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# To Be Unworthy of National Stage. Women's Disobedience as Performative Practices

On August 5, 2015, two dramatizations were played in the public space of a small Croatian city. The scene for the first of them was the theatre stage in Rijeka, where five women of different nationalities "presented" their private stories. Second, its climax had at the door of the theatre, and members of veteran and war volunteer associations, and supporters of the Armada football club played the main roles. The twentieth anniversary of Operation „Storm” seems to be a meaningful example of the way in which the processes and acts of its commemoration took place in public space: at the theatre and streets of the city. The situation of commemoration launched the processes and practices in which social performance became at the same time a creative act that expressed opposition as well as action supporting normative protocols and structures of power. Social dramatizations in Rijeka, both "in" and "in front of" the theatre, show that theatre is a very important type of public space, which not only exists as a specific place of communication, but it also has a status of conceptual subject with a particular history and separate semantic dimensions. In order to understand the entitled "disobedience", it is necessary to deal with several essential issues, such as: performance of resistance and obedience, categories of "national theatre" and "experts" of everyday life; public space and the right to it; memory and "counter-memory" and relationship between performance and archive.

*Key words:* women, public space, "Second war", national stage, performance, disobedience

## Бити недостојна националне сцене. Женска непослушност као перформативна пракса

Дана 5. августа 2015., у јавном простору једног хрватског града изведене су две драматизације. Сцена за прву драматизацију била је позоришна сцена у Ријеци, где је пет жена различитих националности „представило” своје личне приче. Друга драматизација је свој климакс имала на вратима истог позоришта, а главне су улоге имали чланови бранитељских и драговољачких удруга и фудбалски навијачи Армаде. Двадесета годишњица операције „Олуја“ чини се као значајан пример начина на који се процеси и чинови комеморације одигравају у јавном простору: у позоришту и на градским улицама. Комеморативна ситуација изнедрила је процесе и праксе у којима је друштвени перформанс постао истовремено и креативни чин који изражава противљење, и акција која подржава нормативне протоколе и структуре моћи. Друштвене драматизације у Ријеци, и она „у“, и она „испред“ театра, показују да је позориште врло битна врста јавног простора, који не постоји само као специфични простор комуникације, већ има и статус концептуалног субјекта са посебном

историјом и посебним семантичким димензијама. Како би се разумела „непослушност“ из наслова, неопходно је позабавити се неколиким суштинским питањима, као што су: перформанс отпора и послушности; категорије „национални театар“ и „стручњаци“ свакодневног живота; јавни простор и право на њега; сећање и „противсећање“, и однос између перформанса и архива.

*Кључне речи:* жене, јавни простор, „Други рат“, национална сцена, перформанс, непослушност

## Two stages – two performances – one city

There are at least two stories about each war. The first one concerns the macro-narratives and usually belongs to the nations participating in the war. The second one is micro-narratives – personal and subjective stories of people who lived in war-torn areas and times. Each of the stories, emphasizes Barbara Szacka "is built around other topics and uses a different language" (2012, 54). In the first of them the expected and picked up selectively elements of public communication are prevailed (Szacka 2012). They usually remain in line with the dominant national policy. The second stories – that are stories of ordinary people, which consist of memories of fear and pain, but also close friends and relationships on both sides of the conflict. It is assumed that in most cases, these two categories of narratives not only do not complement each other, but also constitute completely separate stories, sometimes even coming into conflict with each other for being admitted to public discourse. Since each story has at least two sides, it becomes necessary to reflect the situations in which they are confronted.

The peculiar confrontation of the aforementioned narrative categories – micro and macro took place - as it may seem - on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, on the twentieth anniversary of the military operation "Storm" (*Oluja*)<sup>1</sup>. That day two performances simultaneously were held in the public space of the Croatian city. The stage for the first of them, was the scene of the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, where five women of different nationalities "presented" their personal stories and memories not only from the period of the last war, but also about the everyday life that they have lived last 20 years. The 20th anniversary of the operation "Storm" became a pretext for Oliver Frljić, the director of the mentioned theatre of that time, to present in the public space the monologue-based production entitled "Second war" (*Drugi rat*) based on testimonies and experiences of women who survived the war. One can assume that the evening meeting with women from Osijek, Knin, Vukovar, Slatina and Mostar, combined with listening to their stories and memories, in the first impulse was thoughtful as an attempt to draw attention to the fact that "war is a much more complex phenomenon than is attempted to be presented in official statements of politicians" ("Drugi rat" 2015). It was not, as it seems, the only goal. That, as it seems, was not the only goal. Performance "Second war"

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<sup>1</sup> Considered as the last major battle of the Croatian War of Independence in 1995.

demonstrated the urge not only to 'save up' but also to 'bring back' and 'make audible' emotions and stories from the position of personal experiences of women, hitherto silenced and suppressed by the dominant male narratives of war. Oliver Frlić noticed in this event much greater social and cultural benefits: through "opening public debate on the situation of women in wartime" he wanted to "create space for women's memories" ("Drugi rat" 2015). The organizers<sup>2</sup> of the "Second War" marginalization of women's history saw in subsequent treatments of their objectification, which first had the dimension of war violence, and then in time of peace, took the form of taking away their right to own narration in public space. Equally important was also to try to renegotiate the existing model of collective memory and indicate its discursive nature. The director and as one might guess, also women taking part in the event, wished to capture memories and experiences as a peculiar reservoir which would complement the dominant collective memory. Creating a space of "shared narrative" (Bošković, Perica and Gavrilović 2011)<sup>3</sup> could be a step towards trying to renegotiate an existing archive and methods of its production.

