

Sexual Theatre

Feminist Readings of Classics

Works and Processes

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Each play is followed by a discussion space on the challenges of creating the play and the performance based on it.

Foreword

The title of this book refers to Kate Millett's "Sexual Politics", one of the first and most important books defining the feminist critical approach in the culture. It was used as the conceptual framework of the international project "Sexual Theatre", supported by the Creative Europe program of the European Union, whose overall goal was to improve the quality of theater topics and narratives by implementing feminist's reading of literature through international co-productions and exchange of artists from four countries of east and west Europe, Bosnia, Montenegro, France and Portugal.

The specific objectives of the project were to create and maintain a European network of professional theaters and festivals dealing with feminist approaches in the arts; improve gender awareness, feminist education and social engagement of artists, gender equality, inclusion, social justice and democracy in partner countries. It also aims to develop new audiences and their capability to read theater and culture critically.

The project results were four crossed theatre productions involving artists for these four countries and institutions, Bosnian National Theatre Zenica, Theatre City Budva, Faz Cultura and

Teatro Circo Braga, Paul Valéry University of Montpellier. Each institution produced the original writing and directing of a play inspired by a classical work by a major text from its literary heritage.

This book presents the plays as well as the reflections of the artists – writers, directors, actresses and actors, assistant – about the artistic processes, their discoveries, difficulties, and wonder, to leave a trace of this creative research and to enable others to take up these themes and works.

Laurent Berger

THE LIVING
by Aïcha Euzet

Inspired by the short story “Mara Milosnica” by Ivo Andrić

« It took away my possessions, my laughter, my tenderness, my willingness to please, to help, my compassion, my animality, my radiance, and crushed every separate manifestation of it until nothing was left. But why a human being does this, that's what I don't understand. »

Ingeborg Bachmann, *Franza*

Mara. –

I am Mara, in Ivo Andric's short story Mara Milosnica.

Veli Pasha. –

In this story, written in 1926, set in 1878, I play the role of Veli Pasha.

Veli Pasha, a Turk, commander-in-chief of all the armies of Bosnia, stationed in Sarajevo on the eve of the Austrian occupation.

My hair is greying at the temples.

My left cheek is covered, over an area the size of a child's hand, by a red lichen that spreads and deepens imperceptibly yet steadily, now biting into the soft flesh of my lower eyelid.

Mara. –

My life, me, Mara, turns upside down one day in March, when I am not yet sixteen years old.

When Veli Pasha enters my town of Travnik, I am kneeling in front of the large stall covered with bread and dishes of pita at my father's bakery.

Veli Pasha. –

She leans on one arm and extends the other to reach for a dish in the back. She raises her head, and I catch her in this posture, her

body stretched and extended above the counter. I fix my gaze for a moment on her broad childlike face and her light eyes. Her arms are bare.

I order that she be taken to Sarajevo, to a small house apart where no one is allowed to visit her. Mara spends her days in two half-dark rooms.

In the evening, my servant goes to fetch her.

Mara. –

I wrap myself and veil up to my eyes, and, head bowed, I follow him to the Pasha's house.

The first days, I am incapable of regaining my senses. Physical pain completely overwhelms me. When you penetrate me, I am a virgin, and you smile, saying that it is tight inside. Your dry movements in me, I observe your body and imagine that my spirit soars above my body, above your body, as if I could see everything from above. After the first nights of suffering, an obsessive thought arises in me, the troubling yet terrible and oppressive thought of sin and shame

I fear you. I dread light and people. I can no longer sleep, and even in dreams, I feel cursed. I struggle to get used to you and your caresses; even when the pain and fear of the beginning disappear, I respond to you stiffly.

Veli Pasha. –

Yet you begin to accustom yourself.

She particularly likes my smell.

The breath radiating from my body attracts her more and more, gives her strength and makes her joyful; she lets herself be enveloped by it for hours, eyes closed, head resting on my chest or the palm of my hand.

Mara. –

I am only tormented at night when, as often happens, you send me to sleep alone.

I then wake up several times with a clear awareness – as happens only in the dark – of what I have now become, and, mouth full of tears, I press my face between the mattress and the pillow and sob: “A Turk...”

In the darkness, I think I will go to eternal hell. The next day, I greet you again with a silent smile.

Veli Pasha. –

It is the same every evening.

I greet you with my arms crossed over my chest. I then undo my clothes.

After washing and refreshing myself, I open the doors and windows that look over the city of

Sarajevo and the ridge of Trebević.

Ready, you join me and curl up on my lap.

Between us, it is called “sitting in the box.”

You are so small compared to me, and you curl up so well that you can fit entirely within the hollow of my crossed legs.

Night begins to fall; we remain sitting like this, peaceful and motionless. You soak in the familiar smell, while I feel your ear on my bare chest. We do not move and speak little. Except when I admonish you, smiling, because you nibble at the edge of my shirt.

I smoke above your neck while watching Sarajevo slowly darken and the clouds extinguish one by one beyond the hills. When darkness is complete and, in the steep neighborhood of Bistrik and Meraga, a multitude of small lights begin to shine, along with the stars in the sky, you rise, light a candle, and stand beside the door.

Mara. –

If he says:

Veli Pasha. –

Are you sleepy?

Mara. –

I nod and retreat to my room, leaving him there with his glass and the candle. But if he says:

Veli Pasha. –

Shall we go, my girl?

