⁵² Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia," 16.

⁹⁵³ One of the most mediated examples of this was the case of the Franciscan priest Tomislav Duka. When asked to comment Duka's active participation as a soldier in the war, the Croatian Cardinal Franjo Kuharić answered that "when pater Duka wears a uniform and carries a revolver he is not doing this as a representative of the Church but as a private person." As quoted in Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia," 17.

⁹⁵⁴ By the end of 1994, one researcher estimated, some 800 mosques, 128 Catholic churches, ten Orthodox churches, and three synagogues had been destroyed throughout former Yugoslavia.

Departing from the Niebuhr's remark of how "nations are held together largely by force and by emotion,"⁹⁵⁵ this chapter will discuss different ways in which the religion and its representatives constructed and manipulated this 'emotional' element of belonging in the overall operation of constructing a new national identity. However, as I am going to argue, it was not just this 'emotion-shaping' that the different religious organisations (such as the Croatian Catholic Church) were engaged in during wartime—via different means, they also engaged in the overall practice of rewriting and reinterpreting national history. Regularly interfering into the readings of the national past and interpreting historical facts according to their own systems of belief, they demonstrated in what way the Church reclaimed its socio-political authority in the times of severe social and political turmoil.



Fig. 29: Still from a video excerpt; mass in the Zagreb Cathedral held on May 30, 1990. The poster says "Franjo [Tudman] our hope!" with the Croatian flag on the left.

After displaying a general overview of the different interactions that the religious institutions and state apparatus nurtured during the wartime periods in Croatia, I will subsequently move to the analysis of the question of how all of this was reflected in institutional theatres in Croatia at that time. Departing from the fact that the theatre at the time witnessed a large number of religious topics and genres that penetrated institutional stages, the context of this phenomenon is highly relevant to my further research and should be pointed out in detail.

⁹⁵⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 210.

Ethnoclericalism: Religion, Nationhood, and State

The key active subject when discussing the religion, its connections to the political context, and its overall role prior and during the Yugoslav wars is the institution of the Church. Just as throughout most of the Balkans, one of the main components of these religious communities is the fact that they were generally based on the idea of ethnical nationhood. In this light, these ‘national churches’, bearing national adjectives in their official appellations (the Croatian Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church but also the Macedonian Orthodox Church or Slovenian Catholic Church) as well as their main activities, manifested a certain “ethnoclericalism.”⁹⁵⁶ This ethnoclericalism, functioning both as an “ecclesiastical concept and a political ideology,”⁹⁵⁷ generally aims at preserving a homogenous ethnic community in close cooperation and interdependence with the political state system focused on the ethnic nation-concept. Moreover, it is exactly this mutual action of the state and the church that ethnoclericalism detects as the point of transformation of “the ethnic community into a nation”⁹⁵⁸—the Church and the nation-state are considered to be the pillars of ethnic identity and actually generate it.

Needless to say, these types of ethnic church institutions defining themselves as the ‘guardians of nationhood’ usually gain more power and significance as the ‘outside’ threat becomes more radical. In order to become more apparent, this is why this threat is then extensively narrated, interpreted, and positioned. Parallel to defining the nation, elaborating these ‘enemies of the nationhood’ from the perspective of faith became one of the most important activities of the religious communities prior and during the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia.⁹⁵⁹ As I am going to point out, this defining of the ‘enemy’ found in religious narratives prior to and during the war was then transported onto institutional theatre stages, adding up to the overall positioning of the ‘Us vs. Them’ concept. Furthermore, the Croatian Catholic Church delivered the narrative of the war through the perspective of the general ‘holy war’ category, describing its genesis, process, and potential outcomes with the story of the eternal battle between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, a process that will be introduced in and by the institutional theatre system as well.

An article authored by the Catholic priest Josip Beljan best explained just how complex this relation between the religion, the nationhood, and the state during the wartime years actually

⁹⁵⁶ Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, 215.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁹⁵⁹ As it’s already described in the prelude chapter of this paper.

was. Published in 1992 in the very popular religious magazine *Veritas* distributed throughout Catholic churches in Croatia, the article stated that

God has, by way of his Church, by way of the Holy Father, looked at his faithful people, spoken out on their behalf, directly intervened in history, in the struggle, warring together with his people for their liberation (...) With this war God has also returned to his people, to their hearts and homes. [God] returned to the entire mass media, political, social, and state life of Croatia, from where he was driven out 45 years earlier. The cross of Christ stands next to the Croatian flag (...) The Church is glad for the return of its people from the twofold slavery—Serbian and communist. This is a great *kairos*⁹⁶⁰ of God's grace for the entire Croatian people (...) Here was not a battle for a piece of Croatian or Serbian land but a war between good and evil, of Christianity and communism, culture and barbarity, civilisation and primitivism, democracy and dictatorship, love and hatred.⁹⁶¹

Although lacking time and space for engaging into a more detailed discussion, this quote, however, seems to capture and compile the general position of the Croatian Catholic Church during the ethnic-religious conflicts of the 1990s: Croats as people 'chosen' by God; God is not only the highest moral but also political authority; the Croatian national history and Catholic religion are interconnected; the Church and the state apparatus are partners in the 'spiritual renewal' of the nation-state; the political enemy in the stated 'Us vs. Them' concept is being detected and named; etc. All these stated characteristics will serve as the contextual references to the research that follows.

Performing the Religion: Political Ritual and the Birth of a Nation

As I have sporadically mentioned in the prelude chapter of this dissertation, the Croatian Catholic Church was progressively gaining certain political and social significance in the years leading up to the wars of the 1990s. These activities seemed to intensify and became more 'attainable' as the Yugoslav Communist regime was nearing its end. For example, "between October 4, 1989 and March 17, 1990, the national Catholic bishops' conference released several statements, epistles, and instructions to the clergy and faithful about how to vote and prepare believers for the elections."⁹⁶² The elections in question were the first

⁹⁶⁰ The term used in ancient Greek philosophy describing 'qualitative' time marked with important events of history.

⁹⁶¹ Josip Beljan, "Priznata vjernost," *Veritas*, no. 9–10 (1992): 24–25.

⁹⁶² Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, 140.

multiparty parliamentary elections held in the Socialist Republic of Croatia in April 1990, and the voting instructions were aimed at providing the official support for the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), a conservative centre-right party led by Franjo Tuđman. Ultimately winning these elections with most seats in Parliament, the merger between clerical/religious and secular ethnic nationalisms was set in motion, forming the mutual goal of defining the Croatian nation.

This consolidation of the newly formed state apparatus and the Church was eventually even ‘performed’ in public as a central political ritual, gaining additional communal significance. More precisely, on May 30, 1990, right after the first session of the newly assembled Parliament, a formal ceremony commemorating this event was staged on the main Zagreb square (which was, at that time, still called the Square of the Republic) in front of several thousand people heavily equipped with symbols of the new state, such as Croatian flags and other national insignia. After the official part of the program, in which Tuđman and other chief politicians delivered extremely emotional speeches referring to the historical importance of that moment, a short ‘skit’ involving the present political elite was staged in front of the masses.⁹⁶³ A wooden children’s cradle covered with white cloths featuring traditional Croatian elements was placed on the stage in front of the newly-selected political leadership and other dignitaries, such as the actual Cardinal of the Croatian Church, Cardinal Kuharić (see Fig. 13 & 14). The announcement of the skit played on the loudspeakers explained that the cradle and the imaginary baby placed inside represented the “new Croatia”⁹⁶⁴ and that, after an old Croatian tradition, the newly born would receive gifts put under its cradle pillow. The offered gifts, it was explained, symbolised prosperity (represented with the gift of a golden coin), abundance (gift of the bread), and culture (gift of a plume). These gifts were then brought on the stage by three women dressed in the traditional clothes of Croatia and were handed out to Franjo Tuđman, who placed them under the pillow of the imaginary new-born. While he performed this task, the announcer invited all people in Croatia to “do the same and place some kind of a pledge to the new Croatia under their pillows tonight,”⁹⁶⁵ thus enlarging the communality of this act and providing wider audiences with an opportunity to participate in such a ritual. Once the gifts were placed, the

⁹⁶³ The whole event was broadcasted live by Croatian Television thus disseminating it to a much wider audience.

⁹⁶⁴ As seen in the video excerpt of the event, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3f7GCZNvubk>, last access on January 8, 2019.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid.

announcer invited Cardinal Kuharić⁹⁶⁶ to bless the infant, which he did by performing the sign of the cross over the cradle, a move that was welcomed by enthusiastic cheers from the gathered crowd. Interestingly enough, grand Mufti Šefko Omerbašić, the highest representative of the Muslim minority in Croatia, stood directly next to Kuharić on the main stage, and just as Kuharić finished his blessings, Tuđman shook Mufti's hand and seemingly gestured him to perform his prayer. Although visible on the video material of that event, this very short prayer was not communicated by the announcer or explained in the live broadcast, thus reducing its potential significance. While we could say that, although very shyly, the Muslim minority was at least present on the stage that day in the form of its religious representative, the noticeable absence of any representatives of the Orthodox church seemed to affirm the newly formed political positions along religious exclusion. In other words, already in May 1990, one could see who was invited or allowed to form this new nation and, most importantly, who would be expelled from it. Furthermore, it also showed that the newly established state apparatus considered the Croatian Catholic Church as its equal partner in the endeavour of establishing the new state and nationhood, hence strengthening its political and social significance. Due to the multifarious support of its clerical ally extending from politically loaded church sermons to diplomatic engagements securing the international recognition of Croatia as an independent state, the Croatian Democratic Union gained and maintained political power during the years of the war. This mutually 'beneficial' relationship was further confirmed by certain practical but highly political actions, such were the introduction of the religion class in primary and high schools in 1991, the Church marriage equated with the civil union as of 1998, and the tax relief for Church functionaries, etc.

Religion and War: Promoting Peace or Encouraging Hatred?

However, the beginning of the actual war conflicts and the outburst of ethno-religious hatred presented some important political and, moreover, ethical challenges for the institution of the Church. More precisely, initially regarded as being a peace project opposed to any kind of hatred and its manifestations, the overall activities of the Croatian branch of the Catholic Church focused on defining and, one can argue, consequently even on encouraging the ongoing conflict. Although sporadically engaged in anti-war activities (the case of Cardinal

⁹⁶⁶ Franjo Kuharić (1919–2002) was a Croatian catholic cardinal who served as the Archbishop of Zagreb from 1970 until his resignation in 1997.

Kuharić calling upon ‘human’ treatment of the Serb minority in Croatia during several church masses in 1991), this humanitarian position was seldomly administrated in the broader public. There were no major public letters, actions, or demonstrations from the Church addressing this issue or firm accusations of crimes against minorities that were normally being depicted as individual acts of hatred. Furthermore, these individual acts were, however, still positioned in the context of dividing ‘us’ (Croats and Catholics) and ‘them’ (Serbs and Orthodox), thus expelling citizens of Orthodox religion from the national body.⁹⁶⁷

Curiously enough, this paradoxical standpoint towards the arising armed conflicts was rather often explained by the Croatian Catholic Church with resorting to Vatican authorities. More precisely, Church representatives often quoted a specific Vatican document when explaining their position towards the armed conflict and its consequences. The mentioned source was the official document of the 2nd Vatican Congress concerning the conduct of the Catholic Church in times of war written in 1965, when the Catholic religious leaders agreed that “it is one thing to undertake military action for the just defence of the people and something else again to seek the subjugation of other nations.”⁹⁶⁸

Inclined to follow the prevalent political definition of the ongoing war as essentially being a defensive one, the Croatian Catholic Church thus justified it according to the ‘higher authority’, meaning the head of the Catholic Church, simultaneously advocating its brutal and aggressive form. Furthermore, the same document, declaring “any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities of extensive areas along with their population (...) a crime against God and man himself”⁹⁶⁹ additionally linked these combat acts to the acts of God as well as reaffirmed the already mentioned sanctity of national community.⁹⁷⁰

As one could expect, the Croatian Catholic Church generated a more divisive rather than conciliatory role in the case of its involvement in the conflict of the 1990s. While arguing against the aggression coming from the Yugoslav army and the Serb paramilitary from a

⁹⁶⁷ For more on this affirmative role of Croatian Catholic Church during the war of the 1990s see Julija Barunčić Pletikosić, “Stavovi i djelovanje Katoličke crkve u Hrvatskoj tijekom 1995,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 47 (2015): 3.