However, testimonies of forced displacements and fragmentary, undefined identities without a clear division into victims and aggressors, proved to be uncomfortable and inconvenient for some residents of the city and the surrounding area who went together to the street. Fear of a the lack of expected clarity and coherence in collective memory, so important for national identity and macronarchism sustaining the community of the group, had to create a conflict.

Late in the afternoon, on August 5<sup>th</sup>, the second performance took place in Rijeka. The main roles were played by adherents of veterans and war volunteer associations, proponents of the Autochthonous Croatian Party of Right (Autohtona - Hrvatska stranka prava), as well as members of football ultras group "Armada". About three hundred, mostly male demonstrators, equipped with Croatian flags gathered on the bridge, and then manifestly marched through the city centre. The march was accompanied by patriotic songs, nationalist slogans, Ustaša symbols and greetings, chants and shouted offensive slogans addressed to the Serbs, director of

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<sup>2</sup> The organizers of the performance entitled "Second war", directed by Oliver Frlić, were: National Theater in Rijeka, National Serbian Council and *Documenta* (Center for dealing with the past) - a non-governmental organization operating in Croatia, See: <https://www.documenta.hr>

<sup>3</sup> The idea of "shared narrative" was used by the editors of the book *Political Myths in the Former Yugoslavia and Successors States. A Shared Narrative*. They not only use the term, but also design individual parts of the book in this way. Each chapter is the result of the joint work of scientists representing individual countries of the former Yugoslavia; the editors of the volume are Serb and Croat respectively. The use of the "shared narrative" method in this case, means a joint study of historical facts that simultaneously bring closer the perspectives of two or more national histories. Joint research and polyphonic analyzes not only shed light on the ephemeral nature of the newly built collective identities in the Balkans, but also allow to focus attention on the structure, content and roles of individual national myths and their interactions with "opposing myths" of neighboring nations. The authors consider these myths as a form of ideology, which in the most general sense they perceive as a system of ideas, "that are not necessarily good or bad on their own but that primarily depend on how they are used and in which context." (Bošković, Perica and Gavrilović 2011,16)

the theatre in Rijeka and the mayor of the city. The culmination scene took place at the entrance of the theatre at the moment when Marija, who came from Osijek, began her story on the stage. Eventually, a large part of dissatisfied patriots and defenders of the homeland reached the theatre door – first trying to break in and then – blocking its exits and entrances. The violent nature and the course of the demonstration in front of the theatre (or rather its occupation) made the hearing of women's stories, who after twenty years received the right to public expression, a synonym of courage. The situation in front of the theatre resembled a state of siege, and the audience of the performance "Second War" was literally imprisoned by participants of demonstration whose voices were filled with hate speech. Those who managed to leave theatre safely, were verbally attacked by smaller groups of nationalist and right-wing activists. In some cases verbal violence turned into a physical one.

One could speculate whether the media were responsible for the scenario of patriotic dramatization in front of the theatre. Namely, the Split daily newspaper "Slobodna Dalmacija" announced the event in the theatre under a rather characteristic title: "The counter Storm is prepared in Rijeka". The provocative title has launched a media lynch which resulted in spontaneous open-air demonstration or rather counter-performance directed against the event "Second war".

At first glance, it may seem that the twentieth anniversary of operation "Storm" is an obvious example of the way in which the processes and acts of commemoration took place in a public space: at the theatre and in the streets of the city. Its context launched the processes and practices in which dialectical relationship between theatre and political demonstration eventually became a meeting of two social performances. I use the concept of "performance" to describe both events in Rijeka. However, I realize that "performance" belongs to the category that is described as "essentially contested concepts" (Strine, Long and Hopkins 1990) and has multiple implications and meanings. I also agree with the opinion of Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera that today performance has evolved „into ways of comprehending how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world" (Madison, Hamera 2006, xii). Understanding performance in this broader and more complex way has opened up endless questions, some of which both interrogate and enrich our basic understanding of memory, identity, community, nation and politics. That is why, looking at these two simultaneous dramatic events, one should pay attention to the multidimensional character of each of them. Therefore, both performances represent a reaction to the important social and political issues. Both of them seem to be politically and socially engaged. Through those two simultaneously events in Rijeka I want to examine the potential of the performance itself, its capabilities, and its dual character. The performance is often used as analytical lens for extending parameters, suitable for measuring the role and impact of symbolic behaviour in relation to social change. The inclusion of the events from Rijeka in the framework of the performance may allow an attempt to discover contemporary political subjects and ways of redefining the relationship between human action and politics in different contexts and overlapping systems in which we deal with records of oppression and resistance. Diana Taylor, focusing on the issue of resistance and oppression, points out that perfor-

mance can be equally a creative act of expressing discontent, a tool for understanding one's strength and a peculiar response as a 'counter-action' supporting normative protocols and structures of power (Taylor 2002). To put it even more precisely: performance can at the same time disrupts the power structure and supports its activities. However, one can agree that in both cases it creates the identity of the spectators and participants and expose the corporeity of characters and their historicity (strong cultural background) as well as convey identity and memory.

