

Research Report

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This is a Research Report on my Short-Term Travel Grant awarded for the continuation of my research of the theater during the war in Bosnia. The original research was conducted during the period from September 20th, 1999 to March 17th, 2000. This research took place from June 25 to August 15, 2002.

1. Topic of research and countries visited

The 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Hercegovina progressed into a series of unthinkable crimes aimed at the complete destruction of that nation's population! For three and a half years, theater kept many people floating above the surface of pure misery. During the war, theaters in Bosnia and Hercegovina (7 theaters in 4 cities) produced 131 premieres of plays that were performed 3,838 times (2.6 performances per day) in front of half a million audience members of all ages (exactly 560,088). Also, theaters organized and/or hosted 1,505 other cultural events such as concerts of classical music, promotions of new books, art exhibitions, cultural and academic discussions, etc. The theaters performed 159 times for soldiers in the battlefields, for children in kindergartens and schools, and for people in shelters and parts of the cities that were completely cut off by enemy soldiers and danger. They toured almost all of Europe, performing for both Bosnian refugees and audiences in the host countries. Finally, the theaters in Bosnia and Hercegovina hosted many theater groups and individuals from Europe and North America who either performed their own plays or created original works, directed plays, and held workshops for actors in professional theaters, for amateurs and for students of the Academy for the Dramatic Arts in Sarajevo.

The above mentioned data demonstrates the great achievement accomplished by theater artists who managed to create in impossible living and working conditions: every time they went to a rehearsal or performance they risked their lives; some actors were killed and some wounded (one actor lost his legs when a shell exploded next to him and when he recovered he was on the stage performing in a wheel chair); it was not unusual for actors to

faint on the stage from exhaustion and hunger; the theaters and other performance spaces did not have any heat so many actors got frostbite and became ill. From the very beginning of the attack on their cities, as well as throughout the blockade, theater artists were fully engaged in their resistance. This resistance was often called "a spiritual rebellion", and was based on their ethical, humanitarian, and creative principles. Their instincts for survival caused them to be literally obsessed with creation in order to prove to themselves and others that they exist by being alive in front of their audiences. Theater artists felt a great responsibility toward their audiences for whom they were creating an environment so different from everyday reality. The creative energy of theater artists became the basis for establishing a new quality of existence with communication and togetherness as the means of freeing human potential.

Country visited: Bosnia and Hercegovina

2. Relevance and contribution to field.

Throughout history, the main role of theater arts has been live communication between the artist and the audience. In the modern world, this communicative role of the theater that often encompassed a sense of the ritual, the spiritual, and the empathic purgation, has become one of mere amusement. In this capacity, the commercial aspects of the theater govern its success and viability. I realized, through my research, that the commercial side of the theater did not exist during the war. Theater existed not as entertainment, but rather as a communicative force, with a strong impact on the everyday lives of both the artists and the audience. In this period of crisis, theater regained its original role of being a crucial component of life. My research documents a time and a place in this world where theater played a significant role in the survival of a community. Actually, quite often, the people that I interviewed insisted that the theater helped them feel that they existed as human beings.

3. Summary of the approach and research methodology

My research was based on the individual testimony of direct and indirect participants in theater events: actors, directors, dramaturges, designers, managers and artistic directors of theaters, media theater reviewers, professors and students of Academy for the Dramatic Arts, Academy for Fine Arts, and other educational institutions, members of the Ministry for Culture in the Bosnia and Hercegovina government, sociologists and psychologists of the University in Sarajevo, and above all, the people, soldiers, and children who were audience

members at the performances during the war. Points of interest in my research were: the living conditions of people during the war; theater and the war; theater artists and their engagement; war audiences and war theater; the Academy for the Dramatic Arts and its role during the war; the statistical data, repertory, and reviews of the war performances; the sociological, psychological, and cultural analysis of theater in the war and its relationship with its audience.

Specific targets of my research were theatre people and audiences in cities of Zenica, Mostar and Tuzla. Since this research was a continuation of my original research that took place in Sarajevo for six months in 1999/2000, a big portion of my work in Sarajevo, on top of additional interviews, was related to the finalization of my previous research such as collecting autobiographies of interviewees, taking their pictures, helping a person who typed the interviews in Bosnian, and arranging possible publication of my work.

4. A summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions

Many interviews were conducted with theater actors, directors and technical staff as well as audience members who had attended various productions. Also, I gathered additional written materials on both the arts in general and specifically theater during the war. My original thoughts, based on preliminary conversations with several people who lived through the war in Sarajevo, were that I would find that the significance of the theater to the people of Sarajevo was greatly increased during this period of crisis. Since the “material world” for the people in Sarajevo completely disappeared, what remained was a need for spiritual fulfillment. In this realm, arts and especially theater played a crucial role. From all of the interviews, I found this to be true.

5. Suggestions for future research agendas.

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6. Recommendations for the US Policy Community.

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