⁹⁶⁸ “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World ‘Gaudium et spes’ Promulgated by his Holiness, Pope Paul VI. December 7, 1965,” [web.archive.org](http://web.archive.org/web/20110411023509/http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), http://web.archive.org/web/20110411023509/http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; last accessed December 14, 2018.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁷⁰ The connection to Vatican as a subject of political pragmatism was further confirmed by several events. Namely, in May 1991 Tuđman visited the Pope as the official leader of the new state parliament, arguing for Croatia’s independence. On January 13, 1992, Vatican became the first state to officially acknowledge Croatia as an independent country, followed by the Pope John Paul II first visit to Croatia in 1994.

moral point of view, the Croatian Catholic Church, however, never, or extremely sporadically and cautiously, addressed the crimes of the Croatian army and state against other ethnic-religious communities. This only goes to show to what extent the ‘essential’ moral authority of the Catholic Church and the Catholic religion itself was ‘flexible’ for use by its main administrators.

In addition, elaborating all of the abovementioned characteristics of the ethnonational Croatian Catholic Church, one could see that the political significance that it gained during the war was quite extensive—the traditional religion was becoming blended with the new national ideologies carried out by ethnic nationalist parties, thus establishing a certain ‘state religion’. As I will argue, it is exactly because of this newly gained and administratively approved political significance that the religious topics entered the institutional theatre stages of wartime Croatia, adding to the overall process of constructing the national identity and its different manifestations.

‘Spiritual Renewal’: Defining the Nationhood

Furthermore, the religious institutions and individuals actively participated in the process of the so-called ‘spiritual renewal’ regarded to be some kind of a process of “national introspection”⁹⁷¹ needed in a time of war and transformed the socio-political context, defining it as one of the most often used programmatic concepts of the newly formed Croatian government. Although very abstract and broadly conceived, the concept itself was more or less actualised in July, 1991, in the context of the founding of the Ministry for Reconstruction and Renewal.⁹⁷² Aiming at further explanation of the term and the possibilities of its practical use, a conference under the name of “the Spiritual Renewal of Croatia” was organised under the patronage of the mentioned Ministry in June 1992, gathering some 70 prominent speakers from Croatia—scientist, politicians, economists, academics, cultural workers, as well as theologians and church functionaries. Soon after the conference, the seminal volume titled *Duhovna obnova Hrvatske* [The Spiritual Renewal of Croatia] was published, gathering the given lectures and presentations and serving as a sort of an official programmatic reference point of the new government when discussing the overall construction of the new nation-

⁹⁷¹ Zoran Vukman, *Kuda ideš Hrvatska?* (Split: Verbum, 2000), 177.

⁹⁷² The mentioned Ministry consisted of seven committees, one of which was the Committee for Demographic and Spiritual Renewal [Odjel za demografsku i duhovnu obnovu], led by Anto Baković, a priest and vice-president of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).

state. The volume itself was divided into five sections, describing different segments of this discussed ‘spiritual renewal’, such as its political, economic, moral, or cultural perspectives. The first section of the book titled “Moral and spiritual renewal” featured different articles by theologians, Catholic philosophers, and priests, bearing names such as “The Spiritual Renewal from the Perspective of a Christian,” “Renewal of the Nation, Renewal of the Family,” “The Renewal of the Individual and the Nation according to the Bible,” etc. The authors of these articles unanimously opted for the spiritual reconstruction of the nation to be executed in accordance with the Christian or Catholic values, such as the sanctity of the family in the context of building a nation-state, etc. Moreover, mentioned throughout the section, this process of ‘renewal’ was also advised to be executed in precise opposition towards the ideological concepts of the past, stating how it was “necessary to free our Croatian man from Communist totalitarianism, the illusion of Yugoslavism, the practice of Serbian theft, bribes and corruption (...), and from the newly established slavery towards Western-European *mammonism*.”⁹⁷³ However, as stated by Andrea Zlatar, “the main purpose of this ‘spiritual renewal’ was to subjugate the culture, render it an instrument of the state ideology, based on the idea of national and religious unity, ethnic and religious ‘purity’ and eligibility.”⁹⁷⁴ It is exactly why this elaborated notion is extremely pertinent for the analysis of the theatrical phenomena of the Croatian theatre of the 1990s—placing it as one of the most important contextual frames, I will determine in what way the theatre in Croatia of the 1990s as a cultural system participated in this processes of constructing these ‘metaphysical’ ideological elements of national belonging.

Religion on Institutional Theatre Stages: the 1990’s Religious Revival

One of the most interesting phenomena relating to the main research perspective of this work was the way religion was staged in the Croatian national theatre system during early 1990s. In comparison with the period of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (1945–1991), not only did the number of these plays delivering religious narrative drastically increase but the significance and interpretation of these performances was also radically transformed. While during socialist Yugoslavia, different religious topics were predominately introduced in theatre as a tool to criticise the Church as a manipulative and backward system, as of early

⁹⁷³ Anto Baković, *Savjetovanje duhovna obnova Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Agencija za obnovu, 1992), 5.

⁹⁷⁴ Andrea Zlatar, “Kulturna politika,” *Reč* 67, no. 1 (2001): 67.

1990s, the religion started to be staged in the form of “affirmative religious plays,”⁹⁷⁵ aiming at presenting and defining religion as a positive identification system.

Analysing these “affirmative” religious theatre performances that appeared on different stages in wartime Croatia during the early 1990s, theatre historian Sanja Nikčević managed to find 20 of them that were in fact produced. Out of these 20 plays, eight productions were made in the “most important Croatian theatres”⁹⁷⁶ (meaning institutional ones), two were produced in the context of national theatre festivals,⁹⁷⁷ seven were staged in professional theatres for children, etc. Some of these plays were played in theatre houses, while quite a few were actually staged in churches, thus reaffirming them as locations of performative practice, while some were even staged as religious processions or parts of the liturgy.⁹⁷⁸ Most of the texts performed were original texts in Croatian dating back to the Middle Ages or early Renaissance, but a prominent number of them were also up-to-date adaptations of existing Bible texts, with just three newly written religious plays. Considering the genre of these plays appearing on Croatian stages during the period in question, one could notice that they were quite variable in terms of genre: from children musicals, 17th-century operettas, to morality plays, apparition plays, puppet shows, or relevant Church holiday shows.

This increase in the number of religious theatre performances in the early 1990s could be explained by different factors, some of which were already outlined in the section of the prelude chapter dedicated to staging religious productions during socialist Yugoslavia. First of all, parallel to the socialist government releasing its suppressive approach towards the question of religious affiliation and the existence of different national churches, the religion became more and more present in public and soon enough found its way to the national theatre stages as well. Simultaneously, this increase in the number of religious theatre productions coincided with the increase of social and political significance that the Croatian Catholic Church gained in the same period, something one should bear in mind while analysing theatre repertoires of that time and place in detail. As I am going to show, in some cases, it was the Croatian Catholic Church that initiated, organised, or even funded some theatre productions or events, hence testifying to the complex connection between theatre and Church as a system of political power. In addition to the mentioned arguments, Nikčević, for

⁹⁷⁵ Sanja Nikčević, “Anđeli na sceni ili religiozno kazalište u Hrvatskoj: 1945–1990–1994–2002 (1995–2002),” in Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 44.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁷⁷ *Kako bratja prodaše Jozefa* [How They Sold Brother Joseph] by Mavro Vetranović in Dubrovnik, and *Everyman* by Hugo von Hofmannstahl in Split.

⁹⁷⁸ The Passion of Our Christ the Saviour both in Cres and Split.

example, goes on to argue that the rise of these kinds of theatre was actually caused by certain “emotional and spiritual” needs of its audiences caught in the atmosphere of uncertainty, social chaos, fear, and “threat to the community.”⁹⁷⁹

Departing from all these assumptions, in this chapter, I will demonstrate in what way the question of religion and religious affiliation became one of the most important elements of the ‘new’ national identity that was also being formed or disseminated from theatre stages of that time. More precisely, in this chapter, I will introduce and analyse the most pertinent examples that will answer the question of why religion became such a prominent topic on theatre stages of wartime Croatia and how this related to the wartime context. I will also highlight the main consequences of such theatrical tendency. The research material that will serve to reflect these analytical positions will feature both performances departing from original texts that refer to a certain national theatrical heritage as well as texts and productions written in the actual times of ongoing armed conflicts.

Muka Spasitelja našega: Liturgical Drama and National Identity

The first example that serves as a very important element in the analysis of the religious theatre in the wake of war in Croatia is the performance called *Muka Spasitelja našega* [the Torment of Our Saviour] that premiered in Split in 1991 on the central Prokurative Square, then still named the Square of the Republic. The production consisted of more than 100 participants (all three ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Split along with some additional singers, children choir, a karate group, etc.) and was initiated and organised by the Croatian National Theatre of Split in cooperation with a private theatre company “Dalmacijakonzert” and, interestingly enough, the local Franciscan Provinciality. Directed by Ivica Boban, the play was presented on Palm Sunday (March 24, 1991) and was hence directly connected to the Catholic church calendar.

Following the prevailing notions already outlined in the prelude chapter of this work, the theatre production of *The Torment of Our Saviour* referred to the heritage of the liturgical drama and its national significance. One of the textual materials that was used in this version of the *Passion of Christ* was written down in a church document from 1556 and written in

⁹⁷⁹ Nikčević, *Šta je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 66.

Glagolitic script and an archaic Chakavian dialect.⁹⁸⁰ However, for the purpose of theatre performance, Boban added some other textual material to the original score, such as parts of different verses and excerpts from the literature of that time, religious songs and chants that were performed in public spaces throughout Croatia starting in the 15th century, as well as some contemporary poetry and other textual content.⁹⁸¹

The main story of the play, as in most of Eastern liturgical drama, describes the Way of the Cross of Jesus Christ or, more precisely, his last week in life: from entering Jerusalem on a donkey, the last supper, crucifixion, to his resurrection and his address to the apostles and holy Mary. The trajectory of this story was adequately placed on the Prokurative Square in the centre of Split, with different group scenes placed under the arches of the buildings surrounding it. Analysing the available video material of the play,⁹⁸² one can successfully detect the dynamic of the *mise-en-scene* that Boban employed in her directorial approach—most of the scenes were played on several wooden mini-stages under the arcades, while the square itself was the stage for all massive scenes or trajectories of Jesus Christ (see Fig. 30).



Fig. 30: *Simon of Cyrene*, Split 1991, video still.

⁹⁸⁰ One of the three main dialects that forms the Croatian language. The Chakavian is the oldest written Serbo-Croatian dialect that was used in legal documents. This predominantly vernacular dialect, mixed with elements of Church Slavic, was detected in texts such as early as “The Istrian land survey” (1275) and “The Vinodol codex” (1288). These and other early Chakavian were mostly written in Glagolitic alphabet until the 17th century.

⁹⁸¹ Works by authors such as Marko Marulić (1450–1524), Tin Ujević (1891–1955), Josip Pupačić (1928–1971), Vesna Krmpotić (1932–2018), among others.

⁹⁸² The available video of the Split performance was actually filmed for Croatian television with several cameras and subsequent editing. Although this is the recording of the performance itself, one has to be aware of its specifics when performed live (the audience’s physical position and immersion, point of view, audibility, etc.)

In this way, whenever a group scene was played, an ensemble consisting of actors playing ‘the people’ was mixed with the actual audience of the performance, thus maximising its involvement in the play and further strengthening its physical contact with the ensemble and, consequently, the interpretation of the plot. The last scenes of the crucifixion and resurrection were played on a wooden platform built in the centre of the square, placing the crucifixes above the audience and hence elevating the last parts of the Way of the Cross to the vertical plane. This transitional dramaturgy of the production’s physical trajectory was further outlined by the light spots following the main dramatic narrative and directing the spectators’ gaze.

In addition to the spoken text of the historical liturgical play, some singing parts were also added to the performance, mostly consisting of church songs in the Chakavian dialect from the same period as the original text. These songs were sung by several vocal groups and choirs positioned on the square and functioned both as interludes as well as the background music for several scenes. Beside these songs that were sung live, other musical elements specifically composed for the event were played from the speakers surrounding the square. Consisting of mostly flat tones resembling early medieval church music, they were heavily applied all through the performance, underlying or introducing the dramatic tension of the narrative. The historical element was further maintained by the use of costumes that reflected the most common imagery used when depicting Jesus Christ and other characters (rudimentary coloured rags, wrinkled cloaks, veils for women characters, etc.)

However, few characters were dressed in strong contrast to the prevailing costume choices, most notably those of Pontius Pilatus and the Devil. Interestingly enough, both ‘villains’ of the story wore significantly modernised garments. Pontius wore a type of stylised, Napoleon-like black military coat with golden buttons and wide lapels, while the Devil wore a much more modern black suit with a white shirt and a black silk scarf underneath. In addition, Devil was the only character wearing heavy stage makeup with a whitened face, black lipstick, and blackened eyebrows and was smoking a cigarette in a few scenes as well (see Fig. 31).