What also seems important, is the usage of space of national theatre and its symbolic capital as instruments for deconstructing the existing politics of memory by introducing counter-memory (Foucault 1977) and revising the right to narratives in public space. By inviting women on the stage – in this peculiar and ultimately simple way, Oliver Frljić wanted to deconstruct and revise the concept and mission of the national theatre itself, which sometimes could be recognise as a very questionable place for civil disobedience.

By examining these circumstances closely, it may be possible to shed a light on the eponymous women's disobedient. Several issues seem to be important in the case of recognizing the "Second War" performance as an act of disobedience. According to Nesreen Hussein, "walking to the more reflective space of the theatre, in that alternative cultural quarter of the city, triggers a question about the relationship between the theatre and the street" (2015, 360). Usually, the street becomes a scene for most social drama, where women carry banners, march and protest as part of a civil act of disobedience. It turned out, however, that the theatrical event is not too limited to have a wide social influence. Presenting their *herstories* about war at the stage of national theatre, showing its diversified image, women not only proved to be efficient and disobedient, but they were also assigned and recognized by others as militant and disobedient. Their presence in such form, and the power of their storytelling challenges the very structures of power by refusing to play according to the imposed roles of gender and national matter (Mayer 1999). Women's insubordination makes their political presence felt.

For those reasons it seemed to me more important to understand what we might call women resistance as a form of everyday disobedience – the prosaic but constant struggle between women and those who marginalize them. Moreover, to understand such forms of disobedience is to understand much of what women have done to defend their interests against conservative orders. The particular "struggle" between two performances in the space of Croatian city was not merely a struggle for being visible and the right to the public space. It was also a struggle over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labelled; a contentious effort to give other, marginalized stories meaning to local history. What is remarkable about this aspect of "conflict" is the extent to which it requires a shared memory and narrative.

By giving voice to those who often are muted and voiceless, Frljić wanted to address issues of a significant social impact. He wanted to make *herstories* of "experts" who, like men, survived the war, an extremely important element in the

discussion on collective memory, ways of creating archives and the right to be present in public space.

### ***It's my fault that I've married a Serb... vs. "Frlijić! You Serbian pig!"***

There was darkness on the stage of the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka. One by one, five women with microphones in their hands took up their seats. The testimony of Marija, Iva, Marija, Jelena and a young woman from Bosnia who wanted to remain anonymous were not registered on their request. Assuming that the experiences of war are personal testimonies of one's memories, Oliver Frlijić did not use any dramaturgical strategy to justify the presence of women on the scene, no stage measures; all scenes were female subjects. He did not place them in any kind of dramatic fiction or situation, did not suggest any unequivocal interpretation. Leaving only chairs in the dark, the director did not allow the staging to dominate the story. The tone and sound of women's voices, the shadows of their bodies, slight movements and tears gave their narratives sense of meaning. This kind of performance assumes the usage of the performance and its space (or broadly understood art, Hussein 2015) as a tool of resistance. Staging was minimal, directed towards the audience with a minimal dramatic action. All elements gave the impression of a general unfinished quality of performances, which were negotiated as a continuous work in progress: an open "action" that emphasizes the specific violence of dominating regimes of power over the presence, memory and the right to narration. As a performative gesture, the value of "Second War" does not necessarily lie in its status as a final artistic product, but it is shaped in a way that ensures the prolongation of the on-going resistance, presented as part of an action that is ambiguous, fluid and changeable.

The first woman, who spoke was Marija from Osijek. Until now, she has followed her friends' advice and kept silence for many years. For the repeated accusations that as a Croat married Serb, she consistently responds: "You are wrong. I married a man!" With a soft voice with the Slavonian accent, she told a story about her experiences from the early 1990s until today. Then other women told their stories. Each of them strongly emphasized the absurdity, incomprehensible to many people right after the outbreak of war, the division into "us" and "them" according to ethnic and national key. All the stories have raised the obvious, but not so far outlined issues: what to do when one does not belong to any of these "groups" or even if you are "us", yet not quite the right way ... Each of five women asked themselves the same question: who would they be if the war did not happen?

Trying to tell stories of absence, the performance "Second War" problematizes conventional ways of representation as potentially undermining - already undermined - voices. In a reflexive gesture, the title, the speeches of the heroines and the special manner of theatricality developed by this performance, betray suspicions about the modes of representation. Let us try for a moment to look at the title of the performance, which can have at least two dimensions. Firstly, an intentional and thoughtful procedure to give a performance the title "Second War" is a reference to the book by Simone de Beauvoir. Director's intentions can be explained as an at-

tempt to take similar, as the author of the *Second Sex* (2009), reflection and analysis of women's issues in the broad context of various cultural, historical or social discourses. Fundamental questions raised by Simone de Beauvoir, in the intention of the organizers of the "Second War" in the Balkan context could be: What does it mean to be a woman in a state of emergency? To what extent does the situation of women depend on them alone? Can women be politically and socially aware entities or passive objects, realizing only the images and constructions to which they adapt? Secondly, the word „second” in the title may mean that we are dealing with an idea of showing not only the other mode of representation war but also the different narration and the memory of it.