Mara. –

I approach you, help you stand, and we go to bed together.

Veli Pasha. –

This happens more and more rarely.

I regularly send her to sleep, and I remain there, smoking for hours.

Mara. –

Lying in the dark, I listen for the slightest noise from the gallery, regretting not being with him and having to sleep; at the same time, I shiver at the thought that he might come in.

Often, I get up and, trembling, look through the keyhole. As soon as I am somewhat away from him, he seems foreign and terrible to me.

I tremble and clench my jaws convulsively, but I do not move from the door until I feel my chest cold and my feet frozen. Only then do I collapse on my bed, exhausted, overwhelmed by the feeling that there, before that door, my soul too is being lost.

The next morning, I wake up without the horror having diminished within me.

But as the day progresses and noon approaches, my curiosity and desire grow, until the moment when, fully dressed and wrapped in my veils, I wait with painful impatience for the evening, the night, the torments, and all that is inevitable.

Adila. –

I cannot escape this old house. I cannot escape the
man with the slashed eye.

The man with the slashed eye sucks in each of my breaths.

The soldiers arrived early in the morning. One of the soldiers
grabbed me by the hair. He had a scar on his left eyelid.

The scar covered his entire eye.

I held my daughter tightly in my arms, My little daughter,
still a bit of a baby, My two-year-old daughter Alma.

The soldier with the slashed eye said I was young, that I would do.

That I'd be good to screw and resistant.

He looked at Alma. Mercy, I screamed, mercy.

I called for my mother to help me. She lowered her head,
clenching her jaws.

The man with the slashed eye started laughing.

“Dirty Muslim bitch.” He pointed his weapon at me. I
invoked Allah in secret.

The soldier fired.

A bullet to my daughter's skull. A bullet exploded my
daughter's head. She held a small doll in her arms.

The doll fell
onto the snow. The man with the slashed eye picked up the doll
and tossed it to another soldier. They started playing with my

daughter's blood-stained doll.

They laughed while playing like children with the doll. My little
daughter, still a bit of a baby, a hole in her head.

I don't know how to escape.

The walls, encircled with iron and concrete, the only exit the door
of the great
Which opens and closes mechanically, the dogs tirelessly watching.

I don't know how to escape, how to save myself. I drag myself,
weary, naked, my gaze above my body. I lose my reason a little
more each day.

I lose a little of who I am every day as I turn.

My body in his gaze, in his hands.

I turn within the body of the soldier with the slashed eye.

At night, the long hours until his infinite groan.

Horror is familiar to me now, familiarity engraved in my flesh, my
head, my heart, my sex,

familiarity inked into silence. The
silence is a living, gaping wound that feeds on my hopes.

The silence in my head. The silence of my
daughter on the snow.

I didn't understand what was happening.

My daughter, my little Alma.

My mother collapsed.

She crawled near the body of my little Alma. The soldier with the scar ordered her to get up. My mother clung to my daughter's body.

The soldier with the slashed eye ordered her to rise.

My mother refused. The soldier with the slashed eye shot my mother.

Despite the screams and the barking of dogs, it is the silence that marked me. The silence and the emptiness, like a slab of concrete in my mind.

With an amnesic mouth, I try in vain to recite the Surahs, Verses from my childhood. I want to scream the name of ALLAH.

YAA ALLAH.

The sacred names return to me, the sweetness of my childhood.

HAYY

The Living.

HAYY.

Opening the density of the air.

Allâhu Akbar Allâhu Akbar Allâhu Akbar Allâhu Akbar
Ach-hadu An là illaha il lallâh Ach-hadu An là illaha il lallâh
Ach-hadu Anna Muhammadan Rasuloullâh Ach-hadu Anna
Muhammadan Rasuloullâh Ach-hadu Anna Ali-y an wali-yo-

Allâh

Ach-hadu Anna Ali-y an wali-yo-Allâh

Hay-ya 'Alâ-c-calâh Hay-ya 'Alâ-c-calâh Hay-ya Alâ-l-Falâh Hay-ya

Alâ-l-Falâh

Hay-ya 'Alâ khair -il –Amal Hay-ya 'Alâ khair -il –Amal

Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar Là ilâha il-lallâh

Veli Pacha. –

In the house, they are unpacking and packing all of my things. Mara comes, as usual, every evening.

I say nothing to her, and she doesn't dare ask me any questions.

Mara. –

I don't understand what is going on. I listen in terror during the day to the distant echoes of the crowd's cries gathering at the bottom of the city or, at night, to the gunshots and the calls of the sentinels who take turns regrouping. I see that the entire household is preparing to leave. All of this only heightens my fear and confusion.

Veli Pacha. –

I speak to you of my departure.

Mara. –

The whole house is being emptied, and the empty rooms echo. He sits in the gallery in front of the open windows, his belt removed, and as I do every day, I arrive, close the door, and sit on his lap. It is only after he smokes a hookah and exchanges a few insignificant remarks that he tells me :

Veli Pacha. –

I am leaving the next day “on a trip”

Mara. –

Addressing the matter quickly as though it were of little importance and secondary. He then begins explaining that :

Veli Pacha. –

You will stay quietly here, the house rent is paid for an entire year, I have arranged everything for you. But if you prefer to return to your father’s house in Travnik, you need only say so. I don’t think anything bad will happen to you. Once things calm down, then we’ll see...