Fig. 31: The figure of the Devil as presented in the production of *The Torment of Our Saviour*. Photo still from the video excerpt of the production.

Although one could only speculate about the author's decision to visually 'modernise' only the villains of the plot, it seems plausible that the aim was to bring this historical text closer to the actuality of its staging. The Devil is thus presented as a real and actual threat, further connecting the biblical story of the fight between 'good' and 'evil' to the actual socio-political context of the production. However, although the Devil did not bear any features that would directly refer him to the enemy identified in the political discourse of that time, one could argue that, just like the red cloth in the production of *Simon of Cyrene* symbolising the communist government, his red belt somewhat pointed towards a similar possible interpretation.

As already mentioned, the original text used for this play was written in the Chakavian dialect. Although this dialect is still mostly spoken in the Dalmatian region of Croatia (with Split being its administrative and cultural centre), the question arises to what extent its archaic version was understandable to the audiences in 1991. With this in mind, one needs to ask whether the 'intelligibility' of the text was in fact the goal of this production. As already mentioned in previous chapters, the question of the language and its use was, in the case of Croatian theatre specifically, very often the result of political and not aesthetical decisions. Revisiting and bringing to stage different periods of the Croatian language, thus confirming its longevity, autonomous genesis, and cultural significance, was very often being considered a priority of these staging, even if not openly expressed.

In the case of the analysed production, the relevance of the language was, in a way, further underlined by extra-theatrical means. In the edited video material that was later broadcasted

by the Croatian National Television,⁹⁸³ the performance starts with an excerpt from an epic poem by Marko Marulić, the author known as the father of Croatian Renaissance: “(...) let the words of my language stab the heart of the man.”⁹⁸⁴ Deciding to place this quote as a sort of introductory reference point of the performance itself proved that the authors of this theatrical event were considering the ‘staging’ of this language as bearing a certain prevalence. In addition, by connecting this historical language to the religious topic of the narrative itself, the open-air performance in a way established (or maybe just confirmed) ‘the sanctity’ of the language itself.

Interestingly, at the very end of the play, there is one ‘intrusion’ of the standard Croatian language that somehow challenged the above-mentioned claim of staging the archaic dialect as the priority of the authorial team. More precisely, in the last scene of the performance, in which the resurrected Jesus Christ is placed on the top of the platform, observing the silent procession that moves through the square approaching him, two voices are heard from the monitors—one narrating a poem about Christ suffering on the cross in the Chakavian dialect, the other reciting a poem by Josip Pupačić⁹⁸⁵ called “Moj križ svejedno gori” [Nevertheless, My Cross is Still Burning]. Representing the vision of a suffering poet equated to the one of Jesus on the cross, this poem was in fact used in its adapted version. Besides the main verses explaining the similarity between the human and divine sacrifice, the chosen verses depicted “the shadows of the great armies erupting from the ancient times,”⁹⁸⁶ “the air has been greased by arrows,”⁹⁸⁷ “the centuries are burying the light,”⁹⁸⁸ etc. Singling out these verses that delivered a vision of a historical and armed threat in the moment when the actual armed conflicts were well under way across Croatia,⁹⁸⁹ this directorial decision should be taken with further consideration. The choice of the standard and ‘understandable’ language to somehow conclude the performance and deliver audiences with its final and intelligible interpretation transported this event to its actual moment, including all the challenges this move could have

⁹⁸³ The date of the first public showing is not known, but the production is still showed on Croatian Television from time to time, in the same format.

⁹⁸⁴ “(...) da riči jazika moga se zabiju u srce človika.” Quote from his epic poem *Judita*, written in Chakavian dialect in 1501.

⁹⁸⁵ Josip Pupačić (1928–1971), was a Croatian poet. His work was characterised by a strong dedication to the topics of homeland, nation, and Croatian language.

⁹⁸⁶ “Sjene velikih vojski nadiru iz davnina,” my translation,

<https://radiogornjigrad.wordpress.com/2016/05/23/josip-pupacic-moj-kriz-svejedno-gori/>, last accessed June 20, 2018.

⁹⁸⁷ “Zrak su omastile strijele,” my translation, Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸ “Vjekovi pokapaju svjetlo,” my translation, Ibid.

⁹⁸⁹ One week after the premiere of the play, on the day of the Catholic Easter, the first armed conflict with casualties at the Plitvice lake occurred.

provoked. Suddenly, this performance no longer functioned solely as a reinterpretation of the past but also as a certain prediction of the approaching future.

Later that year, on May 28, 1991, the original Split production of *The Torment* was staged in Zagreb as well, this time in the context of the official celebration of the Croatian National Day. In this one month that separated the Split and the Zagreb version of the performance, the conflicts between the Serb rebellious paramilitary groups supported by the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) on one and Croatian police on the other side intensified, resulting in a rising number of casualties. In addition, the referendum concerning Croatia's full state independence was held on May 18, resulting in 94.17% of voters demanding its autonomy, thus setting off the administrative and other collapse of the Yugoslav federation. Moreover, on the day of the Zagreb performance, just a few kilometres further to the west of the city, the first formation of what would soon become the Croatian Army held a founding parade. In the context of escalating violence and accelerated preparations for a war, the pure fact of bringing this massive production from Split to Zagreb was seen and defined as inciting inner national cohesion, proving that "no logs could separate Zagreb from Split and *vice versa*."⁹⁹⁰ Once again, the Zagreb version of *The Torment* was staged in a public space, following a specific choice of the location. This time, it was performed on the square in front of the church of St. Catherine in the historical and political centre of Zagreb, some 200 meters from the Croatian Parliament and government headquarters. Moreover, this was also the exact location where the Jesuit Gymnasium theatre held its first public performances in Zagreb. In other words, this site sort of outlined the structural interrelations between the central political power, the church, and the theatre, hence representing a highly relevant national significance of the play itself.

Although no video recording of the Zagreb performance is available, the media reports gave a hint that this version did not differ as much from the original one.⁹⁹¹ As the main plot of this play was generally known by its audiences, the dramatic tension was not placed on the story itself or on the interplay of its characters but arose from this kind of direct involvement of its public. Most of the media reports of the Zagreb performance emphasised exactly this specific

⁹⁹⁰ Ivo Sanader, the director of Croatian National Theatre Split, as quoted in Denis Derk, "Spektakl na Gornjem Gradu," n.d. By mentioning 'logs', he was referring to the revolt of Croatian Serbs happening in that moment, that was colloquially called the 'Log Revolution'. The Serb 'rebels' were using logs and other bulky material to block the roads in areas with Serb population with the goal to disrupt the first democratic elections in Croatia after its secession. As these areas were located between the northern and southern Croatia, the connection between these regions was at times completely blocked.

⁹⁹¹ The only difference I could spot was the mention of the added texts in the Zagreb version of the performance with some new names such as Tin Ujević and Vesna Krmpotić, poets that were not mentioned in the original version of the play.

engagement of the audiences as its most potent specificity. For instance, a few critics pointed out the “energy of coming together that could be felt at every stage of this big passion spectacle,”⁹⁹² as well as the “natural involvement of the audiences as active participants of the play,”⁹⁹³ while some wrote how “in this overall theatricalisation still very similar to a ritual, the spirit of a nation is being outlined.”⁹⁹⁴ In other words, just as much as the Croatian Catholic Church of that time tried to locate the mutual origin of the Catholic religion and Croatian nation as far in the past as possible, this theatrical event also aimed to present this religious/theatrical ritual as one of the origins of the Croatian cultural heritage.

A certain ‘ritualistic’ approach to this play was something that Ivica Boban, the director of the performance, often used in her directorial practice. Nonetheless, this ritual aesthetics she heavily deployed in theatre of the 1970s and early 1980s seemed to transform into something else when applied in the context of galloping nationalism where the categories of group, nation, or community were being defined or shifted, questioned, or highly manipulated. The ritualisation of the Biblical story in a highly ethno-clerical manner did not render the narrative more ‘general’ and open to different understandings following its religious context but rather more ‘specific’—it seemed that this ritual theatre transformed into an ethno-ritual theatre, outlining or even defining the features of the new national identity.

This interrelation of religion, theatre heritage, and strategies of national unification executed by political (as well as religious) elites in the early 1990s was best explained by the already discussed director of the Croatian National Theatre Split, Ivo Sanader. Announcing the Zagreb performance at a press-conference, he explained that the Way of the Cross that Jesus undertook “at this moment resembles the actual situation of Croatia.”⁹⁹⁵ In other words, by showing correspondence between the suffering of Jesus and the ‘suffering’ of Croatia in 1991, Sanader not only managed to present the position of Croatia in the late spring of 1991 in religious terms but also equated its position to the martyr and morally unquestionable position of Jesus Christ, suffering for a higher goal.

Some theatre critics even succeeded in further elaborating this analogy by saying, for instance, how “the dramaturgical passion forms are very suitable for feelings of collective identification,”⁹⁹⁶ how “these scenes of identification inscribed our destiny into the big trope

⁹⁹² Marija Grgičević, “Veliki križni put,” *Večernji List*, May 30, 1991.

⁹⁹³ Jagoda Martinčević, “Ganutljivi prizori,” *Vjesnik*, May 30, 1991.

⁹⁹⁴ Dubravka Vrgoč, “Kultura velikog petka,” *Vjesnik*, March 29, 1991.

⁹⁹⁵ Derk, “Spektakl na Gornjem Gradu.”

⁹⁹⁶ Vrgoč, “Kultura velikog petka.”

of the suffering of Christ,”⁹⁹⁷ or how these passion forms, “in which the Croatian nation left imprints of its historical existence,”⁹⁹⁸ in a way connect us to the Christian cultural heritage, etc. Furthermore, the significance of the staging for the ‘actual moment’ also resonated in media reports, stating, for example, how these “living statements are not only resonating in a religious consciousness but also in the real state of affairs.”⁹⁹⁹ Once again, the interpretation of the performance was detected and inscribed to its exact socio-political context. This understanding was also confirmed by those included in the staging itself—for instance, Tomislav Martić, the actor who played the role of Jesus in both productions, thought of his character as being a “political prisoner par excellence,”¹⁰⁰⁰ thus not just adding political significance to the character of Jesus and the narrative of his life but also recognising him as a victim of concrete ideological persecutions and the general attitude towards practicing religion in socialist Yugoslavia.

When asked about the significance of the play for its own time, in one interview from 1992, the director, Ivica Boban, explained how she approached the play as a sort of “remembering of the future”¹⁰⁰¹ or, in other words, presenting historical material as some sort of protocol for the future. “I truly believe that theatre can see the future, even then when it’s going back to the origins of its historical identity.”¹⁰⁰² This position was echoed in several reviews that understood the production as a form of a “warning, wanting to remind us of some eternal truths,”¹⁰⁰³ thus ascribing some kind of a prophetic significance to it. As I have detected in other performances mentioned throughout this paper, in times of defining the national identity along the lines of ethnic and other affiliation, staging a text from national history was seen as not only providing a historical argument to attain national independence, but it also generated alarming interpretations of the approaching war.

Betlehemska zvijezda: Political and Historical Manipulation

Besides liturgical drama being brought up from the history in the 1990s, there were some newly written or adapted liturgic texts that were created during these years and that also aimed to reclaim the Catholic cultural heritage as the foundation of the new national identity. Although there is not much material that comments on or explains the following

⁹⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁸ Vrgoč, “Kultura velikog petka.”

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Slaven Relja, “Muka naroda našega,” *Večernji List*, August 08, 1991.

¹⁰⁰¹ Jagoda Martinčević, “Patnji treba dati ime!,” *Vjesnik*, April 11, 1992.

¹⁰⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰⁰³ Jagoda Martinčević, “Ganutljivi prizori,” *Vjesnik*, May 30, 1991.

performance, I still decided to include it in my research, as I believe that it still exhibits relevant significance for positions of this work concerning the relation between the religion, theatre, and nationhood. The play *Betlehemska zvijezda* [the Star of Betlehem], written by Vojmil Rabadan and directed by Petar Šarčević,¹⁰⁰⁴ was performed in the church of St. Catherine in the production of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb on December 13, 1992. The starting point of the text itself was a liturgical play written in 1537 by Mavro Vetranović,¹⁰⁰⁵ which describes the events around the birth of Christ. Under strong influence of a pastoral drama, Vetranović introduced many folk songs as well as local characters in this play, thus significantly distancing it from the original Bible story. This original material was then adapted by Vojmil Ramadan in 1941 under the title of *The Star of Betlehem*, premiering in 1942 in the small performance hall of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.¹⁰⁰⁶ Rabadan (1909–1988) was a director, playwright, translator, and author and was significantly active in theatre of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during WWII. He was mostly known as the author of the dramatisation of Budak's *The Hearth*,¹⁰⁰⁷ the most representative theatre production of the Ustashe regime. It is in this light that the choice of staging Rabadan's religious play in 1992 should be mentioned—as I have already demonstrated, the theatrical relativisation of NDH and its ideological controversies has already occurred in the scope of national theatre system, and this production, to some extent, tackles the same problematic, introducing the Catholic religion as one of the features that binds these two periods of Croatian history.

