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Performance Knowledge and Practices Beyond Dominant Discourses and Geographies: Glimpses from *Crossing the Lines*

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the post-war Bosnian production *Crossing the Lines*, while exploring the complexities and functions of performance as an efficient means of artistic creativity, political resistance and collective healing. Based on multidisciplinary theories primarily from performance studies and trauma theory, the analysis aims to demonstrate how engaged theater can restructure power dynamics, facilitating individual and communal psychosocial recovery. To illustrate this capacity for performance art, the work centers on *Crossing the Lines*, a collaborative performance project presented by Dah Theater and Women in Black. The study exemplifies how the performance artistically blends testimonial stories, embodied enactment, and public intervention to confront wartime violence and its aftermath. Grounded in relevant theories, the analysis reveals how activist performances perceive audiences' presence as active intervention, whether through direct involvement or silence. This mechanism is demonstrated through *Crossing the Lines*, which shows how the performance engages its spectators and strengthens the bonds across previously divided communities. Such performances attempt to establish connections and dismantle dominant historical narratives by employing three techniques identified throughout the analysis: trauma reenactment through symbolic sounds, gestures, and collective engagement; artistic methods based on Brechtian techniques and postmodern collage; and the strategic use of public spheres to facilitate broader participation. The study argues that performances like *Crossing the Lines* stimulate the emergence of knowledge that confronts systematized oppression and provide meaningful grounds for post-war recovery, negotiating the intersection of collective memory, trauma, and socio-political change.

KEYWORDS

Performance Art

Applied Theater

Trauma Healing

Collective Memory

Social Justice

Resistance

Introduction: Performance as Political and Therapeutic Intervention

Through various verbal and non-verbal channels, performance addresses diverse human issues associated with social or political reality, while being detached from geographical confines and transcending the idiosyncratic boundaries of performances. In this sense, performance addresses the collective awareness of worldwide audiences in order to draw their attention to specific universal social or political ills, hence making the world a huge stage. Through satire, symbolism or more direct criticism of such conflicting contexts, today's performances can go beyond those spaces, often devoted to the elite to turn performative

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practices into patterns of knowledge that revolutionize the very hierarchies of the subject matter of theatrical knowledge.

Performances that used to be in certain temporal and geographical spaces de-politicized abiding by the dictates of the master-puppeteers and censored whenever viewed as endangering the image and existence of the dominant discourses have shifted into new paradigms in the geographies of knowledge, bringing about new modes of being and doing. Hence, new performance studies and practices might play a vital role in transforming the political scene in a number of contexts, especially those where master narratives and political censorship dominate.

Performances contingent upon such conflicting contexts will be addressed in this paper, aiming to clarify the gaps, struggles, and interconnections between the actual dominant powers and the politicized dramatic discourse. This might be effectively achieved and concretized through illustrations derived from a performance titled *Crossing the Lines*, produced in the wake of the Bosnian war, as its content and performative aspects challenge the atrocities of political control, conflict, and displacement. Such performance-audience dynamics might contribute to reducing trauma effects on the civilian victims, as well as improving performance knowledge, one that can remap the old hierarchies of power and hegemony to give room to new freer performance studies and practices.

Theoretical Framework: Performance at the Intersection of Politics and Trauma

The analysis of *Crossing the Lines* draws on performance studies, trauma theory, and applied theater frameworks to explore how the performance operates as both a political intervention and a healing practice. Rădulescu's (95) research on war theater demonstrates the therapeutic power of drama, while Rancière's (*The Emancipated* 13) spectator theory illuminates the dynamics between audience and performers. More recent contributions from Conti (9) on trauma's social dimensions and Harme's (9) embodied drama therapy approaches, enhanced with Sajnani and Johnson's (4) trauma-informed approaches and Sarul's theatrical trauma processing, further enrich the analysis of the' role of performances in post-conflict healing. These intersecting perspectives provide an efficient framework for analyzing this Bosnian postwar performance, synthesizing testimony, activism, and ritual healing.

Drama in Contexts of Conflict

Drama as Social Commentary

Building upon the previous ideas, one might assume that the transformative potential of performance art extends beyond merely portraying societal concerns to actively rewriting the discourses embedded within them. As they attempt to engage audiences in intuitive, realistic narratives that resonate with their lives and existence, such performances evidently trigger emotional involvement and active reflection, thereby prompting viewers to question their own roles within contemporary social realities. This embedding of innovative performances within their social contexts is deepened by introducing techniques that revolutionize the interrelations between drama and therapy.