Recalling Peter Weiss's (1971) argument about the capability of documentary theatre, which recognizes the forces of individual stories, is to be a challenge for the dominant discourses of history; thus, it is worth paying attention to the performative response to them. Message communicated by the demonstrators gathered in front of the theatre in Rijeka seemed to be in the line with dominant representation and even stand on its guard. In this case, the symbols and legible props use, such as: Croatian flags, patriotic songs and nationalistic slogans informed about national and ethnic affiliation. It was also confirmed by offensive cries directed to organizers of the "Second War" performance, clearly defining who they are "us" and who they are "them": "Frljić! You Serbian pig!"; "We, the Croats do not drink wine, we drink blood of Chetniks from Knin" (I allow myself to recall the "mildest" of them). Slightly simplifying, one could say that in this way they expressed their dissatisfaction with the performance "Second War", proving that its organization on the twentieth anniversary of operation "Storm" was intentional and provocative. The efficiency and aims of the organizers of demonstration on the Rijeka's street also seem to diminish Dubravka Ugrešić. She defines the mentioned "defenders" of the fatherland as a "new species of men" who, from the previously unnoticed, became well visible in Croatian society. In the 1990s, most of them as young men voluntarily grabbed arms and went to war to defend their homeland. Today, twenty years older, they founded numerous organizations, and expect gratitude for their voluntary activities. Since then, emphasizes the Croatian writer, "the state constantly shows them their respect: financial and moral. And for most defenders [...] the four-year war is their identity, biography, career or even the reason for existence" (Ugrešić 2013).

However, the reaction to the "Counter-Storm" seems to fit perfectly into Jean Duvignaud's thesis that societies dramatize certain roles to create or construct a cohesive, more intense society (1976). Performance on the street of the city, in a sense planned - on the occasion of the decisive victory of the Croatian army, on the other hand as a spontaneous demonstration, also caused by the media, became an example of a staging that combines specific social goals. The unanimously shared and understood meaning of the event established, in some way, the identity of the group of "defenders" of the homeland and served as a source of self-identification. The "Second War", involving female witnesses medially condemned "Frljić's counter-storm", was accused of destabilizing the collective identity worked out by the last 20 years. Women's testimonies, despite being considered subjective and insig-

nificant narratives, and thus immaterial, were ultimately taken as an attempt to challenge the stability of the community. The tension between biographical, individual experience and collective imagery about the past has been translated into attributing the meaning to specific narratives and their appreciation. The alleged purpose of these competitive performances can rely on, political and social character revealed in women's tales that did not match the official national versions. In this sense, the stories of women who are the embodiment of a socially important dispute are probably understood as propaganda. And if their presence on the stage of the national theatre forced a group of people to go out to the streets, it can be admitted that it was an effective propaganda, although not thoughtfully as it. And if their presence on the stage forced a group of people to go out to the streets - it can be admitted that it was effective, although not thoughtfully as such – propaganda. *Herstories* personify the critique of national ideology, and thus the vision of a normal, preferred state of affairs. As such, they require intervention in order to maintain a symbolic order.

Nationalism can be an exercise in internal hegemony as Tamar Mayer pointed out. Its goal is to resolve ethnic, religious and sexual differences through “the empowerment of one gender or one nation or one sexuality which virtually always comes at the expense and disempowerment another” (1999, 1). Women as well as other minorities (ethnic, religious or sexual) are often marginalized in the public space. Ironically speaking they are a “silent majority” because in the last resort, they are outnumbered group of citizens of the nation and society, and should be consider as a political power. Male representatives of nationalist policies, not only in the Balkans, self-appointed as guardians of any nation and interpreting communities in mythical categories, most often bring women's roles to a few fundamental issues: being biological breeders of the nation, transmitters of ideas important to a given community, and finally carriers of symbolic differences between different ethnic and national groups. Vesna Kesić emphasizes that in the state of emergency in which the community is found, gender becomes subordinated to ethnicity, even before it appears as an "autonomous" discourse (2002). Sabrina Ramet additionally supplements this argument, pointing out that the roots of military violence in the 1990s in the Balkans lie in the militarized patriarchy and nationalism (1999). The strength of both was to bring down women's voices and at the same time erase them and their activities from the collective memory. Each of the mentioned rules of forgetting and silencing does not apply only to the duration of the war, but it is also manifested in post-war rhetoric (Mostov 2000). The performance “Second war” and its “counter-performance” seem to confirm once again that women sometimes are fighting not only against the attempts to limit their agency, but also against the nationalist excesses, which seem to closely connect with each other.

Oliver Frljić's act, however, can be defined not so much as a deliberate attempt to provoke the national majority, and more so, to deliberately confront those two stories or two sides of one story. Concerned residents of Rijeka gathered in front of the theatre played a performance that mechanisms “are not the raw exercise of physical power, but the more subtle control of psychic desire, the rational transformation of individual desire into the socially defined desire to fit in, to get along, to conform to the pattern of the apparatus” (McKenzie 2001,160). I invoke John



McKenzie to draw attention to the normative dimension of the performance, the action of which can be understood through a specific formation of power that tries to dominate certain aspects of social and individual life. Belonging to a particular nation constitutes the subjectivity of the performance participants, its repetitive and schematic character as well as recognizable props could be a tool for embedding certain social norms. In this dimension, the performance becomes the expression of the dominant form of power. The validation of social activities requires a repetitive performance, in which the repetition is both a re-playing and re-experiencing of a set of fixed meanings (Turner 1982).