Furthermore, the choice to stage the play in a church points to additional strategies of relativising this controversial content to the ones outlined in the chapter dedicated to the 1991 production of *The Hearth*. More precisely, performing the text on the site of an institution considered to be a moral authority seemed to morally justify the context of the text as well. It only goes to show the extent to which the religion or, more precisely, the religious institutions were used for further historical and political manipulation, an aspect that I will discuss in the continuation of this section.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Petar Šarčević (1935–2001) was a quite renowned theatre and television director who did most of his work in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Mavro Vetranović (1482–1576) was a very prolific author, poet and a catholic priest from Dubrovnik region, focusing mostly on religious topics. He was known for introducing elements of folkloric tradition and everyday life in his religious opus, and he wrote in Shtokavian dialect which was featured in the literature production of renaissance Dubrovnik.

¹⁰⁰⁶ It was also staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Osijek in 1943.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See page 193 of this dissertation.

The process of connecting the national myth of NDH representing an affirmative stage of Croatian statehood and its connection to the Catholic Church was even noted in the only available media report of the time concerning the performance itself. Although discussing its Split version played in a small city church on Christmas Eve of 1992,¹⁰⁰⁸ the critic Anatolij Kudrjavcev concludes that “little of this text has a reason for scenic presentation but should be considered as more of a soundtrack to this conventional mythological imagery that slipped or maybe even broke into theatre.”¹⁰⁰⁹ In other words, restoring this play in the times of renewed nationalistic uprising was considered to bear more political than aesthetic or theatrical significance. Knowing that there is no additional material available in the advised archives that deals with this performance, one can only assume that the performance either went ‘under the radar’ of the theatrical community, as it was staged only few times, or it was simply considered too controversial to be written about.

Krađa Marijinog kipa: A Theatrical Mass

Unlike *The Bethlehem Star* which did not gain as much media and other coverage, one of the most commented newly written religious plays that was produced and staged during wartime in Croatian institutional theatre was the play *Krađa Marijinog Kipa* [The Stealing of the Statue of Holy Mary]. Written in 1970 by a Franciscan priest Kristijan Hrvoslav Ban, a Croatian émigré living in Chicago,¹⁰¹⁰ the play had its first public staging in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Theatre Festival on July 14, 1993, and was directed by Jakov Sedlar, the director of the drama department of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb at the time.¹⁰¹¹ Adding fiction to the historical narrative of the story, the plot of the play is situated in the year of 1647, when Croatia, under its Hungarian rulers, fought against Ottoman empire on numerous frontlines. The story follows events occurring in the sanctuary of the Holy Mother of Bistrica, which is visited by a bishop, the princess Katarina Zrinska from the ruling

¹⁰⁰⁸ This version directed by Boris Kovačević was produced by the Croatian National Theatre in Split and staged the Church of Gospe od Zdravlja.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Anatolij Kudrjavcev, “Bez dogovora,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, n.d.

¹⁰¹⁰ Kristijan Hrvoslav Ban (1924–2000) was a poet, playwright, translator, editor and journalist born in Yugoslavia but living most of his life out of the country due to the alleged political persecution. Predominately active as the editor in the scope of the Catholic-Croatian radios in Rome, New York and Chicago, his literal oeuvre focused mainly on religious topics. He was also active as the president of the Croatian Ethnic Society of Chicago as of 1975. In 1992 he came back to live in a Franciscan monastery in Herzegovina.

¹⁰¹¹ Sedlar himself had some previous experience in directing religious material, most notably the play *Brat našeg Boga* [Brother of our God] written by the Pope John Paul II., performed in the St. Catherine church in Zagreb in 1990. In the same year he directed the production *Agnes of God* by John Pielmeier as a project of his production company “Thalia”. I have not managed to detect where exactly the production was staged, but it was once performed in the scope of the Split Summer Festival of 1990.

Croatian noble family, an almost-blind Hungarian count Erdody, and his helper Dopuz. Count Erdody persuades Dopuz, an immigrant and nonbeliever, to steal the miraculous black wooden statue of the Holy Mary¹⁰¹² from the church, as he secretly believes that he could cure his vision impairment with it. Anica, a local God-fearing girl, is being accused of the theft by a young man called Bistran. Although secretly in love with her, Bistran publicly confirms that he heard Anica accepting immoral proposals from the count, depicting her as a liar and a traitress. As the play evolves, it turns out that Anica, after overhearing the conversation between the count and his servant, in fact managed to hide the stolen statue in a safe place. In the spirit of Catholic virtues, the play ends with two reconciliations (one between Anica and Bistran; the other between Dopuz and the ‘community’, which integrates him once after he has repented for his sins), as well as with two miraculous recoveries (a small mute girl who, in order to confirm Anica’s story, suddenly starts to talk; and the sudden sight cure of the blind count).

Although the pre-premiere was, rather interestingly, executed at the same site where the actual plot of the play took place, that being the church of Marija Bistrička, the most important religious place of pilgrimage in the Croatian Catholic Church, the first public performance was actually staged in the scope of the Dubrovnik Summer Theatre Festival. Due to its substantial cultural and political significance I already presented throughout this dissertation as well as the fact that it was one of the most heavily bombed municipalities during the first years of the war in Croatia, both Dubrovnik and the eponymous national festival maintained the position of the most recognisable city-victim in the ongoing conflict. Although the official siege of Dubrovnik by the YPA ended in November 1992, in the summer of 1993, the city was still in ruins, surrounded by the enemy that would sporadically continue to shell it, and was cut off from the mainland, infrastructurally functioning mostly via its maritime connections. A theatre festival organised under these circumstances presented a challenge, and was, as we could understand from the media reports of that time, predominately seen as point of resistance and national duty.

For these reasons, the program of the 1993 edition of the Summer Festival featured only few selected national productions, among them *The Stealing of the Statue of Holy Mary*, performed in the Franciscan monastery in the town centre. According to the reports, the Dubrovnik performance was a success, to the point that “the whole Franciscan church was

¹⁰¹² The actual statue of Black Madonna located in the small north-Croatian village of Marija Bistrica is considered to have miraculous powers for the believers.

singing together with the actors the song ‘Zdravo Djevo, kraljice Hrvata’ [Hello Mary, the Queen of Croats] in the finale of the play.”¹⁰¹³ The relevance of the text was also recognised as “perfectly adapted to the time, atmosphere and the ambience of the summer festival being organised in a conflict environment,”¹⁰¹⁴ and although “it evoked war sufferings of the 17th century, it was instantly related to our present.”¹⁰¹⁵ Reflecting the actual conflictual reality, some even noted a certain therapeutic effect of the play, stating how “this black-and-white naïve provides an atmosphere of unavoidable victory of good over bad, and this is something that is more than therapeutically efficient.”¹⁰¹⁶ That is to say that linking the plot of the play to this ‘Good vs. Evil’ narrative actually defined the positions in the actual conflict. Nevertheless, traces of reluctant criticism of the play concerning its ‘artistic value’ were found in one of the reports from this Dubrovnik staging. More precisely, Anatolij Kudrjavcev noticed that the narrative of the play itself carried “extremely religious and patriotic accents”¹⁰¹⁷ and that it had been written “with certainly much more religious and patriotic experience and affinity than theatrical or literal one.”¹⁰¹⁸ With this remark, Kudrjavcev in fact confirmed the presumption that the objectives of the performance were profusely aimed at creating a certain feeling of national unity, with religion posited as its main point of consolidation.

According to the available reviews, the liturgy-like form of the play was also heavily accentuated in its staging, presumably not only to keep it as similar as possible to its religious reference but also as to reclaim a certain ‘emotional’ and communal atmosphere of a church gathering. As the text was written in standard Croatian in 1970 and dealt with a historical topic in the 17th century presenting psychologically motivated characters, it seems as if this liturgical feature was not generated from the text itself but was accomplished by other means.¹⁰¹⁹ These specific dramaturgical choices included the decision of staging the play exclusively in churches, adding a procession of characters at the beginning of the play as well as introducing traditional church songs at the end of the performance, etc. Elaborating on the premise expressed above, one of the critics who witnessed the Dubrovnik performance

¹⁰¹³ Jagoda Martinčević, “Jednostavna pučka igra,” *Vjesnik*, July 16, 1993.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰¹⁵ Marija Grgičević, “Marijin Kip osvojio publiku,” *Večernji list*, July 16, 1993.

¹⁰¹⁶ Anatolij Kudrjavcev, “Teatar na misi,” *Slobodna Dalmacija*, n.d.

¹⁰¹⁷ Grgičević, “Marijin Kip osvojio publiku.”

¹⁰¹⁸ Kudrjavcev, “Teatar na misi.”

¹⁰¹⁹ Ban even subtitled his play as ‘prikazanje’, a Croatian term defining liturgical drama, which, purely by the definition of the genre, it was not. As Nikčević argues, although the play did have some traits of a religious drama, Ban “totally inappropriately used means of psychological theatre” thus distancing the text from “its moral mission.” See Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 63.

claimed that “Sedlar realised something we could call a theatrical mass, thus bringing theatre back to its primary experiences,”¹⁰²⁰ a statement that once again points to the attempts of linking theatre and religion to the same sources in the mutual cultural history. The conditions and consequences of staging such a theatrical simulation of church liturgy (and, more precisely, its inclusive character) will be further addressed in the concluding section of this chapter.

Throughout 1993, *The Stealing of the Statue of Holy Mary* extensively toured across northern and southern America as well as Australia and Europe, visiting local Croatian émigré communities. As already mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the production of *The Hearth*, these types of tours were something that Sedlar, the director of the discussed play, often carried out, thus pursuing the ruling political agenda of including Croatian diaspora in the national program.¹⁰²¹ Although I have already explained the political significance of the Croatian diaspora, the case of this production being staged across the globe disclosed other authorities serving these strategies, namely the religious institutions.

The Croatian Catholic Church, together with its international departments, was very much responsible for both organising and hosting cultural programs and events coming from Croatia, thus cultivating a certain myth of nationhood and functioning as the platform for its communal execution. After all, the Croatian Catholic Church was operating as a connection platform between the homeland and the expatriate Croatia from the very beginnings of the emigration processes, often representing the first contact point for Croats living abroad. Moreover, these spaces of communal religious practice (church or other religious institutions, clubs, associations, etc.) helped to define the Croatian Church in diaspora as “a central space for the Croatian politics of identity and desire.”¹⁰²²

In the case of *The Stealing of the Statue of Holy Mary*, the production toured the five continents with performances that were, almost by rule, staged on the premises under the direct management of the Croatian Catholic Church. However, unlike the international tour of *The Hearth*, which was extensively reviewed in the local media, this tour was accompanied with very limited public mention back home. Still, as we could learn from the only available media report from one of this staging in the St. Eberhard church located in the centre of

¹⁰²⁰ Kudrjavcev, “Teatar na misi.”

¹⁰²¹ Actually, this was Sedlar’s second world tour of Croatian diaspora: as already mentioned, the first tour featured *The Hearth*, also a production of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, in 1991. Interestingly enough, Kristijan Hrvoslav Ban, the author of *The Stealing of the Statue of Holy Mary* acted as a host for *The Hearth* when it played in Chicago, and approached Sedlar with the idea of staging his own religious texts.

¹⁰²² Winland, *We are Now a Nation: Croats Between ‘home’ and ‘homeland’*, 65.

Stuttgart, the play still resonated very well with the target audiences. For example, the report mentioned more than 2,500 people present in the audiences, cheering for the actors and singing with them at the end of the performance. Once again, the emotional connection between the émigrés and the Croatian ensemble was accentuated, describing how “the actors and the members of the ensemble barely held back their tears (...) as this was the first time that Croatian theatre met these people that left their homeland so long ago”¹⁰²³ and how “the audiences, like under a spell, listened and absorbed every word and gesture of the actors.”¹⁰²⁴ Moreover, the production also managed to further activate an affirmative position towards the Ustashe heritage initiated in these communities. Namely, in an interview reporting on the outcomes of the American tours of the play, the actress from the play, Mirta Zečević, described how the ensemble in Buenos Aires was “warmly welcomed by a crowd (...) which consisted of many intellectuals, Pavelić’s soldiers, and others,” while in Toronto they met with the “wife of Andrija Artuković, as well as the daughter of Ante Pavelić who came to the theatre in folk costume.”¹⁰²⁵ The significance of this performance for the ensemble itself was emphasised in the reports detailing how, due to the fact that one of the main actors could not perform in Stuttgart after he was injured in a car accident just hours before the performance, the director Sedlar jumped into his role, not wanting to disappoint the audiences.