This idea is emphasized by Sanjnani and Johnson, who consider that "the field of drama therapy is in the process of re-examining its basic principles and reorienting itself to pressing issues related to social justice, for there can be no healing without some form of justice" (21). This implies that embedment within social contexts endows performances with potential healing abilities capable of reaching broad social groups. Hence, innovative forms of drama, integrating multimedia elements for instance, further boost the convenience and influence of these performances, clearing the way for a broader engagement among diverse groups of audiences who may not habitually frequent theatrical spaces.

This democratization of performance art calls upon collaboration that extends beyond the field of performance studies, to encompass various cultures and relevant disciplines, thus the emergence of a rich landscape of voices and perspectives confronting power narratives. Accordingly, performances like *Crossing the Lines* do not simply address existing injustices: they serve as stimulus for dialogue and action, stirring up engagement among communities, while uncovering systemic issues at both micro and macro levels. This paves the way for building a conduit for healing and resistance through the interplay of art and activism, a space where marginalized stories can arise.

Such engaging contemporary performance practices not only expose the interdependencies and defects of social and political realities but also operate as active props for rethinking the prospective routes of societies entrapped within conflict and oppression. Through their engaging character, such performances allow audiences to cultivate a deep comprehension of their interconnectedness and collective responsibility towards their societies. This dynamic interplay would enable them to advocate for change, hence the transformation of performance arts into spaces for exploration and mediums for resistance against injustices.

Drama in this sense becomes a therapeutic means that allows viewers and performers alike to represent and speak of experiences they used to ignore, through non-verbal techniques such as gesture, sound, and movement (Harmer 9). This implies that drama, through various channels, including language, gestures, music, and other forms of communication, addresses diverse human inter-geographical and multicultural issues relating to social or political reality. It is a form of written art, generally intended to be performed before an audience that is engaged in the subject matter of the work in question. In this manner, drama engages collective audiences' awareness to spotlight specific social or political issues, thus relegating to the background political and geographical constraints. Satire, symbolism, or more direct criticism of such challenges is used by playwrights to involve the audience in the various facets of performances or even to urge them indirectly to act against certain dominating powers.

Applied Theater in Oppressive Regimes

Performance as Transformative Social Justice

Drama frequently serves as a subtle yet transformative force within societies dominated by oppressive power structures, especially those under authoritarian regimes that enforce rigid master narratives. In such contexts, theatrical practice is undermined by certain restrictive measures, from political censorship to direct persecution of artists and writers, that fundamentally control artistic expression.

These limitations often lead to pushing innovative performances to peripheral situations, where coded resistance discourses might flourish. Such oppressive conditions might also prompt artistic exile, as creators evidently seek environments where they can express their experiences without fear of retaliation. Through these dynamics, theatrical expression appears to be substantially associated with broader democratic struggles.

Equally, the role of performance increases in contexts of war and forced displacement, where it functions both as a form of post-trauma survival mechanism and a means of potential political change. In this way, post-trauma performances evolve from individual catharsis into influential sociopolitical critique. Within such unstable political environments, the synthesis of psychological and physical suffering infiltrates and tests the natural human abilities to resist and survive traumatic situations as suggested by Conti (9). This combination of trauma, pain and innate resilience drives victims of traumatic events toward artistic expression, a process that might lead to innovation and transformation, both artistically and politically.

Historical Foundations

Theater as Social Mirror

The multifunctional nature of performance art has deep roots in theater's earliest manifestations, which sought to reconcile human experience with artistic expression. Ancient theater was focused on depicting daily human activities while attempting to uncover the aesthetic aspects prevailing in particular historical periods. Theater was, hence, focused on music, dance, singing, hymns, poetry, and other visual or acoustic arts. The content of the shows included, mainly, ritual tribal performances, historical tragedies, storytelling, dramatic dance, and entertaining performances (Al-Janabi); ("A Short History of Ancient Theatre").

As theater became more and more focused on stage performances, it developed gradually into artistic forms premised on language and/or gestures, besides a deeper content expressing specific attitudes towards social, economic, and/or political phenomena. Theater has evolved into various forms of performances imitating social reality, hence its function as a prism through which human behavior of all kinds and dimensions can be visualized and/or denigrated. Theater, in this sense, is a mirror of human life that extends beyond mere reflection of human phenomena and popular or ritualized forms of entertainment to immerse the receivers within the different facets of their society.