It is worth recalling here the mentioned potential of the performance itself, its capabilities, and its dual character. Judith Butler slightly extends the theory of social drama, emphasizing the dual nature of performance and its character - transgressive, marginal and normative. On the one hand, performance can be a force of resistance; on the other hand, it can maintain the power and limit social actors. For both scenes and events in Rijeka, the difference between theatre as an act of resistance and the protest on the street, loses its importance and seems to be blurred. The presence of women's witnesses on the stage of the national theatre in Rijeka was not treated as a theatrical act or artistic expression but rather as a breakdown of social taboos and the form of intervention in collective memory, narratives and common sense. By revealing the hidden, the performance prepared by Frljić, provoked the second action of social resistance and in some way has become an intervention in a collective life.

Women's testimonies are not overcrowded with the nationalist rhetoric maintained since the 1990s of the last century. And it's not just about the differences in the details of events, but also about something more "irritating": about disturbing the one-dimensional model of social memory and breaking the imposed rules of silence. Stories of women can be understood as stories told by the enemies of the motherland. In addition, producing enemies is the most effective way to build national consolidation and homogenization, which in turn serves to mitigate and conceal social differences and tensions. Frljić, inviting feminine witnesses to the stage of the national theatre, gave their narratives similar status and significance as the stories of the "warriors". At the same time, by the gesture of questioning the roles of the winners and the defeated, he also breaks the social agreement on the rightness of struggle for the homeland and the affirmative attitude to a clearly defined national identity, which participants in the counter-performance in the urban space seem to recognize perfectly.

In the case of the anniversary events in Rijeka, it is worth asking questions about why public space has become disputable, and even "difficult" for some citizens? How have certain social groups started to determine who in practice has the right to public spaces? There are more questions, but the most important of them would be: are women's stories unworthy of the national stage?

## Performance space as a public space: who deserves the national stage?

Public space becomes controversial especially in commemoration situations, and as such, it occupies an ideological position in democratic societies (Hartley 1992). Events in Rijeka, both "in" and "in front of" theatre, prove that theatre is a very important type of public space, and that it can be a disputed place. Inviting five women of different nationalities to the theatre on the anniversary of the operation "Storm", brings the assumption that in the theatre in a democratic and pluralistic society, one could also talk about matters that are not necessarily pleasant for this society. In this peculiar and ultimately simple way, by expanding the field of performing practices, Oliver Frlić also wanted to deconstruct and revise the concept and mission of the Croatian national theatre and its memory policy.

This revision is first of all a departure from the understanding of the "national theatre" as a museum of remembrance for a certain imagined national past, in aid of presentation of social reality in which theatre "works". Today, the theatre, which has two adjectives in its name: "Croatian" and "national", as Frlić recognizes, is often identified with space and institution, which should preserve and cultivate the so-called „national culture”. In such circumstances theatre exists as a symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) and its operation is based on false idealization of the past and the dangerous mythologization of theatre, which makes it impossible to diagnose our history and questioning its construction” (“Droga do wolności jest konflikt” 2013) Thus, not only the average spectator, but also contemporary politicians proclaiming populist slogans about art and culture, may erroneously conclude that the national theatre should be a place - both programmatically and artistically – of the domination of the national majority over minorities and marginalized groups. The performance prepared by Frlić showed that the national theatre, as an institution, should become a space for the emancipation of minorities. And within its space one should rather talk about the differences that official narratives try to conceal or downplay, than maintain the existing social order and reconstruct national values<sup>4</sup>. The struggle over the right to the national theater revealed an important issue related to the attempt to exclude a certain group of citizens from public space. The National Theater was deprived, as it seems, of the status of what Habermas named public sphere, in which private people exchanged and discussed their political ideas and “come together as a public” (Habermas 1991, 27). Instead, protesters in front of the theatre attempted to make it a place reserved mainly for those who stick to the hegemonic vision of social order, carefully selected citizens and a homogeneous discourse of memory subject to social control (Capulong 2016). On August 5, neither the theater nor the main streets of Rijeka were granted the

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<sup>4</sup> Similar remarks and comments can also be heard in the theatre researchers' community, questioned by the editors of the socio-cultural monthly "Krakow" about the criteria to be met by the theatre, which in the official name has the adjective "national". Their answers suggest that if "national theatre is to have a more real meaning than to play a glorious past, then revisionist theatre has the greatest reason to exist." So polemical theatre, discussing and revising national mythologies [...].” (“Jakie kryteria powinien spełniać teatr narodowy” 2014).

status of what Don Mitchell characterized as a "normative" ideal for public space (1995), in which one can meet people and ideas that are polemical and dialogical. The rhetoric of integration and dialogue has been replaced by the rhetoric of exclusion, strength and national community.