As I have identified, touring the diaspora with this theatre production further promoted a specific religious affiliation as one of the primary features of the national identity in the making. In conclusion, by simulating the church liturgy, the authors of the play tried to activate the ‘communal inclusivity’ of the theatrical event and to present it as the core of the newly found national unity. However, as seen in the case of many productions mentioned here, this redefined unity was being narrowed down to one religion, one language, and a distinctive national history, something that leads us to understand this type of staging as a firm political statement, bearing real consequences for the overall political activation of the Croatian diaspora.

¹⁰²³ Nevenka Mikac, “Drama u drami,” *Večernji list*, November 11, 1993.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰²⁵ Undetectable source of the reference, the scan of the article is in my private possession. Andrija Artuković (1899–1988) was a Croatian lawyer, politician, and senior member of the Ustashe movement. During the existence of NDH, he served as the minister of internal affairs and minister of Justice. He initiated and executed several racial laws against Serbs, Jews, and Romani people, and managed several concentration camps in Croatia where tens of thousands of civilians were murdered and mistreated. He escaped to the United States after the war where he lived until extradited to Yugoslavia in 1986. He was tried and found guilty of a number of mass killings in the NDH, and was sentenced to death, but the sentence was not carried out due to his age and health. He died in custody in 1988.

Glas u pustinji-Stepinac: Embodying the Sanctity of the Nationhood

Another example of the newly written play with some sort of religious topic or point of reference concerns the case of the play *Glas u pustinji-Stepinac* [A Voice in the Desert-Stepinac] written by Ivan Bakmaz and staged in the Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin, on June 5, 1992. Although this theatre institution was given its name and status of a national theatre only in 1994 (until then it was called the National Theatre August Cesarec), the production was still included in my body of research. Regardless of its official name and status, this theatre house was directly funded by the Croatian Republic and the city of Varaždin, hence confirming its institutional character and relevance for my research. Furthermore, with choosing this play for further analysis, I wanted to tackle the theatrical representations of one of the most important national myths situated somewhere between religion and national history and detect the level of their interwovenness and interdependence. Lastly, as this production (along with a rather controversial topic it discusses) was quite often discussed in different research material of academic provenance, it presented high relevance for the overall research. Although the following production could also be analysed from the perspective of reintroducing and rehabilitating another personified national symbol by theatrical means, it was found to suit this section, as it introduces new levels to the question of how theatre promoted religious affiliation as an element of the formation of a national identity during the early 1990s.

Cardinal Stepinac: Historical Interpretations and Frictions

In 1937, the young Catholic prelate Alojzije Stepinac (1898–1960) became the archbishop of the largest Croatian diocese of Zagreb. When the Nazi-puppet Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was established in 1941, Stepinac remained safely in his position, actively performing as the chief of the Croatian Catholic Church until 1945. The controversy of the Stepinac story revolves mostly around his NDH years and, more precisely, his connections to the Ustashe regime. Upon the creation of NDH, Stepinac publicly exhibited his enthusiasm with the fact that the Croatian nation has finally obtained an autonomous status, simultaneously reaffirming the spiritual as well as political and social significance of the Croatian Catholic Church in this new national constellation. However, with the introduction and execution of racial laws directed mainly towards the Jewish and Orthodox communities in Croatia, Stepinac's overt loyalty to the Ustashe regime started to fade—written evidence of him helping Jews and Serbs in Croatia from being transported to concentration camps exists,

which confirms this premise to some extent. Still, he never officially severed his ties with the Ustashe regime or publicly denounced its politics but rather continued to execute his functions as the head of the Croatian Catholic Church throughout the war years. For instance, he attended numerous public gatherings at the side of Ustashe functionaries, accepted an Order of Merit from President Ante Pavelić in 1944, and even held a church mass for the 4th anniversary of NDH in April 10, 1945, on the same day when half of the local fascist regime was already fleeing Croatia.

With the forming of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945, the new socialist government initially wanted to keep Stepinac as the Archbishop of Zagreb, but due to his ties with the underground Ustashe emigration that continued throughout 1945 as well as his public denunciation of the socialist ideology, he was arrested and sent to trial in 1946. Stating accusations of collaborating with the NDH regime as well as for multiple war crimes against the non-Catholic population, the trial itself was heavily mediatised because the new socialist government wanted to make it an exemplary case that would reflect its general position towards other potential Nazi-collaborationists. Stepinac himself openly considered the trial to be not so much directed against him but against the Catholic Church and religion as such, as well as the Croatian people in its totality, hence reflecting the concept of NDH as the realisation of a century-old dream of Croatia's independence. He was eventually convicted to 16 years in prison but, after having served five years, was placed under house arrest, where he eventually died in 1960.

The story of Cardinal Stepinac and his role in NDH was highly elaborated in the political discourse of socialist Yugoslavia, with him becoming a frequently used symbol for both the socialist government and the national church. Already in 1984, Croatian Catholic Church leaders started to campaign for Stepinac's official political rehabilitation by having his political position reevaluated. The efforts for Stepinac's official rehabilitation and eventual beatification intensified in the 1990s and parallel to the breakdown of Yugoslavia, with Franjo Tuđman and the HDZ party becoming the most passionate advocates of these aspirations. The reasons for it could be detected in one of his speeches given after the official Vatican eventually proclaimed Stepinac a saint in 1998:

With the beatification, the Holy Father and the Vatican sided with this Croatia and Croatian people against attempts to accuse the whole Croatian people of genocide and fascism. The Holy Father, the Vatican and the Catholicism all proved that neither Stepinac nor Croatian people were criminals. That is a contribution to the truth about the Croatian people in WWII and the truth about

the contemporary Croatia.¹⁰²⁶

In other words, Stepinac was seen as a personification of this religious, morally uncorruptible Croatia caught somewhat unprepared in the chaos of WWII, ultimately founding its redemption in the fact that it was cleared of guilt by the highest moral authority, the Pope and the Vatican. This redemption was not only being seen as addressed to the ‘past sins’ committed during WWII but was additionally used as an argument for forgiving all potential ‘contemporary’ sins of the modern Croatian nation. As I will show, this complex network of different connotations and manipulations was reflected in theatre of that time as well, confirming its overt complicity in the (re)construction of national identities by using the notion of religious affiliation.

Stepinac in Theatre: Moral Rehabilitation of the Nation

Due to the political climate and the position of the Croatian Catholic Church during the post-WWII years, the myth of Stepinac was very seldomly brought to life in the form of artistic expression.¹⁰²⁷ Although equipped with so much political and other significance (as well as featuring a very dramatic biography), Stepinac was not featured in any theatrical material before 1992, when the author Ivan Bakmaz¹⁰²⁸ wrote a text called *Glas u pustinji* [Voice in the Desert] about the life and work of the Cardinal and offered it to the national theatre in Varaždin.

Written from the point of view of the dying Stepinac who remembers his life, the play was organised into sixteen scenic episodes or chapters¹⁰²⁹ placed in atemporal order. The

¹⁰²⁶ Darko Đuretek and Mladenka Sarić, “HDZ Will Regain Support of Voters with Clear Politics, not Cheap Tricks. Dr. Franjo Tuđman’s Speech: We Must not Allow Sheep and Geese to Lead us into the Fog!” *Večernji list*, December 8, 1998. Interestingly, Tuđman, as a former avid communist, did not evoke the fact that the anti-fascist struggle was initiated and fought by many Croats too (ultimately, Tito was Croatian as well), a fact which proved that the support of the Ustashe regime by Croatian population was far from unanimous.

¹⁰²⁷ Except few biographies printed in the Croatian diaspora and numerous statues celebrating Stepinac that were erected from early 1950s throughout the world, there were no ‘dramatisations’ of his life either in fiction literature, film or theatre. This could be explained by the context of the time and the position Stepinac as a convicted person held during socialist Yugoslavia. It could also be seen as a ‘tactic’ to leave the myth of Stepinac to its ‘historical accuracy’, proving that he actually did not need artistic or any other interpretation.

¹⁰²⁸ Ivan Bakmaz (1941–2014) was a playwright and teacher, as well as the author of some 50 theatre plays mostly criticizing the socialist ideological context. He was very interested in biblical topics, even considering himself writing “only thanks to the Holy Gost.” See Ivan Bakmaz, “Osobni prilog za budućnost kazališta,” *Novi Prolog* 3, no. 11 (1988): 62.

¹⁰²⁹ Bojište [the Battlefield], Grad [the City], Zaruke [the Engagement], Svadba [the Marriage], Germanicum, Neposlušnost [Disobedience], Savjest [Conscious], Bleiburg, Prekrštavanje [Baptism], Hapšenje [the Arrest], Proces [the Process], Robija [the Imprisonment], Grijeh [the Sin], Kardinal [the Cardinal], Bezimen [the Nameless], Pismo i Smrt [the Letter and the Death].

described events included different moments of Stepinac's biography, such as his fighting in WWI and the time spent in Italian captivity; his short engagement with Marija Horvat; his beginnings as the Zagreb Cardinal; his alleged attempts of resisting the Ustashe regime; his last years spent in house arrest, etc. Although formed around these factual events, the dramatic episodes were not focused on recounting them but were rather aimed at outlining different circumstances testing his belief which Stepinac successfully resisted. From purely physical temptations (his fiancée who seeks to meet him in person after many exchanged letters; his fellow students who persuade him to visit whorehouses with them), to moral temptations initiated by other people or representatives of the criminal political system in power. This set of temptations seemed to be introduced in order to additionally demonstrate the extent of the suffering that Stepinac had to endure for a certain 'higher cause', reaffirming his position as a martyr and, consequently, a saint.

Following the episodic setting of the narrative, the notion of temptation as well as the emphasised martyr role of Stepinac, the play established itself as a sort of a personalised Way of the Cross, linking Stepinac directly to the story of Jesus Christ¹⁰³⁰ and thus morally equalising them. However, unlike the suffering of Jesus, Stepinac's suffering was not made solely in the name of God but also in the name of the nation which, in way of association, became somewhat sacred: "God gave us only one death to carry. But I already told you, even if I could take up to thousand deaths, I would be miniscule in the light of the sacrifice a nation makes."¹⁰³¹

The text itself carried other obvious characteristics of medieval liturgical plays besides the mentioned episodic character, hence building an autonomous space of dramatic tension. Firstly, although it was not created as an adaptation of a Biblical story, it did sort of consider its topic as being previously 'known' by the audiences. Departing from this presumption, the narrative of the text focused not so much on telling the story of Stepinac but much more on providing audiences with some 'additional value' which will be discussed later.

Secondly, similar to its historical model, the main characters of the story (even Stepinac himself) were constructed as primarily being one-dimensional representations and allegories of either 'good' or 'evil', not guided by any psychological motivations whatsoever but simply embodying the will of a superior force. While the 'good' was represented by Stepinac,

¹⁰³⁰ In her text about the play *Glas u pustinja*, Nikčević states that "this connection between Stepinac and Jesus Christ is confirmed even before reading the text of the play as the note in the manuscript shows that the text was written on the Epiphany Day (Three Kings' Day) in 1992." See Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 56.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

members of his family, and the boy Francek who expressed his interest in being a future priest, the ‘evil’ was represented by the Chaplain and the ex-priest, “carriers of the worst, most evil side of a human life.”¹⁰³²

Finally, the ‘moral’ of the text itself, built around the tragic destiny of Stepinac, was set to confirm the overall superiority of ‘good’, with slight adjustments serving the actual socio-political context. Offering statements such as “I stayed with the nation that was entrusted to me by God,”¹⁰³³ the play offered a vision of interconnectedness between the Croatian nation and the Catholic religion that was discussed throughout this dissertation, presenting Stepinac as the highest moral embodiment of this alliance. In this manner, *The Voice in the Desert* once again defined the Croatian nation with the abstract value of ‘good’, simultaneously interpreting all those negating this superiority as ‘evil’. This approach was best confirmed by the author of the text himself when saying that, in the case of Stepinac,

the holy Ghost will lead the process of revision [of his alleged crimes during the WWII], exposing the demons that were trying to prevent the appearance of the witness who, chosen by the heaven, witnessed the history of his people (...) thus suppressing the only voice left in this region that states the right of Croatian people to its own state.”¹⁰³⁴

The text of the play ended with an epilogue delivered by the Vicar, Stepinac’s confidant and friend, reaffirming the Cardinal’s holiness and declaring that Stepinac was the most important metaphor of the charismatic Croatian nation in attaining its own historicity.¹⁰³⁵

As already mentioned, Bakmaz wrote the play in the first weeks of January 1992, and it already succeeded in being staged in the National Theatre of Varaždin in June of the same year.¹⁰³⁶ According to the available material which, unfortunately, does not include a video recording,¹⁰³⁷ the first major difference one can notice when comparing the original text and its staging is the addition of Stepinac’s name in the title: The play performed under the name

¹⁰³² Adriana Car-Mihec, “‘Glas u pustinji’ Ivana Bakmaza,” https://bib.irb.hr/datoteka/287241.Glas_u_pustinji_Ivana_Bakmaza.pdf, last accessed December 3, 2108, 8.