Mara. –

I lower my head, you stop talking. I lift it again, afraid you might think I’m crying. During all of this, you call me “My girl” only once, at the beginning, and even then as if by mistake, for you speak until the end in a dry, practical tone, with no change in your voice or your facial expression.

Veli Pacha. –

In any case, you don’t listen to me, you don’t understand me.

Mara. –

All of this feels to me like one single blow that blinds me and takes my breath away. You take your horses, your servants, your dogs, but me, you leave behind.

I feel in my chest a void, something silent, suddenly interrupted throughout my body: only two points in my temples throb rapidly, alternating and blurring my vision.

Veli Pacha. –

I say a few words to you, hold you by the left arm, quickly caress your hair and cheek. You are unable to hide your trembling.

Mara. –

I look around me, there is no longer any sound. I stagger, fall first to my knees, then full length, my face against the floor. The cramp gripping my jaw loosens, and the sobs threatening to choke me break out. Only a howl, harsh, long, hoarse, escapes my mouth; and tears mix with my saliva. I want to catch my breath, but the sobs rush up again, rising from the depths of my entrails to my throat; I suffocate, I grab the bedding with both hands, trying to utter the name of the Virgin Mary.

The next morning, I am still there, alone, pregnant.

I drag myself under the window, rest my head against the wall,
and close my eyes, without sleeping.

Adila. –

So much time without meaning.

Visions transform me, From blurred images where I see only
night—now I can see the Miljacka.

The man with the scarred eye loses me in his gaze.

It is painful to leave a prison. Fear invades my body at the
thought of escaping this sealed house.

I think I am alive, but I exist below myself. That soldier with the
scarred eye has held me prisoner for months. Bars of iron,
concrete, more concrete that spins.

The concrete presses, the soldier screeches. The man with the
scarred eye screams the names of all the dead soldiers on my
womb.

When he passes over my body, I think of Alma,
My little girl, still just a baby.

The doll stained with my daughter's blood in their large hands.

The soldier with the scarred eye grabbed me by the hair.

He ordered me to lick the doll.

I licked my daughter's blood.

Veli Pasha. –

I leave Ivo Andric's short story, Mara Milosnica.

I disappear; my time has gone.

I leave Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Turkey orders my return, and I have no intention of interfering in Bosnian affairs. Bosnia-Herzegovina will now belong to the dictates of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1878, the European powers decided Bosnia's fate in Berlin.

The Ottoman Empire is collapsing.

A resistance is growing in Sarajevo to counter the city's takeover, but this resistance is too small,

too poorly supported—

The resistance will shout once or twice, fire off a few cartridges, then run home so their wives can lock them in the cellars.

Let the Austrians stay only three years in Sarajevo, and these resistance will be the first to wear berets, tear off Austrian crosses, and eat pork.

There are no men here anymore, only hungry rabble and even hungrier beys. Ibn Abbas said that a final and terrible time will come when the heart of the true believer will melt, like salt melts in water, with nothing to remedy it.

All kinds of people will still make the law here, but my time is over.

In this story, I played the role of Veli Pasha, Turkish

commander-in-chief of all the armies in Bosnia.

I leave this character, and within me parade all the characters I could have played, all possible incarnations in the Time of History.

I'm a man, I'm an actor, my roles parade.

I AM AN ACTOR PLAYING THE CHARACTER OF SALCIN
IN THE STORY *MARA MILOSNICA* BY IVO ANDRIC.

SALCIN, A YOUNG MAN FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD,
LURES THE LITTLE NIECE OF MARA'S AUNT — A TEN-
YEAR-OLD GIRL — WITH SUGAR, TRAPPING HER IN A
PIT FAR FROM ANY DWELLINGS, TO BEAT AND
VIOLATE HER UNTIL SHE LOSES CONSCIOUSNESS.
SHE COULD BE HEARD PRODUCING STRANGLED
GURGLES AND KICKING HER LEGS UNTIL THE NOISE
STOPPED ALTOGETHER.

I AM A MAN I AM AN ACTOR : INCARNATE THE
CHARACTER OF BROTHER GRGO INCARNATE THIS
MONK, THAT CASTS OUT MARA : FILTHY WRETCH,
FOUL CREATURE SWARMING WITH WORMS.
IN THE NAME OF GOD, I CONDEMN YOU SUPPOSING
THAT FOR YEARS YOU'VE BEEN WASHING THE
CHURCH FLOOR WITH YOUR TEARS THAT YOU LIVE
ON DRY BREAD AND WATER, YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE
TO WASH AWAY THE SHAME
WRONG YOU'VE DONE

I AM THE CHARACTER OF SIMUN, HUSBAND TO AUNT
ANDJA, SISTER OF OLD PAMUKOVIC, IN WHOSE
HOUSE MARA WORKS.

I AM A DRUNKARD, AND I DESIRE TO VIOLATE MARA :
LITTLE GIRL FROM TRAVNIK DON'T BE AFRAID, COME.

I AM NIKOLA, SON OF OLD PAMUKOVIC, HUSBAND TO
NEVENKA, WHOM I BEAT AFTER DRINKING :YOU
WRETCHED BARREN DOG! GO THROW YOURSELF
INTO THE WELL, DOG, GO!

I WANT TO DISAPPEAR. I DON'T WANT TO PLAY
ANYMORE.

ROLES COME AND GO AND DEVOUR ME.