It turned out that the space of the theater, transformed by the act of storytelling, gained new meanings for the participants of both performances: "as [possible] intervention, taking a position, trying to influence someone" (Lehmann 2009, 134-135). Rather, it cannot be doubted that the participants of the performance in front of theater were aware of the public nature of the event in which experts from everyday life exhibited their experience, knowledge and thinking (Lehmann 2009). Important in this case was also the fact that these stories still took up live and current topics, thus polemically with the official "images of the remembrance stored" (Assmann 2008, 16-18). "In contemporary societies, as Pia Wiegink pointed out, the clear-cut separation of the public sphere and the state does not exist" (2011, 2). Because the performance of women took place in a space that matters, and was a form of committed citizenship, theatre's space has become a place of confrontation instead of a consensus. It also confirms Nancy Fraser's (1992) argument about the recognition of the existence of multiple publics and rejects the idea of the public as a monolithic, homogenous entity. Moving away from the idea of a single, unified and simplified socially homogenous public sphere can refer to her concept of the public sphere, which is based on the idea of society as the locus of policy contestation; the space in which the "plurality of competing societies" meet and fight with each other (Fraser 1992). Thus, the analysis of both performances in Rijeka shows that the public space should be seen just as Chantal Mouffe sees it (2007) – as a battlefield for rival senders and receivers, where it fights among themselves rather than space for rational discussion and where one action arises in response to the actions of another social group and public.

The fact that the event took place in the national theatre meant that it not only gained additional social visibility, but also communicated certain meanings. The meanings that, if they do not convince viewers with their authenticity, will at least provoke public discussion, and certainly will make the audience participating in meetings with female witnesses feel discomfort. The ability of the performance to establish a special relationship with the audience and provoke it to be engaged is triggered by presenting the story of "real life". In this sense, one can argue, referring to Hussein, that "Second War" as a form of "documentary theater" is "performative for the public sphere" (Hussein 2015, 369) because it attempts to "build" a certain community together with the audience. This embodied relationship with performance's actors and the audience allows for shared experiences, a sense of closeness or solidarity, and perhaps even compassion. It also assumes that the audience will deal with the matters presented in some way and will provoke a special kind of reflexivity among them. According to Bryan Keith Alexander (2005), this kind of reflexivity may be close to what Victor Turner defines as "performative reflexivity", that is "the condition in which the socio-cultural group, or its most perceptive members, acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses,

social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public 'selves'" (Turner 1986, 2). Oliver Frlijić was aware that the viewers - also as citizens of a specific state - become hostages of a certain vision of the past or ideology that excludes others. Barbara Myerhoff (1992) stresses the potential of performance to generate reflection upon and resistance to the status quo. From her observations of elderly Jews who met at a senior centre in Venice, Myerhoff wrote about the human need to be seen and the ways in which culture and society offers and withholds that visibility. Presence on the stage of the national theatre, gave the women the visibility of which society had deprived them. Through performance and participating in it, which "is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life", as Turner emphasises, people are able to critically evaluate the „way in which society handles history" (1988, 22). Testimonies of five women of different nationalities, not only revealed symbolic violence sanctioning the only acceptable form of talking about the last war in public space, numerous simplifications and lie about it, but also complemented the one-sided dominant narrative and verified the positions of "victims" and "guilty".

The intentions of the organizers of the "Second War" to make visible unprivileged members of society, in this case women, and to create a public space of shared narrative is close to Benjamin Wihstutz's concept of theatre perception as a kind of "laboratory space" (Wihstutz 2015). Thus, the intention could be, as one might assume, to create in the theatre a space in which non-privileged people representing social and cultural "otherness" are allowed or invited to a stage to which they are not entitled in everyday social life (Wihstutz 2015). Benjamin Wihstutz suggests that perhaps this "the time-space established during the performance is one that provides the possibility of suspending certain daily rules, and consequently gives insight into the dimensions of the collective experience transformed by both spectators and performers" (2015, 185). The direct action of Oliver Frlijić related to the public space of the theatre can also be seen as a form of occupying the establishment of space, defined by Judith Butler (Butler, Athanasiou 2013) as a "threshold zone" crossing the boundaries between public and private. This is important, especially since in this case access to public space for one of the peculiar group is suppressed and limited. The presence of "ordinary women" on the stage of the theatre aroused the hope of creating what Nancy Fraser called "subaltern counter-publics" (1992), that is discursive arenas that exist in opposition to the official public sphere. These arenas are the basis of a "disobedient" policy that opposes the exclusion of national politics and promotes the ideal of equal civil participation.

## **Experts and Witnesses. Inconvenient theatre**

At least two strategies can be mentioned, while exploring Oliver Frlijić attempts to create a space in form of "subaltern counter-public" in the theatre in Rijeka. First of all, he tries to find cracks in the post-Slavic collective memory in the form of difficult, silent episodes, which none of the countries of the former Yugoslosphere want to remember and speak about, generally accepting the position of a privileged victims. Setting in such a position has its further consequences, such as,

whose voices / narratives about the past be heard? It also introduces subdivisions into privileged and omitted / silenced ones. Secondly, the director quite often uses a living witnesses and their "I-witnesses" in his projects. Reality becomes noticeable thanks to their presence, which simultaneously takes on the rank of something much more important than just expressing public outrage.