Performance and performance studies might be, in this way, a means of reshaping audiences' collective consciousness by depicting and criticizing reality and providing them with a conceptual view of the psychological relationships linking them to their social reality. In other words, performance is an important means that shapes the way people behave towards the vital issues of their nations (Al-Janabi). This equally implies that people's interaction with the geographies of knowledge, as well as their perceptions of their surrounding conditions, are all shaped by historical, geographical, cultural and political factors, reflected in certain ways through performance.

It is this dynamic interplay between individuals, their surrounding contexts and performance art that enables the destabilization of the established conventional links between performance and the mechanisms of political control and manipulation. Along these lines, theatrical practice evolves into a more autonomous and self-determined form of performance, paving the way for the emergence of greater artistic creativity and freer societies.

Creative Performance and Challenging Oppression

Performance and performance studies actively challenge colonial discourse and other (dis)informing powers by rendering their mechanisms visible. Through writing, acting, or staging, drama practitioners employ both technical innovation and artistic creativity to steer the receivers away from passive spectatorship, enabling them to criticize dominant narratives and perceive new paradigm shifts in the geographies of knowledge. This transformative potential

necessitates that artists, writers and researchers echo these insights through performance in ways that align with the perceptions and aspirations of local communities, paving the way for fostering dialogue and structural change. Such effective creative performative practice could be feasible only if the participants in the realm of performance arts, namely playwrights, producers, directors, actors, etc., are deeply aware of their society's specific tensions (Al-Janabi). This approach can prevent performance from becoming either abstract didacticism or trivial spectacle.

In this regard, performances, while maintaining their artistic essence, must reflect and criticize political, social, and economic realities. They transcend mere sociological analysis through their inherent entertaining quality. This suggests that efficient theatrical productions should rely on a balanced combination of real events and artistic creativity. This duality makes theater a unique channel, refracting reality through an artistic prism without being restricted to didacticism. Such productions achieve a careful balance between factual grounding and creative interpretation. Blending these two facets enables theatrical works to avoid two pitfalls: irrelevance from over-prioritizing entertainment, or disengagement from excessive reliance on overt political comments. This equilibrium is often inherently required by audiences as such artistry resonates with the unspoken tensions shaping their past and present experiences.

This intricate equilibrium between artistic creativity and socio-political engagement is deeply rooted in earlier stages of the evolution of drama itself. The historical trajectories of the field show that dramatic performance has long served as a critical medium for social reflection, through purposeful aesthetic forms. From ancient ritual and storytelling to its modern artistic forms, as a medium for political resistance and cultural critique, theater has consistently negotiated between entertainment and engagement. This dual dimension, where artistic representation is interwoven with social, political, and economic complexities, establishes performance as a pivotal cultural practice. As such, engaged theatrical practices resist singular approaches, whether purely didactic or solely entertaining. Its efficiency lies precisely in synthesizing creative innovation with critical perceptions, inviting multilayered interpretations and active audience response.

These nuanced aspects of performance art require practitioners to maintain deep awareness of the delicate balance between artistic creativity and social accountability. Such equilibrium necessitates the development of thought-provoking and socially relevant works. This implies that drama writing and performance, when grounded in thorough historical understanding, can produce works that provoke both profound emotional connections and intellectual engagement. For this purpose, all participants in the field need to remain reflexive, contextually informed, and dynamically responsive to the fluctuations of power, identity, and representation that stir social contexts. This ongoing critical engagement allows performance spaces and works to extend beyond their conventional boundaries, hence shifting from mere on-stage representation to active individual and social transformation.

Contemporary Applications: Theater for Social Change

Applied Theater in Unstable Political Contexts

Theater has long served as a lens that allows viewers to critically explore their contextual values, conflicts, and aspirations. Rather than operating as an isolated aesthetic means, drama is deeply embedded within the socio-political networks that both shape and are shaped by performance art. This implies that theater is not a mere entertainment sphere, but a medium of intervention and change, a dynamic area where socio-political awareness is both contested and promoted. Within such a context, evolving contemporary theater practices exemplify how

performance art can intersect with real experiences, in such a way that attempt to bridge the gaps between the stage and the real world. This section explores these fluctuating aspects through key forms of applied theater: social theater, political theater, and education theater. Grounded in relevant theory, it seeks to illustrate both the capacities and limitations of drama as an area of resistance, dialogue, and transformation by underlining the interdependencies linking theater to its socio-political environment.

The escalating socio-political crises, including displacement, economic inequalities, cultural hegemony and political polarization, have prompted new conceptions of performance art as a medium for in-depth social transformation. Within such a context, performance works take on new moral, pedagogical, and political dimensions through various forms of applied theater, including social theater, political theater, or education theater. These forms of performances move beyond local political contexts and restrained cultural identities, reaching broader global issues and ideologies. In doing so, they challenge dominant narratives and hegemonic hierarchies controlling the field of performance art and society at large.