¹⁰³³ Ivan Bakmaz, “Glas u pustinji,” as quoted in Car-Mihec, “‘Glas u pustinji’ Ivana Bakmaza,” 9.

¹⁰³⁴ Ivan Bakmaz, “Poosobljena povijest,” *Krležini dani u Osijeku* (1993), 130.

¹⁰³⁵ “Maybe one day we will all sit at the same table. It is not important who will live to be present there and then, but on that day, we will be called in love by the name because of which we are now suffering so much. And the whole world will call us by our name.” As quoted in Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 61.

¹⁰³⁶ According to the available material, “the gala premiere, along with many prominent guests, had all of the features of a very meticulously prepared social event.” Marija Grgičević, “Stepinac: kronika mučeništva,” *Večernji List*, June 7, 1992.

¹⁰³⁷ According to the director of the archival department of the Varaždin National Theatre that was contacted, the video recording of the production does not exist.

Glas u pustinji-Stepinac [the Voice in the Desert-Stepinac], thus making its main topic even more visible to the potential audiences. Furthermore, the most substantial change in comparison to its textual source was the fact that the authors of the performance decided to add a theatrical introduction to the play itself. This introduction, written specifically for this occasion by the dramaturg Ante Armanini,¹⁰³⁸ was staged in the foyer of the theatre house and featured documentary material describing the Stepinac trial in 1946 as an opening. Functioning as an ‘entrance point’ to the production itself, this dramatical addendum prolonged the duration of the entire event to a challenging four and a half hours. Referring to this prelude, the only available media report referring to it does not discover that much. Although praising the motivation of the authors to present audiences with this documentary prologue, the report states that this introduction was, at the end, a “pretty dull play” in which only “the main actors (...) could lessen its didactics.”¹⁰³⁹

Although one can only speculate about the reasons of inserting this documentary part where actors delivered the actual transcripts from Stepinac’s trial, some motives for this decision could still be identified. First, although the general story of Stepinac’s life was known by many, the extensive story of his trial (the exact charges, the arguments of the defence, etc.) were still not mediated to wider audiences at the time of this performance. In other words, the cause of introducing this segment to the performance could be seen as a purely informational one. Secondly, bringing the actual facts into the play in a documentary form could be seen as an attempt to actualise the Bakmaz dramaturgical adaptation—if the story of Stepinac is outlined by its factual elements, then the play itself will probably gain some elements of factuality or authenticity. As already stated throughout this dissertation, staged in this ‘early stage’ of the defining nationhood much dedicated to confirming the historical accuracy of the Croatian ethnogenesis, one could argue that the factual elaboration of Stepinac as a national symbol was considered as essential to this process.

¹⁰³⁸ Ante Armanini (1943) is a poet and long-time dramaturge at the Varaždin Croatian National Theatre, very much active in creating public warmongering narrative during the wars of the 1990s. For example, in 1995, he wrote how the “phenomenon of AIDS and Serbs will be perceived in the 21st century as in some terrible dream, grown from a torn-out civilisational and moral tissue of the western civilization. The problem of the outmost gravity: what kind of civilisational and cultural disorders will be caused by both of this malign genetical mutations, one existing on the level of the sexual hygiene called AIDS, and the other one existing on the level of political and civilisational hygiene called Serbs.” See *Vijenac* no. 43, August 24, 1995.

¹⁰³⁹ Grgičević, “Stepinac: kronika mučeništva.”

In addition to the stated arguments, staging the trial of 1946 in front of the audiences in wartime Varaždin in 1992¹⁰⁴⁰ could have had real consequences regarding different approaches of depicting and defining the enemy of the Croatian state and nation. But as in many other cases of dealing with the concept of the enemy in Croatian theatre during the wars which have been mentioned and analysed, here we can again witness how this enemy was not fixed in the actual historical event but was further generalised. For instance, the actors playing the members of the trial chamber in the initial documentary part of the play were chosen to play different roles of ‘villains’ in the second part (ranging from the ‘bad’ students, ex-priest, representatives of both Ustashe and Communist government, etc.). By transferring these characters from factual to fictional narratives of the production, it seems that the authors of the staging wanted to further accentuate the universality of ‘evil’ which, “in alternating circumstances of different regimes continued with its devilish actions.”¹⁰⁴¹ By depicting all politicians as enemies (both the Ustashe and the communists), Stepinac was elevated in his religious dedication and moral significance, while at the same time, his political decisions and alliances were omitted from the narrative.

After this informative introduction, the performance continued in the main theatre hall and was presented in the form of fragmental scenes, “with the help of masks, puppets, choreography and very dense scenic music.”¹⁰⁴² As the available material indicates, “this part of the play aims no more in being educative (...) but rather tries to plastically express the state of mind in which this relation between the past and the present would be reflected.”¹⁰⁴³ In other words, the performance recounting actual historical events was evidently recognised as resonating in the actual moment of its staging, detecting a certain overlap of the historical narrative and its present ‘resurrections’. Although lacking more detailed media information on the event, I would still argue that staging this play in an institutional theatre was not just an aesthetically but also politically motivated decision, aimed at activating direct socio-political repercussions as well. As I have demonstrated, introducing the named production in an institutional theatre in 1992 aimed at re-establishing Stepinac as an ‘innocent victim’ and a moral authority not recognised by his political associates. In addition, emphasising his

¹⁰⁴⁰ Situated in northern part of Croatia, the town of Varaždin did not experience any direct combat activities during the war in Croatia. However, being home of the 2nd largest base of Yugoslav People’s Army in Croatia the city gained a certain political importance in the course of the first months of the war conflict. In September 1991, the YPA forces left their premises in the town, surrendering its weapons and ammunitions to the Croatian police: An event that was regarded as the first victory of the Croatian army forces against the much prevalent enemy.

¹⁰⁴¹ Grgičević, “Stepinac: kronika mučeništva.”

¹⁰⁴² Ibid.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid.

personal suffering as motivated by his belief in an autonomous Croatian state, he was established as a national symbol of the highest moral status.

Conclusion

Examining the most representative examples of religious topics that entered the institutional theatre system during the wartime in Croatia, one could recognise some similarities and general characteristics that these performances generated. First, they all positioned the Catholic religion as one of the most important characteristics of this 'new' national identity being formed by different systems of power at the time of the armed conflicts. Following the soaring ethnoclericalism, institutional theatre once again showed the scope of its interdependence and complicity to the dominant political phenomena. Furthermore, the religious motives were presented as being a part of a cultural heritage of the Croatian nation, thus validating its national integrity and historic continuity. As stated in one of the articles written at that time, "confirming the dramatic significance of the passion motive (...) that survived for more than a century, also promoted the religion and culture of the Croatian nation."¹⁰⁴⁴ In addition, many of these productions also confirmed the Croatian language as another important element of this (re)constructed identity, initiating different significances in the scope of redefining and historicising national culture.

Secondly, the suffering of Christ in all of these plays was related to the 'suffering' of the Croatian people in the wake and during the war, thus defining the arising conflict as the battle between the universal 'good' and 'evil' and hence directly providing the highest moral justification to the armed actions initiated and executed by the Croatian state.

Another process of relating the religious motives closer to the concepts of the nation was generated through the 'ritual' characteristic of some of the theatrical events analysed here. Encouraging the interaction of the audience and reconstructing different communal forms such as a Catholic mass, some of these productions addressed the question around which communal practices a nation could be constructed or represented. The 'ritual' function of some of these plays obviously aimed at generating a certain community. Integrated in theatrical events themselves, these specific theatre audiences most probably created some type of fellowship and levels of identification with the theatrical plot itself, as well as its conceptual and ethic premises. Sanja Nikčević even argued that this 'ritual' function of gathering around theatre performances with accentuated religious topic consequently made

¹⁰⁴⁴ Dubravka Vrgoč, "Sve povijest pučkim očima," *Vjesnik*, March 29, 1991.

this community stronger in its endurance of wartime suffering: “Theatre plays with religious topics presented on Croatian stages from 1990 to 1994 were no ‘ordinary’ plays but rituals which, reminding us of mutual truths (...) are strengthening this community.”¹⁰⁴⁵ In her view, by introducing religious topics and in order to answer the ‘spiritual’ needs of the wartime audiences, theatre simply ‘upgraded’ its communal character with the spiritual one usually found in religious gatherings.

However, in times of acute ‘Us vs. Them’ differentiation process such is a war and parallel to defining who could take part in constituting this newly created nation, the mentioned productions also denominated those who were not ‘allowed’ to be an integral part of this communal entity. A statement by the Helsinki Committee on the freedom of religion in Croatia, published in February 1996 but referring to the data collected during wartime years, reported how “some religious officials have used the media, pulpits, and religious meetings to promote the aggressive and systematic persecution of those who do not share their opinions (...), while not refraining from openly using propaganda to promote totalitarianism (...) and even distorting history.”¹⁰⁴⁶ Referring to religious affiliation as a point of reference for the national affiliation propagated by the Croatian Catholic Church, the here-examined theatre productions thus also simultaneously defined all those found to not fit this delineated national entity, denouncing different religious identifications as ‘threatening’ to the project of independent Croatia. Considering the wartime reality featuring religiously motivated hatred occurrences on all levels of life,¹⁰⁴⁷ once again one witnesses to what extent theatre could reinforce the overall construction of the ‘other’.

Additionally, as I have established, some of these productions (once again) reached for politically compromised historical material without problematising it whatsoever.

Reaffirming the cultural heritage created during the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945) proved not only in what way this ‘new’ concept of the nation was indeed just ‘renewed’¹⁰⁴⁸ but also addressed the moral responsibility of the Croatian theatrical community during the wartime when dealing with these highly problematic reference models.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 69.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ivan Zvonimir Čičak, “On Freedom of Religion in Croatia,” *Croatian Helsinki Committee, Statement* 33 (1996).

¹⁰⁴⁷ As of early 1990 Croatian citizens of Serb ethnicity or orthodox religion were physically attacked, bullied, and evicted from their jobs or homes. Although not administrated via state mechanisms or judiciary processed, these hate crimes affirmed the overall atmosphere of ethnoreligious hostility.

¹⁰⁴⁸ This is also echoed in the concept of the ‘spiritual renewal’ itself as the term *renewal* presupposes a certain original condition that is being reconstructed and not created from anew.

It also indicated in what way institutional theatre engaged in the overall reinterpretation and nationalisation of the past, a topic which is thoroughly discussed throughout this dissertation. Lastly, what we can detect on the analytical margins of this chapter is the emergence of some sort of theatre historiography featuring a much hyphenated religious or spiritual point of departure, with theatre scholar Sanja Nikčević being its most vocal and present exponent.¹⁰⁴⁹ As I have already indicated in the course of this chapter, when discussing why religious drama entered Croatian theatres in the 1990s, Nikčević posits her main argument in the fact that the audiences needed religious content in times of “this a-logic life which we lived, the cruel war fighting in the heart of Europe at the end of the 20th Century, the war we didn’t want and didn’t understand.”¹⁰⁵⁰

Also, in her research dedicated to religious drama, she focuses on the term of “emotional participation” of the audiences generated in this type of theatrical event. She states that it is exactly because of this added ‘emotional’ value that these “type of affirmative religious plays caused a type of reception very much different from the cold intellectual one activated by theatre plays. In the cases of these plays, the audiences openly wept or showed their emotions.”¹⁰⁵¹ Nikčević thus detects the main purpose of these plays in a certain ‘emotional’ activation of their audiences or, more precisely, in ‘awaking’ certain religious feelings. On the other side, by narrowing down this process to its ‘emotional’ intention, she completely ignores what kind of consequences this kind of theatrical practice could provoke in the overall construction of a certain nation. If the religious plays were meant to activate the feelings of belonging to a community focused around a certain religious affiliation, they simultaneously activated the feelings of exclusion for all those not affiliated.