Working with "real people" - older ladies, unemployed air traffic controllers, lawyers or truck's drivers - is a recognizable sign of the Rimini Protokoll theatre that has existed since 2000. Performers who use their own tales, knowledge and experience to make up the performances, are called "experts" by Rimini Protokoll's directors<sup>5</sup>. Dominic Boyer (2008) slightly widens this definition and defines the "experts" of those social actors who have developed specific skills, semiotic-epistemological competence in a specific sphere of practical activity. Although such a significant openness of the definition may weaken its analytical benefits, it should be agreed with Boyer that the relevant research in this case are the tensions between the empirical-performative and socio-institutional dimensions of being an expert. In social discourse, the expert voice of women and their memories are downplayed as unvaluable; the defender of the homeland representing the power structures also does not respect them. Female narratives, their experiences and knowledge are considered to be not very important biographies, private stories, ultimately irrelevant to society and its institutions. However, it can be different in the empirical and performative dimension, in the public space, which the theatre is. As in the case of Rimini Protokoll's strategies, Frljić allowed to speak those who never tell about themselves; thus, he has introduced "small stories, not a big system" (Malzacher 2012, 29). Consequently, a "little spectacular" knowledge becomes an extremely important element to start a discussion in a much broader perspective that concerns social memory, the rights to narration and being present in public space, and finally, about perceiving war from various perspectives, especially those "uncomfortable". The five women on the stage in Rijeka, as the experts showed the others the meaning of their own social situation and position "by exposing their bodies and allowing their voices to be heard" (Roselt 2012: 42). Thus, the tactics of putting real people on the stage, who do not play, only present their stories can bring several benefits. On the one hand, Soyini Madison sees in such actions the ability to suspend, for a moment, the logic of representation: "performance becomes a vehicle in which we travel to the worlds of Subjects and enter domains of intersubjectivity, that problematize how we categorize who is 'us' and who is 'them', and how we see ourselves with 'other' and different eyes" (Madison 1998, 282). On the other hand, women's oral history can make visible those who, for various reasons, are not only politically but also physically marginalized. It can also deepen the reflexivity or even transform the participants of the performative meeting. Rather, it is about considering the theatre as a space of social responsibility, within which at least for a moment, both in the micro-community of viewers and actors, the logic of the national repre-

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<sup>5</sup> This concept is also well known to anthropologists. However, in modern anthropology, the term "expert" is applied primarily to groups of "intellectuals", and more specifically to specialists with specific knowledge, who act as members of professional networks in their respective organizational and institutional contexts (Holmes, Marcus 2005).

sentation is suspended. And to put it even more precisely, make both narratives and listeners and viewers make the same conscious political subjects.

## **Performing memory as challenging archival practise**

Cultural memory politics and practices associated with it may prove to be a convenient tool used to create divisions between groups, to exclude certain groups from the public space, or else – to put them in places where they lose the power of being visible and perceptible.

Reflections on memory politics and research on collective memory offer important insights. They also confirm the intuitions not only of Kristen Hastrup (1996) but also of Jan Assmann that memory works re-constructively. It also means that, “collective memory operates simultaneously in two directions: backward and forward. It not only reconstruct the past but it also organizes the experience of the present and the future” (Assmann 2011, 27-28). Thus, imaginations about the past are shaped by the present, but they are also oriented towards the future and serve the social needs. Possible mechanisms and practices related to memory meant that in Rijeka, different actors and their narratives met during the one evening. Although their stories and experiences ultimately concerned the same events from the past – both, the protesters on the street and the women who told their stories are those who directly experienced the events of the last war. But what is important is the fact that they seemed to have a different imaginations and expectations about the present and future.

Another issue seems to be significant here – how the events that passed twenty years ago should be remembered as the facts and dates or much more as a moral discourse? (Burszta 2014). The focus put on the latter would emphasize not so much the ethical dimension of memory itself, but allowed to point out the fundamental issues and differences in thinking about memory in the biographical and social dimension. Lack of consent to listen to *herstories* makes the memory “oriented on fixed points in the past, [...] which can not store the past as such, transforms it into symbolic figures worth remembering” (Burszta 2014: 18). The main role of this kind of memory, as Jan Assmann points out, is the transmission and realization of significant meanings (Assmann 2011). For the actors of dramatization in front of the theater, the operation “Storm” had the character of the eventful events from the past, about which memory should be sustained by rituals commemorating the victory. Unanimously shared and understood sense of the event established the identity of a group of defenders of the homeland and served as a source of self-definition. The tension between biographical, individual experience and collective ideas about the past translated into the attribution of meanings to specific narratives and their valuation. Both performances in Rijeka proofed that memory becomes important as a way of life; it helps to maintain identity and gives a sense of constancy in space and time. On the other hand, it is a social and cultural construction. In certain moments and situations, people negotiate what should be commemorated or forgotten. What is important is the fact that forgetting, excluding or ignoring is tantamount to denying meaning and visibility.