Within this framework, theater's discursive power lies in its ability to foster dialogue, incite critical thinking, and establish connections deeply rooted in real-world contexts. However, the impact of such theatrical interventions is largely contingent upon the ways they are produced and received in various contexts. This is mainly due to the variability of audiences' engagement, the socio-political risks of representation, and the potential technical and material limitations of performance spaces, all of which might determine the extent of transformation that could be realized through applied theater.

The relatedness of theater to its socio-political background implies that drama transcends the liminalities of the conventional curtains and walls to achieve various forms of change within societies. From this perspective, various forms of applied theater today seek to contribute to social change. Social theater, for instance, can take place in different settings: "from prisons, refugee camps, and hospitals to schools, orphanages, and home for the elderly" (Thompson and Schechner 12). Social theater seeks to involve the spectators by allowing them to discuss the subject matter and offer their own interpretations of performances, either by improvising roles within the performance or even by mapping and re-mapping patterns of knowledge abiding by certain discursive, spiritual and aesthetic rules. Thus, social theater obliquely attempts to bring about long-term social change.

Applied Theater: A Zone of Resistance and Healing

Like social theater, political theater incites the audience to think about certain issues and, hence, act in accordance with a specific humanized view of the issues discussed. Within this context, Baracco gives the examples of *Golda's Balcony* and *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* as two performances that provide the audiences with a human perspective on the Palestinian cause's tensions (Baracco). This means that political theater seeks to make the audiences and drama practices react to socio-political prevailing realities and performances' conventional modes and rules by embracing liberty outside the elites' confined loci. This is likely to lead to the emergence of new performance modes that would build up new taxonomies and hierarchies in the performance worlds and create new orders, placing certain modes and groups in central positions, while relegating others to the periphery in a network of ever-vibrating relations.

Similarly, education theater could be considered as a means of social change since it seeks to "use theatre as a tool to explore ideas, feelings and values rather than to teach children how to put on plays" (Nicholson 24). Education theater in aims at involving youths in particular topics through inciting them to be active learners, exchange ideas freely and think critically. It is a sort of "group drama therapy [that] allows for an even more dynamic approach, where participants learn, engage, and grow together" (Harmer 3). The term goes back to the 1960s and

1970s when schools in England collaborated with theater companies to include theater in educational activities either as an "extracurricular stage presentation, as a course of study within the approved curriculum, or as a teaching strategy that is used in a variety of subject areas" (O'Farrell). Such performances generate a supportive educational atmosphere: they are "Restorative practices [that] seek to create a culture of equity, communication, growth, and relationship" (Harmer 3).

These forms of applied theater, especially activist performances shaped by socio-political conflicts, are premised on thoroughly structured dramaturgies associated with specific social contexts. These works call upon audiences to participate through multiple avenues: direct involvement in performances, post-performance discussions or even contribution to real-life activism. However, this potential social change remains uncertain, contingent upon the conditions of production and reception of the performance. This uncertainty is considered constitutive by Kelleher, who argues that 'instability and unpredictability' fundamentally shape theater's value (24). Rancière further underscores this idea as he argues that the reactions engendered by activist theater depend fundamentally on the extent of the audiences' engagement and other situational factors (Rancière, *The Politics* 61). Yet he argues that all spectators are, in fact, active (Rancière, *The Emancipated* 13), hence rejecting the passive spectator myth.

In examining the multifaceted practices of applied theater, this section has highlighted the deeply embedded relationship between performance and the socio-political realities from which it emerges. These forms of theater not only reflect the cultural and ideological tensions of their time but also attempt to intervene in them by fostering critical engagement, participatory dialogue, and the possibility of social transformation. Yet, their efficacy remains contingent upon a range of factors, including modes of production, audience reception, and the broader political and material conditions that shape their articulation and impact.

Theoretical frameworks that support or critique these practices reveal that applied theater is not a universally stable agent of change, but rather a dynamic, context-dependent medium whose transformative capacity is characterized by both promise and precarity. In this sense, applied theater operates within an intricate interplay of aspiration and limitation, which is simultaneously capable of disrupting dominant narratives and susceptible to subsumption or inefficiency. Ultimately, understanding applied theater's role as a catalyst for social change requires an ongoing critical engagement with its shifting forms, its embeddedness in power structures, and its potential to reimagine modes of representation, participation, and collective agency.