I'M NO LONGER VELI PACHA I'M NO LONGER AN
ACTOR I'M NO LONGER A MAN I DON'T KNOW WHAT I
AM ANYMORE.

I AM A SERBIAN SOLDIER, ON MY KNEES, VOMITING
UP THE BODIES OF ALL THE WOMEN I HAVE
TORTURED, RAPED, AND DRAGGED TO HELL.

I AM A SOLDIER OF THE SERBIAN ARMED FORCES IN
1992, VIOLATING MUSLIM WOMEN

"I RAVAGE THIS BITCH — SCREAM! COME ON,
SCREAM! SAY YOU ENJOY IT, YOU FILTHY WHORE."

I AM ALL THE ANONYMOUS SOLDIERS WHO RAPED
WOMEN.

I AM AN ISRAELI SOLDIER, I VOMIT THE BODIES OF
PALESTINIAN WOMEN I TORTURE I RAPE I DRAG TO
HELL.

I AM AN ISRAELI SOLDIER, AMUSING MYSELF WITH
THE TOYS OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN I HAVE JUST
SHREDDDED.

I AM A SUDANESE SOLDIER, I VOMIT UP THE BODIES
OF WOMEN I TORTURE, I RAPE, I DRAG TO HELL — I
DRIVE HUNDREDS OF WOMEN TO SUICIDE, HUNDREDS
OF WOMEN DROWN TOGETHER.

I AM THE ORDER OF THE WORLD, BUILT BY MEN.

I AM WORLD ORDER SYRIA UKRAINE CONGO...

I AM THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

I AM THE ORDER OF THE WORLD

I AM A LIVING, GAPING WOUND, ALIVE, GAPING,
BLEEDING.

I AM A WEAPON OF WAR I RAPE I SHOOT I RAPE I KILL

I AM A SOLDIER WHOSE BATTLEFIELD IS A WOMAN'S
VAGINA

I AM A MAN WHOSE BATTLEFIELD IS A WOMAN'S

VAGINA

I AM ALL THOSE MEN WHOSE BATTLEFIELD IS A
WOMAN'S BODY

I'M THAT MAN WHO BEATS HIS WIFE I'M THAT MAN
WHO KILLS HIS WIFE

I'M THAT MAN WHO TORTURES HIS WIFE WHO DRIVES
HER CRAZY “ KILL YOURSELF KILL YOURSELF WHY
HAVEN'T YOU KILLED YOURSELF YET YOU SHOULD
JUMP JUMP JUMP INTO THE VOID

I AM THE MAN WITH THE PIERCING EYE I FUCK ADILA
I FUCK THIS MUSLIM BITCH : SCREAM GO ON SCREAM
GO ON SAY IT YOU'RE ENJOYING IT YOU DIRTY BITCH
HISTORY WILL FINISH MY DESTINY I WANT TO
DISAPPEAR I AM AN ACTOR I DON'T WANT PLAY
ANYMORE I AM A MAN I

Adila. –

Wa Al-`Aşri l 'Inna Al-'Insāna Lafī Khusrin
'Illā Al-Ladhīna 'Āmanū Wa `Amilū Aş-Şālihāti Wa Tawāşaw
Bil-Ĥaqqi Wa Tawāşaw Biş-Şabri

By Time! Indeed, mankind is in loss,
Except for those who have faith, perform righteous deeds,
encourage one another to truth, and
encourage one another to patience. Repeating known words in a
loop to keep from falling into madness:

Wa Al-`Aşri 'Inna Al-'Insāna Lafī Khusrin
'Illā Al-Ladhīna 'Āmanū Wa `Amilū Aş-Şālihāti Wa Tawāşaw
Bil-Ĥaqqi Wa Tawāşaw Biş-Şabri

Wa Al-`Aşri 'Inna Al-'Insāna Lafī Khusrin
'Illā Al-Ladhīna 'Āmanū Wa `Amilū Aş-Şālihāti Wa Tawāşaw
Bil-Ĥaqqi Wa Tawāşaw Biş-Şabri

Oh Allah, I beg of you, Do not let me fall.
Do not let him take everything from me.

Mara. –

Veli Pasha has gone.

I flee to the Latin Quarter. I encounter dead soldiers.

I arrive at Brother Grgo.

Brother Grgo decides I will go to serve the wealthy Pamukovic family until the political unrest in Sarajevo subsides. He decrees that, once the chaos ends, I must publicly repent before the entire Christian community.

I give birth prematurely, at seven months, my still-born baby. I no longer know where to turn. Madness engulfs me. I fall ill. Six days and six nights of fever.

I dream I am playing ball in a vast and peculiar meadow. The grass is a deep, dark green, and the earth is soft, as though after a summer rain. My ball is small and blue, precisely the same colour as the sky. As it soars through the air, it becomes one with the sky's transparency, disappearing into it.

Each time, I feel a pang of anxiety: Will I catch it? This fear nestles in the hollow of my chest, yet it tickles and spurs me to

laugh — a laugh both painful and sweet, one I cannot stop.

All the childhood that was stolen too soon, all the youth abruptly cut short, is now set free in this meadow. And as I run, stretching my arms and gaze toward the ball, toward the heavens, it feels as though my very innards yearn to rise, to take flight. The sensation steals my breath, making me swell until I fear I will burst at any moment and dissolve into the vast beyond.

Yet I keep running, tossing the ball and catching it, laughing, blinded by the light. Through my laughter and dazzled gaze, I dissipate entirely into the boundless clarity of the immense day.