The attempt to create a kind of "laboratory space" on the stage of the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka, one can reduce to introducing into public space the "counter-memory". It was strongly emphasized in the statement of the organizers of performance "Second war", who saw in this kind of "counter-memory" contrasted with the official discourse glorifying the war, a kind of second perspective, which could give "the opportunity to tell and hear stories that always remain somewhere off the beaten track, and will not be recorded in official history" ("Drugi rat" 2015). According to Michel Foucault, counter-memory is the memory that is disadvantaged and excluded. The decision to exclude this specific memory and narrative from the public discourse, Foucault defines as a political act, which essence is to deprive the history and memory of their polysemy (1977). The role of counter-memory can also be understood as a way to supplement the existing and dominant official versions of the past or to create a shared memory and narrative. One can refer here to the term „re-remembering” used by Barbara Myerhoff (1982). This would be a special kind of recollection that can be understood as a re-inclusion of various members of society in history, memory or other archival records.

Finally, it is worth noting one more possibility of reflection on performance „Second war”; that is, the relationship between performance and archive. The editors of the extremely interesting volume *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*, extend the concept of archive and explore the boundaries between performance and the archive. One can think of archives not only in their traditional meaning as state-based storage locations and their material contents, but also as particular combinations of tangible and intangible remains, conventions, practices, beliefs, and genealogies of knowledge, which are historically embedded and politically positioned. Those „new ways of understanding archives, history, and memory emerge and address theories of enactment and intervention, while concepts of performance constantly proliferate and enable a critical focus on archival residue” (Borggreen, Gade 2013, 9-10).

The act of admitting on the national stage to those who never talk about themselves allows us to address issues that are important to the concept of archives. Personal histories of multiple and mixed cultural belonging, and experiences of living in war time can led us to understand the body as a kind of living archive. The women’s bodies as an archive are the material location where memory actively lives, where it is played and re-played – synchronically and diachronically – within and across individual lives and larger social fields. The performance „Second war” and its counter-performance, show that such "little spectacular" knowledge, which is transmitted in the form of personal memories and recollections, can powerfully „questioning the official one”, disturb the symbolic order, and actively participate in processes of meaning production. It means that performances may dramatize and revitalize remains, and critically re-perform archives and repertoires.

The whole mosaic of war *herstories*, paradoxically, gave a broader outline of the background of what happened in many places in the 1990s. To put it even more precisely, the director of the "Second War" assumed that those stories could become an alternative history that would democratize not only the memory itself,

but also those who talk about the past, and ultimately could lead to a dialogue between models of the interpretation of war and past events.

### **"Death to Oliver Frljić": dangerous consequences the performative action**

One can assume that in the post-Yugoslavian theatre, Oliver Frljić is the one who demonstrates how uncomfortable the theatre can be, both for the viewers, the actors, but also for the social actors accustomed to the social and cultural context in which they live. Events in Rijeka, both "in" and "outside" the theatre, prove that its space is a very important type of public space that "not only exists as a peculiar place of communication, but it is also a conceptual subject with a specific history and separate semantic dimensions" (Balme 2015, 105). By inviting Mariya from Knin, Jelena from Slatini, Iva from Vukovar, Mariya from Osijek, and anonymous narrator from Mostar, Oliver Frljić made a shift in private and public relations within this specific public space. Their narratives about war, without heroes and great themes, based everyday life occurrences, could be an alternative to the dominant and expected ideologically saturated stories from this period. The women who told their personal stories from the past not only received an important voice, but their stories have been given certain senses (see Kaniaowska 2003). What is more, through their act of disobedience they obtained social and political agentship.

Attempts to destabilize the adopted versions of the narrative about the future and construction of the Croatian collective memory have their consequences and Oliver Frljić was ought to pay for his involvement. When his apartments in Zagreb and Rijeka were wrecked at the same time and day, the Croatian police convinced him and the public that it was just a coincidence. About the same time, the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, in the public commentary, assessed the director's activity as provocative, irritating and offensive to the majority of the Croatian people. What is more, she accused him of a false presentation of the patriotic war and of denying the idea of a Croatian state. Letters with threats are quite commonly received by the director. A few months ago, on the wall of one of the buildings in the town of Vikovci, someone black painted the threat: "Death to Oliver Frljić." The Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka budget was cut, justifying the lack of Croatian literature in the repertoire. Regarding those circumstances, it is hard to disagree with Benjamin Wihstutz's argument that the theatre proposed by Oliver Frljić "is not only art, but also always represents the real public space of social events" (Wihstutz 2015, 184). The history of the war written for the heroes differs radically from the war stories told by women from Osijek, Mostar, Knjin, Vukovar or Slatini and many others. Most often, however, when we celebrate the victory we are also glorifying the war, and then we rarely hear stories of victims on all sides of the conflict.

And a year later - on August 5, in a small *čarda* on the Croatian-Hungarian-Serbian border, a forty-year-old man from Croatia celebrates with beer loudly boasting that he was a volunteer defending his homeland during the "Storm" operation; and the Serbian owners read the articles in a local newspaper in silence that the



fate of several hundred people missing twenty-one years ago is still unknown. On the same day in Novi Sad, on the main market place, passers-by look in silence at the photographs from Knin and the surrounding area, in which the number of victims of the civilian population is significantly increased: 2,313 killed and 250,000 exiled. Everyone convinced in their own way that they do not want to forget, although this time they did without dramatization...

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