Theater and Healing Trauma

Performance as Social Transformation and Healing

Theater has consistently served as a medium for contesting power dynamics and inciting socio-political change. This engaged role addresses psychological healing as well, particularly in contexts of violence and displacement where theater becomes a refuge and healing space, transcending its conventional critical function. This occurs, particularly, in contexts of extreme collective trauma, which refers to "what happens when the extreme stress of an event or circumstances overwhelms one's ability to cope" (Johnson and Sajnani 3). In such settings, theater empowers trauma survivors to confront systemic exclusion and reconstruct personal narratives. It is through this dual process of reflection and restoration that individuals start to reclaim their identities fractured by conflict.

Drawing on the work of Roth (1) and Rădulescu (95), this section examines the ways performance can serve as a medium of healing for individuals and communities affected by armed conflicts and displacement. It explores the therapeutic dimensions of performance works, which may emerge through telling individual accounts, involving audiences in performances, or symbolically subverting oppressive regimes. Storytelling, absurdist humor, and symbolic gestures are key dramatic techniques emphasized in this section as they collectively function to challenge traumatic histories, while offering trauma survivors a space for emotional catharsis and recovery.

The discussion highlights theater's dual capacity to drive both socio-political transformation and psychological recovery, positioning performance as a vital medium for facing violent histories and survival narratives. It attempts to illustrate how theater can function as a liminal space where individual and collective healing intersect with artistic expression, enabling the emergence of suppressed voices and the rise of activist art. In doing so, this section positions theater within the areas of trauma studies and performance theory, highlighting its role both in remapping power relations and furthering the healing of receivers, survivors of traumatic events in hostile contexts, through performances that are entertaining and change-seeking all at once.

In this vein, Roth considers that theater has not only an entertaining function, but also a healing role when dealing with trauma (1). Likewise, Rădulescu underlines the role of drama in healing trauma through the way drama writing reveals the playwright's personal experience as well as that of the receivers (95). Similarly, Sarul argues that the communal aspect of dramatic performance enables audiences to collectively observe and interact with distressing narratives of war, rather than experiencing them individually. This therapeutic dimension of joint spectatorship aligns with new perspectives on trauma healing through collective support. Through this lens, drama can be used as trauma therapy by letting people relate and act their survival stories, or by allowing spectators to discover the past stories of others and sympathize with them.

In addition to conventional acting and storytelling, drama therapy incorporates humor as a vital therapeutic means. In this regard, Rădulescu refers to the theater of the absurd as a prime example, where oblique sarcasm and performance function to expose oppressive regimes and social injustices (15). Through the enactment of these critiques, absurdist theater directly addresses trauma and suffering, hence its powerful healing feature. This approach proves particularly efficient for the victims of armed conflicts, including military personnel, who often tend to suppress their emotions as a consequence of wartime suffering. Such enforced silence, however, might eventually manifest through hazardous reactions, unless channeled into constructive healthier outlets, such as drama therapy (Sarul). Artistic expression, especially drama therapy, is one of these outlets as it transcends conventional verbal processing or physical expression by adopting a unique combination of narratives, gestures, and parody. It is such a multidisciplinary approach that provides the victims of violent conflicts with an effective means of emotional release. Viewed in this way, the absurdist techniques described by Rădulescu are particularly effective and safe means for externalizing postwar trauma (15). Additionally, beyond providing a creative conduit for emotional release, public exposure of trauma through drama therapy may help prevent recurring tragedies like mass violence and forced migrations.

Such public testimonies on trauma and oppression constitute a form of "ethical trauma treatment [which] entails revealing and acknowledging these obscured power dynamics" as described by Johnson and Sajnani (4). From their perspective, trauma is seen as "the result of the illegitimate exercise of power" whereby oppressors are screened as uncovering them might unsettle their power dynamics: "the spotlight is instead turned on the victim, who is suffering, who has been diagnosed, whose brain functioning is of interest" (Johnson and Sajnani 4).

Resistance Through Performance in Oppressive Contexts

The previous analysis illustrates how theater creates spaces for marginalized voices to articulate their experiences through words, gestures, and sounds, reconstructing personal and collective histories. Hence, these enacted techniques endow past traumatic stories with a sort of present immediacy that engages audiences psychologically while compelling them to confront historical injustices. within this paradigm, even audience silence is viewed as active participation, a powerful form of resistance against staged representations of genocide and displacement (Rădulescu 101).