When I awaken, I am still enchanted by this dream. A trace of that delightful shiver, that weightlessness in my chest, lingers. Behind my eyelids flickers something bright and trembling. Relief washes over me, as though, in the darkness surrounding me, a window of light has cracked open.

Adila. –

I drown in images. In my visions, the road is long. I tread down
frozen paths,
Hours spent barefoot on black ice.
Nothing but a breath— I need just one breath, A single cold
breath.

I leave hell behind.
I despise life. I despise concrete. I despise men.
I despise myself.
I want to crush it all, To crush myself beneath this frozen grass,
to dissolve.
Even Allah is no longer enough.

Sarajevo, I call to you— What have you become?
Sarajevo. Everything feels foreign to my eyes.
I wrench myself through narrow streets hemmed by
disproportionate cinder blocks.
I descend the once-mythic alleys of my city.

I want to die. I want to die engulfed in water.
I want to join the water and its currents, Which churn and erase
the years.

I flee this old house encircled by concrete. In my visions, I see
myself walking down a dark alley at night, Descending narrow
streets until I reach the Miljacka.

In my visions, the Miljacka swells, Water surging from all sides
to fill her belly. She overflows; her currents rage.

In my visions, the Miljacka is no longer gentle, calm, shallow.
She swallows men, paralysed by fear. She is full of the tears of
women. In her tears, my body melts away.

Will I find my body again? Will I find spirit within my body
again?

I want to embrace death, Where the pains in my body will fade,
Where my skin will be mine,
Where my voice will no longer be smothered.

Miljacka, take me, I beg you.
Ecstasy waits at the end of my breath.

My dream and this light— I can unfurl worlds,
Even in this upturned world, On the brink of the abyss. Here I
am again, at the edge.

Mara. –

At my burial, a passerby says they've just buried an angel — a heavenly angel.

In Ivo Andric's story, at the end of my life, me Mara, I am gripped by madness, speaking to ghosts, consumed by visions. It is dreadful how the lucidity of a woman is confined to madness by men.

I, Mara, I build my story.

I transcend time. A century later, I carry these words for Adila. I travel through time so she may not meet the same fate as I did. I return to the Living so they may not perish in shame.

From my life in 1878 to Adila's in 1992. A span of 114 years, the same city: Sarajevo, The battle of Sarajevo, the siege of Sarajevo. Who are we, truly? What are we, as women, within this History? Is the heroism of our resilience ever praised? Are we ever healed from our wounds?

Invisible or visible, silent or loud.

I try with all my strength to fight, yet I do nothing but fade in the gaze of History.

The rapes are a reflection of their impotence. The murders, a reflection of their impotence. The forgetting, the shame — all

reflections of their impotence.

Much is said about war. Many words are used, words that carry false ideas. From all sides, narratives are claimed — imagined or real.

Yet suffering is never imaginary. The suffering of a woman is never imaginary. Even invisible wounds are never imaginary.

War. Aggression. Genocide. War crimes. Ethnic cleansing. Each word bears its weight in the world's imagination.

The time to be silent. The time to name. The time to repair. The time to listen. The time to recognise.

How can we rise again? How can we rebuild? How can we live? To not reproduce violence, endlessly, without end.

History will fulfil its destiny.

And we women, worn out, without recognition,
Words granted to us too late, lives extinguished in silence. There are wounds that will never heal.

And we women, how can we breathe?

In surrendering my body to madness, I, Mara, open the way.
I return for all the women — companions of sorrow, martyrs of
violence.

I forget the weight of my body and the bindings of a life of
unending violence. I watch, as an angel might, as life descends
upon us.

I see Adila.

I soar above Sarajevo. I see you, Adila.
You are lying by the river
Your dead child in your arms, curled into yourself.

Words pull you beyond the visible.
The ruins of the invisible minaret encircle you,
A fortress of sorrow in an unreal world.

You came here in the night, praying to the stones to transform
you.
Praying to feel neither fear, nor love, nor joy, nor hope, nor pain.
You sing into the night, the final call to prayer from an invisible
muezzin.

There are places where passages are possible, Passages to life,
where time suspends itself.

Places where anything might happen without astonishment, In
the deepest, calmest serenity.

In this state of ruin, you plunge, Adila,
Into a space where time intertwines, where life becomes light.

Come with me, Adila. Step out of the darkness.

Mara. –

Dreams are a force of life.

Adila. –

Where do you want to take me?

Mara. –

Away from the depths.

Adila. –

I want to die.

Mara. –

You will be alive.

Adila. –

I no longer know how to live.

Mara. –

Begin again.

Adila. –

It's all so blurry around me.

Mara. –

You belong to the living. The living will return.

They will face the light. The living will speak.

Shame will have disappeared.

In this time of light and peace, the living will stand proud, freed from fear and mediocrity. Love will be immense.

Faith will not have given way to the uncertainty of an illusory and fragile peace.

The living will be there.

We will be there.

Ready to accomplish the ultimate arrival in this life. The ultimate liberation.

The living will undo the bindings.

They will untangle them in their rage for love.

How can we create silence within words so the living can unleash their love?

Adila. –

In love, there is only the intangible.

Mara. –

I want you to know the joys of infinite gentleness.

A hand caressing your skin, freed from expectations. You can

rebuild yourself, Adila.

Adila. –

What is it I must rebuild in myself? What do you want from my
life?