Furthermore, while praising the religious aspects of the wartime theatre as being able to provide the audiences with an explanation of the violent reality, this specific approach avoids to include (and thus negates) the interdependent relation of this ‘religious’ theatre, the Croatian Catholic Church, and the state apparatus in its analytical consideration. In the academic research dealing with the wartime theatre in Croatia and its relations to different systems of political power, this is a set of questions I deeply believe should not be

¹⁰⁴⁹ This position is by no means a particularity of solely Croatian theatre historiography as there have been numerous publications and works aimed at reclaiming religion as one of the most important elements of theatre and performance studies in the recent years. See for instance Lance Gharavi, *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Milija Gluhovic and Jisha Menon, eds., *Performing the Secular: Religion, Representation and Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Nikčević, *Što je nama hrvatska drama danas?*, 67.

¹⁰⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

overlooked, as this would mean ignoring to understand the plethora of possible socio-political impacts of theatre itself.

6. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I set out to examine if and how the Croatian institutional theatre represented and, moreover, forged a specific vision of national community during the wartime period (1991–1995). The main goal was to ascertain whether the mentioned theatre system in fact played an active role in the overall process of negotiating and administrating the concepts of communal belonging in the socio-political setting featured by both the national uprising and the war conflicts. Employing an empirical research based on selected productions, I exposed the ways in which national theatre conformed to dominant political processes of that time and, moreover, how it replicated the most relevant concepts of nation and national affiliation fabricated by the political elites along their nationalist agendas. Concurrently, I have indicated how, just as the ruling political discourse, the theatre system also presented selected narratives of national importance as arguments for the ongoing war effort and its nationalistic interpretations.

Upon investigating the relationship between institutional theatre and the system of political governance holding the authority of producing concepts of national belonging in the early 1990s, my dissertation has shown how the institutional theatre system ardently followed the dominant political discourse and its agendas in promoting a specific understanding of Croatianhood. As I have exhibited, the large majority of the narratives staged in the institutional theatre of that time has actually been previously or simultaneously executed in the socio-political realm as well, hence reaffirming this cohesiveness. Most institutional theatre productions of that time were found to be dedicated to goals defined and administrated by the political elites, compliantly functioning as its representational realm. Although the fact that the institutional theatre system often functions as an agent of a dominant political course does not represent a novel phenomenon, in the case of the Croatian wartime theatre, this fact was rather generalised, scattered, deducted to sporadic study cases, or even openly omitted by the local theatre historiography. In this light, the relevance of this work lies in the fact that it systematically grouped and, more importantly, revealed a plethora of theatrical examples that manage to render this assumption irrefutable.

Staging History: National Myths and National Culture

As this volume revealed, staging national history was a very popular feature of the Croatian institutional theatre during the 1990s. Just like in the political discourse of this period, those staged historical narratives that were recognised as national myths either aimed at or were

interpreted (or both) as providing the most important proof of distinguished and historically justified Croatian nationhood. Whether these stories that penetrated the institutional theatre system of the early 1990s depicted glorious battles or defeats from the communal history, they were reinstituted as being important points in the Croatian ethnogenesis. In other words, staged in an institution of national symbolic and authority, they were presented as formative events for this nation in the making.

More importantly, as I have determined, this process of choosing different historical reference points apt for national stages was marked by the process of overt nationalisation. This means that, regardless of their factual ‘nature’, these stories were adjusted to fit the proscribed visions of Croatianhood. For instance, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, the authors of original texts (or the authors of their dramatisations) dealing with national myths stemming from the local history often resorted to rewriting these historical accounts, thus acquiring higher conformity of this theatrical content to the political agendas effective in the early 1990s. Regardless of the initial intention of these efforts, they still showed how the theatre system staging these national narratives actively participated in blurring the difference between historical facts and fiction, following similar processes executed by other power structures of that time. Although executed as artistic renditions, in the overall atmosphere of securing historical content as an argument for the new nation-state, these productions were in fact often produced or/and understood as providing additional factual relevance as well.

Moreover, alongside these rewritings and adaptations of national history, as I have outlined, many of these narratives have been ‘cleared’ from their more general or multi-national context and were additionally ‘Croatianised’, i.e. presented as being uniquely Croatian. Several examples featured in this dissertation prove how this erasing or forgetting “are essential factors in the making of a nation,”¹⁰⁵² one of these being the Croatisation of the Illyrian Movement, whose pan-Slavic and proto-Yugoslav objectives were harshly omitted to fit the call for constitutive national myths from the past. Nevertheless, one needs to keep in mind that these policies of exclusion were not employed only in the case of staged narratives but were detected in other areas of theatre production of that time as well. From repertoires focusing exclusively on national authors or changing the names of theatre houses,¹⁰⁵³ all the

¹⁰⁵² Renan, “What is a Nation?,” 145–146.

¹⁰⁵³ The most evident example of this was the changing of the name of the “Jazavac Satirical Theatre” in Zagreb. Named after a satirical play *Jazavac pred sudom* [The Badger on Trial] by a Bosnian-Serb author and politician Petar Kočić (1877–1916), the theatre changed its name in 1994 to *Kerempuh*, after a character from a work by Croatian author Miroslav Krleža.

way to ostracising theatre workers and actors of Serbian and other ethnicities from theatre ensembles, one could detect the scope and envisage the consequences of these excluding policies. This points out us to another important element of these processes and tactics, i.e. their ambition to connect not only the historical Croatian nation to its modern version but also to identify historical enemies as the ones fought against on the actual battlefields.

As I tried to emphasise throughout my dissertation, while most of the analysed theatre productions that adapted the historical narratives should be considered as simplistic “illustrations or ‘spin-offs’ from myth production”¹⁰⁵⁴ occurring in the general political discourse, some of them, however, managed to generate national myths whose interpretations were still not so clearly positioned in the context of their staging. For instance, defending the myth of the Independent State of Croatia [NDH] as an important point of the general ethnogenesis of the Croatian nation was very much conjured by theatrical means. In other words, as I have argued, the staging of *The Hearth* in 1991 actually initiated the more comprehensive socio-political as well as public rehabilitation of the very problematic historical period that would, as of that year, expand to a more general socio-political reality. By closely analysing this and similar examples, special attention was paid to the direct political potential of theatre generating national myths as well as to outlining its limitations. Rather paradoxically, although these historical narratives were deeply rooted in their factual past and the ambition of these productions was to somewhat render national history visible, they were simultaneously recognised as universal and thus relevant for the actuality of their staging. On the one hand, they were staged and/or interpreted as direct metaphors or elaborations of the actual nation-defining process; on the other hand, they were also presented as effective interpretations of the wartime reality, most specifically as they predominantly included the notion of the enemy challenging the historical right to Croatian national independence.

Besides staging national myths that aimed at justifying the ongoing conflict by ‘proving’ the historical origins of an autonomous Croatian nation, this dissertation detected another theatrical strategy of its representation which occurred in the Croatian institutional theatres of the early 1990s. More precisely, following the ambition of defining both the origins and boundaries of the reintroduced nationhood, many national theatres staged texts and plays that served as evidence to the distinguished and centuries-long national cultural heritage. As I have determined, when identifying and presenting certain content as having national

¹⁰⁵⁴ Kolstø, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, 29.

significance, the main focus was given to the specific conditions of its creation, such as the authorship and/or its geopolitical origin. In other words, even if the narratives of these plays did not deal with historical episodes from the national past, the authors of these texts and plays themselves were seen as creators or guardians of a certain national distinctiveness. Special significance was given to works of those authors who were important for the evolution of Croatian language (such as Ivan Gundulić, Marin Držić, Marko Marulić, or Dimitrije Demeter), for the definition of Croatian territorial borders (Držić and Gundulić for Dubrovnik, Marulić for Split), and/or those who were closely connected to political or cultural movements understood to define the Croatian identity in general (Demeter and his connection to the Illyrian movement). As I have outlined, in the ambition to render these cultural myths effective argumentative material for justifying the demand for the long-awaited national independence, they were further adapted and nationalised both in the political discourse and on theatre stages of that time. For instance, the renaissance theatre heritage of the Dubrovnik Republic represented by Gundulić and Držić was becoming defined and staged as national in its conception as well, although categories of nation expressed by these authors did not conform to their modern versions. Once more, by executing this ‘Croatisation’ of the local cultural tradition, its prompt implication for the context of its staging was secured. This means that these productions not only provided proof of historical origins of the Croatian culture—in circumstances of establishing national independence—but they also served as celebratory realisations of the centuries-long suppressed Croatian cultural identity. Or, as the example of the premiere of *Osman* indicates, they were used as representative ‘platforms’ for expressing the political, social, and cultural success of the ‘finally’ attained Croatian national project. Once again, these productions and projects representing and recreating specific visions of Croatian culture simultaneously activated various processes of exclusion occurring along the line of ethnic affiliation. A specific “vision of the nation”¹⁰⁵⁵ that was being redefined and reproduced by the political, intellectual, and cultural elites in Croatia during early 1990s excluded all cultural content belonging to a mutual, pan-Yugoslav, or other multinational heritage.

As for the significance of these productions for the wartime actuality, distributing national mythical concepts, such as the importance of national unity, the notion of righteous vengeance, and justified crime, these productions somewhat ideally reflected the argumentative logic of the ruling political discourse when depicting the wartime activities.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” 398.

More precisely, they actually managed to increase the significance of these concepts for the interpretation of the conflict, as they linked them to historical authorities, hence proving once again how establishing historical origins of the nationhood was considered to be of the highest importance in the overall processes of both defining the state of Croatia as well as in justifying the war.

In conclusion, as I have emphasised, in the conditions generated by such a nationalistic project that equalled the nation and culture (and wanting to prove the longevity of both), the notion of a continuous Croatian cultural community was attentively fabricated in the political discourse as well as in the institutional theatres.

Staging Symbols of the Nation

Another theatrical strategy of staging the Croatian nation was detected in those productions that featured personified symbols of Croatianhood, either from recent national history or from a fictitious background. By selecting and staging embodiments and personifications of the dominant national identity, the institutional theatre system of that time once again provided a representative platform that enabled the concretisation and distribution of the nationalist political concepts. Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, while some of these personifications were selected following the similar processes in the political realm, some of them (as in the case of *Andrija Hebrang*) were actually introduced to the public arena by way of theatre. Yet again, these productions presented factual historical trajectories of national figures as metaphors for the communal trajectories of the Croatian nation and were often adjusted and tailored in reference to the dominant political agendas of that time. However, as pointed out by the example of the production of *Domagojada*, some personifications of nationhood were created from scratch to best accommodate the evolving conception of Croatianhood.

These productions propagated the communal identity symbolised by biographies of real or imagined persons and served as a direct comment and an interpretative device of the wartime reality, mostly by activating the myths of martyrdom and victimhood as arguments for morally justified revenge. In other words, these productions also contributed to producing the general 'Us vs. Them' war setting, equally procuring the possibility for direct ideological or ethnic antagonisms.

On another level of symbolic representation by means of theatre, as suggested in my dissertation, women as figures of interpretative systems gained a specific significance in the context of the Croatian institutional theatre system of the early 1990s. Subjected to overt

naturalisation and archaisation of their political and social roles in the setting marked both by the nationalist political agenda as well as wartime, similar processes of deduction concerning women figures were detected in the dominant theatrical sphere as well. Predominately symbolising ‘the motherland’ and its virtues, the theatrical treatment of the selected women figures proved the range of the national theatre’s compliance with the proposed policies of defining the new nationhood. On a similar note, just as women were delegated to particular socio-political positions serving specific ideological or political interests in the socio-political sphere of the early 1990s—as witnesses of male bravery, as producers of new warriors, as nurturers and motivators for soldiers—the same strategies were recognised in the context of theatre, both in the sphere of its creation and its reception. As in the case of other concepts dealing with the theatrical representation of a nation, women figures as symbolic concepts were also overtly nationalised and assigned a specific ethnic affiliation, hence simultaneously administering the definition of all those not belonging to this collective entity. Although the main symbolical significance of these productions was found in specific national myths they tackled, the women figures that populated them as well as the ways they were represented further secured a specific interpretative potential of these narratives.