Performance art, along these lines, functions as a catalyst for both empowering marginalized narratives and deconstructing dominant historical accounts. Being socially engaged, such performances extend beyond mere reality representation to foster individual and collective recovery, particularly in contexts of violent conflicts and displacement. It is through well-organized collective aesthetic actions that performance functions therapeutically as it challenges trauma, amplifies silenced voices, and restores agency, a process akin to collective organization in military units where conflict and healing are intertwined (Sarul). Like a coherent military body, performance provides a structured space for collective testimony and renovation. Theatrical spaces thus emerge as transformative areas for embodied communal memory, generating new pathways for liberation.

It is through such artistic mediums that trauma survivors can recount, personify, and reframe their histories, whereby these experiences become means of fostering resilience and interpersonal compassion. This therapeutic dimension is empowered through a range of performance strategies, including narrative re-enactment, physical expression, symbolic resistance, and even the pre-planned use of silence and humor. In this vein, Rădulescu regards the theater of the absurd as a reflection of how satirical representations could destabilize oppressive regimes, confront systemic violence, and prompt psychological liberation without resorting to conventional, and often simplistic, reproduction of trauma (25). These aesthetic techniques enable the stage to turn into a site where traumatic memory is both recalled and reworked, where performers and audiences alike engage in a process of critical reflection and prospective regeneration.

Likewise, as performances revive traumatic histories, they blur space and time boundaries, allowing audiences to live and taste the immediacy of past experiences. This process turns into an inherent political act, one that transforms spectators from passive recipients into actively engaged participants. It is a dynamic exchange through which audiences' commitment extends beyond mere sympathy with survivors to confront the systemic hierarchies generating violence. From this perspective, healing trauma through theater is not limited to individual catharsis, as it involves broader issues of justice, ethics and historical accountability. The ethical dimension of therapeutic drama is highlighted by Johnson and Sajnani as they argue that "the psychotherapeutic and drama therapeutic treatment of trauma cannot be separated from ethics" (22). Thus, performance, through embodying lived experiences, does more than commemorate past histories: it calls upon communities to challenge past atrocities and prevent their recurrence.

This in mind, theater becomes a living archive of survival memories and historical testimony, resurrecting trauma through a network of gestures, pauses, and sounds, hence creating a universal medium of communication that transcends linguistic barriers and cultural divides. That theater sets the scene for the emergence of oppressed voices both through spoken language and performed action, is an obvious assertion of the performers', along with the audience's, right to be seen, heard, and felt. Trauma therapy through theater is not merely curative as it helps regenerate individual awareness and collective memory through this interweaved combination of aesthetics and activism, empathy and action. Performance, per se, emerges as a

key element balancing the ongoing struggle for historical responsibility, established justice and human dignity.

Case Study: *Crossing the Lines*

Contextual Background

In the aftermath of armed conflicts, societies frequently resort to theater as a major vehicle through which the legacies of war, displacement, and trauma are uncovered. This is particularly evident in post-war Balkan contexts, where performance has played a key role in establishing justice and fostering collective memory, hence enabling the victims to heal and recreate new perspectives on life. *Dah Theater* and *Women in Black*, two troupes founded in Belgrade in the wake of the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, are among the most compelling examples of this combination of art, activism, and therapy. These groups have relied on purposeful performances to confront the atrocities inflicted upon local communities by war, and ethnic divides. In doing so, they have been motivated by a shared commitment to promote peaceful coexistence, enhance feminist resistance, and fight radical nationalism.

Their collaborative work is illustrated through the performance *Crossing the Lines*, which marks a shift of focus in performance art toward theatrical forms associated in Rădulescu's work with warfare and exile (95): politically and morally committed performances that attempt to document suffering, boost peace and understanding, and concretize social change. These groups steer away from the constraints of conventional theaters, opting instead to stage their performances in public spheres. Their aim is to upset dominant narratives by foregrounding the lived experiences of war survivors, including women, displaced civilians, and victims of sexual violence.

While *Crossing the Lines* attempts to document past histories, it also contributes to the restoration of post-war identities and geographies through a rich range of performance techniques, including embodied storytelling, ritualized gestures, song, collage, and symbolic actions. It is through a sort of dual discourse that these performances function, offering performers and audiences a space for psychological healing while embodying, all at once, a form of political action that confronts oppressive systems, such as radical nationalism, militarism, and patriarchal violence.