Mara. –

No one asked me to stay alive.

I ask you to stay alive.

The Man with the Piercing Eye. –

Adila, open your eyes.

Adila, I can no longer do without your body.

You are nothing, do you hear me?

I own you

It's me who decides whether you live or die.

Do you hear me?

Adila. –

Mara

Mara

Mara

The Man with the Piercing Eye. –

Open your eyes. Look at me.

Do you hear me?

Answer me when I fuck you Look at me Hall Muslim bitch I

fuck you you feel how I fuck you

Say you enjoy it

Tell me you love it when I fuck you That's all you wait for all

day long

My sex in your mouth that's all you wait for

All day long screaming and crying for me to fuck you Tell me

you're taking pleasure

Come on, tell me you're enjoying it You fucking bitch answer
me

The pieces of flesh I've picked up for you Eat them eat them
your brothers

You love it I can see look at me you love it Only a Muslim bitch
like you could love Muslims

See when I was a kid I used to fuck bitches and they'd moan with
pleasure You moan like that and refuse to say you're enjoying it?

And your fucking Muslim bitch head on the floor Do you like
that?

Do you feel the pleasure?

Your fucking head against the floor I fucking love your ass

Look at me Look at me Open your eyes

Adila open your eyes

I said open your fucking eyes

Open your eyes Adila

Adila. –

Eyelids closed.

I can see you Mara

You are immense, you are beautiful, you are sweet

Mara, the silence within your words envelops me

The Living will be there after my death

They will carry my body beyond my wildest hopes

I will be memory in their surges of life
We will return to inhabit their strength

Mara

Ya Allah the Living won't forget me

I am already above my body.

To each soul its capacity.

Here I am again at the edge

The man with the piercing screams of a world hurtling towards
its ruin.

He screams of a world already slipping from his grasp.

He screams his own misery upon my womb.

My vast womb.

My womb that cradles History. My womb that cradles the living.

The living will unleash themselves

Mara, you lay love in my heart

What if I had not died ?

Why if my destiny were to create bridges, to open invisible
paths, through which we might dream again, live again ?

QUESTIONING THE PROCESS OF “THE LIVING”

Aïcha Euzet, author

How did you choose the starting material? From which repertoire?

The basic literary material was proposed by Nedzma, the Bosnian writer. She suggested working on a short story by Ivo Andric, Mara Milosnica.

He's a world-famous author, a great writer. However, this story is rather unknown. I found it very interesting, both in terms of the historical issues it raises, and its relationship to women.

What are the main aesthetic principles behind your writing?

My writing style is what I'd call auto-poetico-historical. This writing assignment is a little different. I'm back to history, of course, and poetry. The relationship with reality is also very strong. But I don't write documentary theater. My plays are close

to poetry, with a strong oral element. I like to play with different aesthetics, I'm constantly looking for form, it's an aesthetic principle in motion.

What were the main thrusts of your rereading of the original material?

First I focused on Mara, trying to give her a voice. Let her express herself. Then I wanted to put into perspective the misogyny and violence of Veli Pacha, who is nothing other than a torturer. I tried to place these characters on a historical scale. I deliberately left out other important aspects of the story to concentrate on the dynamic between these two characters.

How did you integrate feminist issues into your writing?

By drawing a parallel between two women suffering the same ills at two different points in history, I'm focusing on how women are treated in a man's world. Because history is made by men, we can see that women are coming back, but they have long been neglected. In my view, questioning the notion of heroism in history is a feminist act.

I also question the concept of resilience. I wanted Mara and Adila to strive not just for resilience, but for life. Resilience allows us to

survive, but it's not enough. Hence the title of my play: Les Vivantes. ŽIVE. The Living.

Another feminist aspect of my text is the notion of sisterhood. I developed this concept through Mara and Adila, inspired by the testimony of a female war survivor who said, “I am alive to become a light for other women.”

What is the modernity of the play in relation to these issues?

We live in a world where women are victims of wartime rape every day. Every day, women are kidnapped, tortured and raped by men. Recently, in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, M23 militias stormed the city, raped women in a prison and set fire to the building. Over a hundred women prisoners died that day. It's sad to see how timeless these issues are. We can only continue to write, to denounce, to put forward our perspectives as feminists.

If you were involved in the process of creating the show, how did you work with the director and actors?

It all happened quite naturally, I assisted director Júlio Cerdeira for a week and everything went very smoothly.

First of all, there were a lot of questions about the text, so I exchanged a lot with him and with the actresses and the actor.

Secondly, during each rehearsal, the director let me give my point of view on what I was seeing, and in fact it was difficult to restrain myself from giving it, as I'm a director myself. In the end, we discussed our own visions in order to best convey the text. I also played during a rehearsal, as one of the actresses was ill that day. It was very enriching because I was playing in French and the actress was playing in Bosnian. Despite our different languages, we managed to understand each other perfectly. It reinforced my idea that theater is essentially energy.

I loved assisting Júlio Cerdeira and talking at length with the actresses that week.

What changes did you make to the text in the course of creating the show?

My first version of the text was much too long to fit into an hour's performance. The transition from French to Bosnian didn't help. The Bosnian version was even longer!

So I had to make a few cuts, which was quite good for the text, because it forced me to go straight to the point. The writing gesture is cleaner!

Then there are some sentences whose place in the text order I changed. I trusted the actors and the director, especially on stage.