Staging the Religious Affiliation

As I have outlined, religious narratives presented another feature containing a symbolic potential for national identification in Croatia during the designated period of the early 1990s. In addition to other mentioned examples, theatre productions symbolising Croatianhood by resorting to religious narratives also featured an amalgam of socio-political functions. More precisely, they activated the notion of historical cultural distinctiveness (displaying the longevity of the Croatian Catholic Church by revisiting theatrical heritage such was the liturgical drama), they activated the concept of communal sacrifice (by symbolically relating it to the sacrificial narrative of Jesus and other figures of Catholic origin), and outlined the recurring differential setting (by symbolically connecting the Biblical figures of evil to the factual enemies detected in socio-political realities). Functioning in the context of the soaring ethnoclericalism occurring on all levels of socio-political life in the early 1990s, the institutional theatre, yet again, demonstrated the scope of its interdependence and compliance with the dominant socio-political agendas. However, what these religious narratives of nationhood added to this mixture of interpretations was a moral perspective—by placing these narratives in a religious context, both the dominant political discourse as well as the

institutional theatre system allowed them to be understood as righteous acts of higher moral significance. Another interpretational motif that these kinds of productions and events were seen to activate was generated via their ‘ritual’ characteristics. As I have argued, encouraging the interaction of the audience and reconstructing different communal forms as a Catholic mass, these productions proposed a vision of theatre as a communal practice which could not only represent but also construct a specific, morally superior national community.

Comparison: Analogies

In conclusion, if referring to the main comparative field of my research (this being the theatre production during socialist Yugoslavia), were these theatrical phenomena that refer to the representation of the Croatian nation during the early 1990s in any way similar or did they feature relevant distinctions? To recapitulate, aside from prioritising theatre productions of the early 1990s, the main research questions of this dissertation were expanded by the previous historical period (1945–1991), hence not only outlining the evolution of the most relevant phenomena tackling the theatrical representations of the Croatian nation but also securing constructive comparative outcomes. More accurately, the main historical myths of nationhood that occurred on Croatian institutional stages during the early 1990s has already been detected in the previous decades (mostly in the period of the “Croatian Spring”). In a way, this provides a conclusion that the Croatian nation that was imagined and politically realised in the 1990s was nothing more than a recycled and ‘successfully’ implemented concept that was already formed and even publicly practiced in the previous decades. During socialism, these narratives affirmed the historical, political, cultural, and other distinctiveness of the Croatian nation and were directed against the ruling political regime maintaining a supra-national state entity. However, as of the early 1990s, their ‘critical’ functions were removed, and they were reinstituted as affirmative statements celebrating the newly constituted national state.

Moreover, as I have detected, the iconoclast ‘value’ of these reused national narratives was further ‘capitalised’ during the 1990s—presented as being exposed to harsh and unjust suppression executed by the socialist government, these concepts gained an overtly affirmative importance in forging the modern Croatian nation. More precisely, their national ‘value’ in the 1990s was best proved by their oppressed position during socialism. In addition, many of these plays and narratives had been ‘recycled’ due to their “deep resonance

with a national culture,”¹⁰⁵⁶ hence activating the “audience’s familiarity with the original as a form of expediency, a prior cultural referent that can help to market a new piece or to highlight an interpretive vision.”¹⁰⁵⁷ For instance, while staging a play like *The Death of Stjepan Radić* in the 1971 aimed at revealing the concept of Yugoslav nation as an artificial creation based on unsolved issues of ethnic friction, the staging of the same play in 1992 seemed to function as the confirmation of this very claim, at the same time proving the continuity of national consciousness.

The decision to include the socialist period in my research also enabled me to trace the important characteristics of this nationhood, such as its definition along ethnically exclusive categories. As one can understand, the ethnicity that became one of the most important reference points in both claiming Croatia’s independence as well as carrying out a war in the early 1990s was actually being determined as well as ‘represented’ during the socialist period, functioning as the “ultimate explanatory factor of Yugoslav social reality, the nature of its people as much as the nature of its disintegration.”¹⁰⁵⁸ In other words, the category of ethnic affiliation was not conceived in the 1990s but was already constructed as the major demarcation line of the future “ethnodemocracies”¹⁰⁵⁹ during the socialist period. As the research of the productions presented in the prelude section testifies, the national narratives presented in the Croatian theatre of that time also promoted a concept of an exclusive ethnic identity which, in return, constituted the main motive for their later reintroduction.

In sum, one could conclude that, just as during socialist Yugoslavia, theatrical tendencies of representing the nation in the sphere of the Croatian institutional theatre during the early 1990s also aimed at presenting the distinctiveness of the Croatian national identity. Following this ambition, the presented theatre productions resorted to similar or identical concepts, i.e. displaying the historical and cultural origins of nationhood, proving their continuity as well as defining the Croatian nation as an eternal victim of external political circumstances.

Comparison: Singularities

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the main feature of the early 1990s in Croatia was the overt nationalisation of history, of culture, of religion, and of theatre repertoires as well. When compared to the socialist period in which local theatre production demonstrated a

¹⁰⁵⁶ Holdsworth, *Theatre and National Identity*, 8.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Žarkov, *Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-Up of Yugoslavia*, 6.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Laslo Sekelj, “‘Realno samoupravljanje’, ‘realni nacionalizam’ i dezintegracija Jugoslavije,” *Sociologija* 33, no.4 (1990): 587–599.

diversity in poetics, topics, and aesthetic forms, as of the early 1990s, it seems as if the national theatre repertoires ‘narrowed down’ to representing a content of a rather specific socio-political function. I would argue that the national theatre system returned to its ‘primary’ roles and functions commonly marked by “staging traditional repertoire and plays by national dramatists,” “supporting rather than opposing the ruling ideology (or the ideology of the ruling class),” receiving “substantial financial revenues from public budgets,” as well as residing in “respectable buildings representing the economic and political power of the national bourgeoisie.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Put differently but following the same comparative perspective, the theatre system of that time was unquestionably reduced to its traditional and pre-modern positions, much along the general return to primordial, essentialist, and ethnic definitions of nation and national belonging disseminated by the dominant political discourse.

This ‘resurrected’ function of national theatre was probably best articulated by Dragan Milivojević, the director of the drama department of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, explaining in 1991 how this theatre house “is a national institution, so its duty and obligation, even in normal conditions, is caring for the identity of Croatian culture. So, the most important role of this institution is to be a theatre—and the better it is, the more it will become Croatian and national.”¹⁰⁶¹ Not only was the national theatre institution being reconfirmed in its conventional and monocultural function, but the quality of its program was officially determined by abstract national categories, hence reducing all the possible artistic, social, or political categories of its creation and evaluation to a simple denominator—that of its active dedication to the proposed concept of Croatianhood.

Although predominately repeating the same representational strategies stemming from the socialist era, these narratives displayed in and by the institutional theatre system of the early 1990s still managed to exhibit specific functions relevant to their concrete actuality. For instance, situated in times of seeking political recognition from Europe and other Western countries, many of the here-analysed narratives parallelly argued for ‘Europeanness’ of the Croatian identity they presented. In other words, while delineating historical and cultural distinctiveness, a large number of these productions rather paradoxically strived to determine a European affiliation of the Croatian nation, while simultaneously promoting theatre as a tool for concrete political action.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Milohnić, “Performing Identities: National Theatres and Re-construction of Identities,” 54.

¹⁰⁶¹ Sanja Nikčević, “Rat odjekuje u teatru,” *Večernji list*, September 2, 1991.

Another distinctive phenomenon that stood out throughout this work (and that has been radically omitted from the relevant research to this date) was the significance of Croatian diaspora in the theatrical representation of visions of Croatianhood during the early 1990s. While these émigré communities were already actively ‘safeguarding’ a nationalist concept of Croatian identity during the period of socialist Yugoslavia, as of 1990s, they were promoted to active subjects of its dissemination. More precisely, as I have demonstrated, several of the here-analysed productions served as a ‘bridge’ between the diaspora and the homeland, hence not only expanding the ‘Croatian spiritual space’ by means of cultural production but in a way further validating the institutional theatre’s comprehensive potential in securing a specific political agenda.

However, the most important singularity of these narratives was detected in their direct relation to the wartime setting, as they were being staged and/or interpreted to actively conform to the ruling discourse explaining the conflict. As my research shows, by glorifying and reinstituting a certain vision of ethnically exclusive national identity promoted by the ruling structures, theatre also functioned as a differential tool of denouncing ‘the others’, defining those who did and did not belong to this national body. In other words, besides signalling the historical, cultural, and other distinctiveness of Croatian nation, in the wartime setting, a large majority of the here-presented narratives also provided arguments for the conflict itself. By introducing subjects and structures identified as enemies or threats to Croatian independence, these productions now served as direct interpretations of the warfare reality. If perceiving this capacity in its effective potential of advocating for a war, one could confirm that the Croatian institutional theatre system of the early 1990s was (mis)used as an instrument of warmongering.

Following this insight, one needs to address perhaps the most pertinent following question when discussing theatre (and the more general cultural production) executed in a wartime setting, the question of its concrete socio-political responsibility. More exactly, by providing a content that openly defines the borders of this proscribed national identity, denouncing those not fitting this national body either by their ideological or ethnic features, the institutional theatre system evidently cooperated in producing concrete consequences. Still, as my research detects, it evidently failed to recognise or directly address these rather dangerous strategies, submissively following the ruling political ambitions of solidifying an ethnically exclusive national identity. Although some critical positions dealing with this role of national theatre appeared during the early 1990s, either through media coverage or works of academic

provenance, these were either very sporadic, scarce, or marginalised.¹⁰⁶² More or less reduced to personal interpretations of the role and responsibilities of theatre professionals during the war, no official, systemic, or far-reaching discussion dealing with this topic was conducted or presented to the wider audiences during these early years of the conflict.

Another similar phenomenon that emerged as specific during my research was the nationalisation of theatre criticism. As one could already detect in the prelude chapter of this work, the reviews or interpretations of certain theatre performances were becoming progressively infiltrated by nationalistic vocabulary, and selected productions were often interpreted by their 'national' functions as they moved towards the beginning of the 1990s. Overtly influenced by the political discourse of that time, one could conclude that it was theatre criticism during the early 1990s that, to a certain point, secured this national relevance of different theatre productions, providing interpretations in line with the dominant political agendas of that time, further disseminating them to larger audiences.¹⁰⁶³ This occurrence was very much conditioned by the fact that the media outlets, which featured these positions, were state-owned and were thus conditioned in their 'freedom' of being critical towards the ruling political strategies "promoting national culture and strengthening the national cultural identity."¹⁰⁶⁴ Nevertheless, as no concrete proofs of these and similar conditionings exist (meaning there are no documented traces of censorship or other forms of control executed by the political authorities towards theatre criticism published in state-owned media), the interdependent nature of this correlation is extremely difficult to confirm. However, under the impact of the comprehensive process of national homogenisation as well as utter professional uncertainty, one could presume that these kinds of rather nationalised interpretations of theatre content were provoked by some sort of preventive 'self-censorship'. Although a further concretisation of this phenomenon would be rather complicated to execute, comprehensive research concerning the wartime theatre in Croatia should consider the consequences of this criticism that supported as well as generated the exclusivist nationalistic discourse. While the topics concerning the socio-political responsibility of theatre commentators as well as theatre creators and structures during the wartime in Croatia is

¹⁰⁶² The few of the 'independent' media outlets during the 1990s were the daily *Novi List*, the weekly *Feral Tribune*, or the monthly *Arkzin* and, to some extent, the monthly *Globus*. Still, theatre reviews were seldomly published in these publications (regularly only in *Novi List* and *Globus*).

¹⁰⁶³ Furthermore, similar process of nationalisation occurred in the sphere of theatre historiography as well. For more see Marina Petranović, "Kazališna historiografija i nacionalni identitet," *Fluminensia: časopis za filološka istraživanja* 1 (2014): 149–162.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Nina Ožegović, "(Ne)vjerodostojnost medijske reprezentacije kulture, od političke manipulacije do strategije skandala," *In medias res: časopis filozofije medija* 7, no. 13 (2018): 2101.

omitted from the relevant academic research, in my dissertation, I have presented some initial insights into this question, hopefully delivering an important analytical point of departure for further research.

For that matter, although the here-presented thesis was envisaged to systematically present the stages of current research on the main topic, its specifics were also laid down to tackle some more comprehensive and relatable concerns. While dedicated to past phenomena of a specific nation, the main conclusions of this dissertation are actually set to address the present and the future of both theatre and nationalism studies on a more international level as well. In other words, taking into consideration that exclusivist nationalist tendencies still sporadically occur not only in the political discourse as well as the cultural production in Croatia but internationally as well, the responsibility of academic society in detecting or reminding us of their direct and sometimes extremely harmful effects seems to be of relevant urgency and importance. In this light, my sincere wish for this work is to function as an invitation for future systematic proposals dealing with the theatrical representation of this phenomena as well as an attempt to promote the concrete socio-political responsibility and engagement of our profession.

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