Performance as Testimony

This section illustrates how the collaborative work of *Dah Theater* and *Women* in Black exemplifies the theater's ability to mediate in the aftermath of atrocities, rather than merely represent them. The ensuing discussion highlights those key features in *Crossing the Lines* that embody the transformative potential of performance art, combining socio-political activism and trauma recovery. This section also sheds light on the dramaturgies of both groups, focused on producing a form of applied theater that seeks to engage audiences and goes beyond conventional aesthetic norms by merging art with political resistance, collective memory, and emotional recovery. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates how the performances of *Dah Theater* and *Women in Black* allude to the possibility of restoring societies shattered by conflict, confronting historical injustices and paving the way for more inclusion and understanding.

As already mentioned, *Crossing the Lines* is a play written and performed thanks to the collaboration of the following groups: *Dah Theatre* and *Women in Black. Dah Theatre* is a group of experimental theater based in Belgrade and founded in the aftermath of the Balkan War in 1991. Dah refers to breath in the Serbian language. The name is suggestive of hope, peace, and

overcoming the pain of the past. The group seeks "to use theatre as a mode of reconciliation across ethnic and religious lines" (Simic 118), imposed by the atrocities of war during the 1990s. *Women in Black* was also founded in 1991. It is a group that adopts peaceful "protest against the war; the Serbian regime's policy; nationalism; militarism and all forms of hatred, discrimination and violence" ("Vigils around the World-Europa-Serbia").

The group collaborates with the *Dah theatre* in organizing performances that portray war atrocities and attempt to help the victims overcome their trauma and suffering engendered by violence and displacement. This collaborative work also seeks to facilitate the reintegration of civilian victims in a constantly changing society. The two groups present performances outside conventional dramatic settings: their shows take place in streets and public places to raise awareness about issues related to war, injustice, and racism. For instance, actresses belonging to the group *Women in Black* "would gather in public spaces dressed in black and stand in silence as a sign of protest, in remembrance of the victims of war and in resistance against its absurdity and horror, and in defiance to all the potential Serbian pro-war attackers. It should be noted that these protests are normally "protected by a cordon of police" (Rădulescu 185).

Crossing the Lines is one of those performances presented in different countries that used to constitute the former Yugoslavia thanks to the collaboration of the two groups. It displays the real testimonies of refugees from various ethnicities, especially, women, allowing them to disclose their suffering and underscore the universal character of pain resulting from colonial control and power struggles. The performance highlights the strength of women who challenged all the atrocities they endured and managed to tell their lived stories. It combines storytelling with other arts, such as singing and dance, in addition to "movie images of Bosnian women and of the war" which are "superimposed on the live performance, which evokes the Brechtian technique of collage and the postmodernist aesthetic of mixed media images of the war. Simic considers the Bosnian women accounts not only part of the performance, but also "legal testimonies of war crimes" (119). Hence, such testimonies could be used for suing criminals involved in war crimes, a fact that concretizes how theater can contribute to the remapping of the aftermath of war through actual paradigm shifts. In doing so, a more secure and just context for the victims of armed conflicts may emerge.

The play also includes scenes portraying the suffering Bosnian women were subject to before they managed to escape from the Serbian Rape camps to seek Asylum in neighboring countries. For instance, "one of the actresses slaps her own face in an accelerated rhythm and with increasing violence, while the others clap or stomp their feet on the ground, creating a maddening rhythm that is meant to tell the story of the violence and torture suffered by women in the rape camps" (Radelescu 186). Like the images of war, which are superimposed on the performance, including dance and storytelling, the violent sounds of slapping the face and hitting the ground are all interwoven with the singing actress's voice. This combination of stories, dance, images and sounds embodies the victory of the victims of rape and torture, the triumph of peace and life and the uselessness and cruelty of war and hatred in a world inherently characterized by diversity and coexistence.

Dual Function: Political Challenge and Trauma Work

The performance has two major dimensions. One is related to the political aftermath of war, as the play seeks to reorder the hierarchies of power relations through embodying a novel form of performance, a dimension that aims to raise the audience's awareness of the atrocities of war and highlight the necessity of peaceful coexistence and non-violent dialogue. In this way, the performance implicitly stimulates actions that might tip the scales in favor of peace continuity

and the avoidance of past mistakes that could trigger a new war, thereby placing those powers of discrimination and colonialism in the periphery. The second dimension of the performance is revealed through its therapeutic role as the actions of the play are aimed at helping the Bosnian women overcome their trauma either as performers who tell their real stories of rape, torture and displacement or as viewers who witnessed traumatizing conflicts not only in the geographical area presented in the performance, but also all over the globe.