When it came to rhythm, for example. I made the changes that were necessary.

There was also a lot of questioning about the translation. I think the creative process on stage really strengthened my text.

In what ways do you think the staging is faithful to or betrays your initial vision? Where do you think the show could be developed further?

What's magnificent about this encounter between text and staging is first and foremost the energy that Júlio Cerdeira and I shared.

Right from the start, we connected at similar points. We talked at length during walks in Zénica.

Even though we didn't talk during the writing process, he recognized motifs that we'd evoked together. And it all flowed. I think the staging is not only faithful to the text, but also enhances it! I don't see what could be changed.

Júlio Cerdeira's staging is truly magnificent. The connection we share is sincere, and I think you can feel that in the creation.

Júlio Cerdeira, director

What was your initial reaction to the play?

I was very excited to work on Aïcha Euzet's text because of the way it introduces the idea of cross-temporality and acts of invisible sorority between women from different historical contexts. Paradigmatic structures of power and oppression are the historical objects that last longer and that we have the most difficulty to redefine, change, and eradicate. This text shows a nonlinear history, a time that is bended, folded, and distended so women like Mara can travel through it to help each other stay alive.

Since the start, I was very fascinated by the text, the poetry in it, and the way Aïcha Euzet writes about the immaterial, the invisible, and the spiritual. It is a very visual text with a lot of descriptive images, and that was crucial for the development of a dramaturgy that feeds from the text but develops further to objects, sound, movement, costumes, staging, and more.

What aesthetic principles did you use to construct the staging?

For me, it was important to have a naked scene so that we could emphasize the invisible paths and placements of the performers. Two stories that happen on the same stage and somehow seem to

push each other forward in a set made only of lights, cables, and microphones that reinforce this slow atmospheric feeling of pathways being opened and closed in history. This is also one of the purposes of theater, to create a distortion of time and reshape narratives, as Mara says:

“Il y a des lieux dans lesquels les passages sont possibles
Passages vers la vie où le temps se suspend de lui-même
Des lieux où tout pourrait arriver sans étonnement
Dans le calme le plus profond le plus serein”

For me it was also a moment to listen to what Aïcha Euzet wrote, to step back and listen to the silence in her words. I usually work with movement, dance, and violence, but for this play I had to understand that this was about a process of healing and grieving, about the way poetry can make us reach the intangible, about ways to find peace after trauma.

What difficulties did the play pose for you during its creation?

The most difficult aspect of this experience was working with a text that was originally written in French, but it was also translated to Bosnian for the actors and to English for me. Usually working with a translated text is not a problem, but in this case, we were doing it in three versions, so our understanding of it was very

different. That was very positive, but sometimes we couldn't understand each other or the text. Aïcha Euzet has a very literary and poetic way of writing, and sometimes we got completely lost in translation. Gladly, when Aïcha Euzet came to Bosnia & Herzegovina to work with us, everything became easier and clearer; we understood her intentions, and she rewrote some parts of the text to make it work better for the stage.

How did you work with the author and the actors?

Aïcha Euzet was a detrimental person in this process. We did the audition process together so that she could be comfortable and excited to write for this specific cast. She was also with us during the process, helping the performers (Adna Kaknjo, Tamara Milicevic-Stilic and Mirza Bajramovic) individually, talking to them about her intentions, the original novel, and the purpose of this feminist rewriting.

It was a true collaborative process that happened not only between performers, director, and author, but also between all members of the team, with production assistants, costume designers, light designer, musician, sound technician, props department, makeup artist, executive producer, graphic designers, and the director of BNP - Zenica. Everyone was essential for the project and very committed to the feminist approach of the Sexual Theatre project,

a collective effort to make Bosnia & Herzegovina a country that recognizes the systemic acts of violence against women in war and in life.

How did you construct the visual and sound dimensions of the show?

The visual and sound dimensions of the show were constructed collectively with a big team from BNP – Zenica.

In costumes, I worked with Ena **Begecevic** to create a dialogue between historical costumes and contemporary clothing. For us, it was important to have figures like Veli Pasha, Turkish commander-in-chief of all the armies of Bosnia, with elements of his historical time mixed with the archetypes of masculinity in today's Balkans. In this way, the costumes were also intertwining and tangling different historical times. In music, I work with Igor **Kasapovic** to create a tapestry of sounds that could evoke this concept, getting us closer to God, to the impalpable, and to this fluid feel of history. Benjamin **Sokolovic** was also very important in the way he transformed Veli Pasha and the Man with the Piercing Eye into more monstrous characters, distorting their voices and making them more fearful and anonymous. With Elvis **Ahmovic**, we created a light design that wove everything

together, from warmer lights to colder lights, changing atmospheres slowly, making us go from 1878 to 1992.

How did you take the audience into account in your staging?

Since it is a very intense text and a very sensible topic, it was important for me to have in mind that I could have victims of violence in war and people with PTSD in the audience when presenting the play in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Because of that, I wanted an approach that could give them hope and courage to help other women with acts of sorority. The play does not downsize the magnitude of the topic, but it's also not gratuitous or replicative in the way that approaches violence.

In *ŽIVE*, the audience is close to the performers in an intimate setting that can enhance silence, tension, and actions, without including them too much in the scene.

How did you develop feminist issues in the process?