The therapeutic dimension of the play is particularly evident in actions aimed at alleviating the psychological suffering of Bosnian women through a variety of expressive means, including singing, dance, and storytelling. This function is confirmed in the final scene where an actress offers the spectators apples as a symbol of wisdom and healing. Subsequently, the actresses form a circle as they pour salt on the stage floor. This action "is symbolic of purification and cleansing following the purging of painful and traumatic experiences" (Rădulescu 186). In the end, they put a flower inside the circle to symbolize their victory over fear, torture, and displacement, an illustration of a universal hope in a brighter future that challenges the atrocity and gloominess of the past and remaps the networks of relations among diversified geographies, identities and powers. Such theatrical performances, linked to war and exile (Rădulescu 95), allow hybrid identities to disclose their experiences and speak of their individual sufferings in such a way that underlines the universality of exile and mass killings. Here, political theater or activist theater plays a multi-faceted role that combines therapy with putting an end to past tragic mistakes and launching a new march towards a better future.

This analysis has highlighted the intricacies and transformative power of theater as an artistic practice deeply embedded within its social context. It demonstrates how the relatedness of theatrical practice to socio-political realities enables performances to transcend aesthetic representation and dynamically engage with the lived human experiences, especially those marked by suffering, exclusion, and conflict. The unique nature of such performances, manifested in their tacitly dialogic structure, emotional discourse, and symbolic language, situates them as active channels that encompass both political critique of hegemonic power mechanisms and psychological therapy for the trauma inflicted by historical violence. As illustrated earlier, performances belonging to applied and activist theater, predominantly those associated with contexts of war, displacement, and systemic inequalities, restructure trauma rather than merely representing it. They do so through embodied storytelling, audience engagement, and purposeful performance rituals that create the appropriate conditions conducive to both commemoration and recovery.

From this perspective, these engaged performances increasingly erase the boundaries between the psychological, political, artistic, and therapeutic dimensions. They turn into liminal spaces in which erased narratives are foregrounded, memory is resurrected, and trauma is alienated. These theatrical practices subvert dominant discourses and restore agency for individuals and communities impacted by displacement, violence, or oppression. The audience in such performances is not merely a passive recipient, but an active participant, who is emotionally and morally engaged. This dynamic involvement is a key factor in the identification and reform process. Along these lines, theater cultivates collective awareness of the past and incites a potential shift toward future realities grounded in justice and integrity.

Conversely, the power of these performances is determined by the socio-political contexts of their staging, as well as the circumstances of their production and reception, the fact that explains the nonlinear character of their impact. What remains obvious, however, is theater's constant ability to navigate the multiple dimensions of suffering and resistance, visibility and elimination, voice and silence. As a form of embodied awareness and emotional testimony, theatre reshapes how trauma is perceived, experienced, and recounted across geographies, identities, and histories.

Conclusion: The Transformative Potential of Performance

Through exploring the transformative potential of performance art, this paper has illustrated how theater functions not only as a means of aesthetic expression but also as an effective medium for social and political change. Contemporary performance practices have evolved into dynamic platforms for addressing vital human and political issues, including war, exile, discrimination, and trauma. This demonstrates how such performances can undermine established power structures and hierarchies, while simultaneously providing spaces for recovery and resistance. By engaging audiences psychologically and intellectually, such performances facilitate communication across geographical boundaries and cultural divides, opening new avenues for dialogue, reflection, and action to address universal concerns.

As illustrated throughout the analysis of *Crossing the Lines*, contexts marked by conflict and trauma exemplify how performance art can seamlessly erase the boundaries between artistic creativity and political activism. Such committed performances further a deeper understanding of the intricacies of human resilience and suffering in unstable political contexts. They achieve this by engaging with actual experiences, employing multimedia elements, and adopting cautiously devised theatrical techniques. Such works not only allow marginalized voices to become visible but also provide spaces for healing individuals and communities influenced by political violence. It is this visibility and empowerment of the oppressed that contributes to the remapping of power mechanisms, thereby promoting deeper socio-political change.

The preceding discussion and illustrations highlight how the recent innovations in the progressive roles of performance art are triggering new theoretical and research advancements at the intersection of theater, individual psychology, and collective socio-political realities. Thus, theater and performance art function as dynamic, multilayered mediums that enable individuals and communities to overcome collective trauma, resist discrimination, and drive social change. These artistic forms operate within a complex world where shifting power dynamics, identity issues, and political forces continually influence both real-world experiences and how they are perceived. It is this intricate ability to uncover lived experiences, critique realities, and heal individuals and communities that makes theater a driving force in the continuous struggle for an integrated world, one wherein justice and empathy prevail.

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