Listening was our most important feminist methodology in a process that easily could question the place of speech of these foreign authors. Aïcha Euzet and I listened to a lot of women and visited Medica Zenica and CURE Foundation to understand the usage of sexual violence as a strategy of war against Bosnia. It was incredibly important for us that we could add something to

this very relevant conversation with our perspective on it while always being attentive to local feedback.

Bosnia & Herzegovina has one of the most relevant contributions to women's rights, in the international recognition and conviction of systemic rape as an instrument of war and as a crime against humanity. So, because of that, in this play we keep reenforcing this feminist process of remembrance and reparation, asking the audience not only to listen but also to help, support, and fight for women's compensation and assistance.

In our artistic practice, we created a kind, horizontal, and collaborative process with a less hierarchical structure of power. This made the process not only more pleasing but also more conscious of everyone's wishes and desires, without neglecting or ostracizing any member of the team. Being a feminist is essential, but working on such a dense and intense text can be very difficult for the performers. This forced us to support, to cooperate, and to help each other, like Mara and Adila do in ŽIVE.

Where do you think you could have gone further in this project?

The impact of this project is very big in local and international communities due to the relevance of the themes and the strength of our partnerships with other institutions, NGOs, and audiences. I think we set the first rock of a project that can become less theatrical and more political, that can be more on the streets and engage even more with local communities. In the turn of the 21st century, theatre became a place of truth; fiction dissipated to give place to projects that involved real marginalized communities, not only to represent them on stage but to give them real visibility, to give them tools to heal, to find justice, and to build a better future. I wish I had more time to include these women in a theatre project that I believe can be even more social and even more political.

Adna Kaknjo, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

Many times the story about the war and war events in our country has been staged on theatre stages. But we have to admit that the text of Aisha talks about terrible crimes in a completely naked

way. When I first read the text, I was of the opinion that it was a huge and too responsible task for someone who was not even born in the era of those terrible crimes. But then when we look at the fact that it still happens today, only in a different order, relationship. It's time to say it and stand behind it.

How would you describe the creative process?

When you have wonderful, accommodating, responsible colleagues gathered around the same goal, which is a successful show and a good collective spirit, in that segment even the most difficult topics come with some ease of work.

What difficulties did you encountering the rehearsal?

Honestly, I couldn't name and define them. It is normal for the process to "get stuck" at some point, but that is all part of the creative process and something that can be overcome. Only beautiful things bind me to this collaboration.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

When I talk about our play "The Living", I must admit that we, as the artistic part of it, had absolute freedom from the director Júlio and the writer of the text Aicha. Accordingly, all the questions that

were in the middle of development were resolved and posed with easy conversation.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

It is wonderful when the director and the author come with an already clear concept and this greatly facilitates the creative concept for the actors. So we had a quality synergy within the work tasks.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

I learned a lot during this process as an actress and as Adna. I realized that I have, as we say in our play, a strong "gut". We tell terrible stories and that's how it should be. People outside our country need to hear what the living wounds of the Balkan people are.

- Where do you think the show could be developed further?

The international connection that will happen with this project speaks volumes. It initiates the expansion of acquaintances, the exchange of cultures. On the other hand, we want to tell everyone that no one is alone.

Mirza Bajramović, actor

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

My initial reaction after reading the text of was anything but positive—almost dreadful. I thought that, once again, the theme was one that is so present in our society and community, a topic that has been explored countless times in our theaters, films, and TV screens, and that it would fail to attract an audience willing to watch something filled with suffering, something they have already seen multiple times, and something that could once again trigger trauma among our citizens.

After my first impression, I started thinking more about why foreigners, especially authors from Western European countries, find the themes of the last war of aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina so compelling and intriguing to explore. I came to the conclusion that they are evidently not fully familiar with all the horrific events that took place over 30 years ago and that they keep returning to these topics.

As the author, Aicha, placed the suffering and rape of women at the center of the story, I began wondering how that would be portrayed on stage and what I, as an actor playing the role of the abusers, would have to do. I was deeply unsettled by the thought of having to utter all the horrific lines that were written. What concerned me the most was how the audience in Montenegro would react to a part of the monologue of *The Man with the Piercing Eye*, in which he mentions being "a member of the Serbian armed forces who raped Muslim women."

The reason I thought so much about this is the historical, cultural, and even political connection with Serbia. Considering that Montenegro and Serbia were one country during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I could not rule out the possibility that someone in the audience might have been part of those military formations. It is evident that I was looking at it from a political perspective, and I also wondered how the same audience in Portugal and France would react to the scenes where I play an Israeli soldier who abuses Palestinian children and women. Given that I cannot assess the official stance of Western countries on Israel's entire military operation against Palestine or Hamas, it left me in further contemplation.

My opinion is that far too many innocent Palestinians have died in the fight against Hamas and that this struggle cannot be used as an excuse for the torture and murder of innocent people—Palestinians in their own homes, on their own land.

As a conclusion to this question, I can state that by the time I had finished the first reading, I had already gone through a serious, confusing overthinking process.

How would you describe the creative process?

A wonderful and beautiful experience—perhaps one of the most beautiful. The main reason for this perspective is the working approach of director Júlio Cerdeira, who meticulously and thoroughly approached the research and work on an extremely difficult and traumatic topic, yet in a way that did not create a sense of detachment or resistance in me. On the contrary, day by day, I reflected on his guidance, striving to complete my task with the highest quality and, in doing so, contribute to telling an incredibly important story.

The focus on silence, pauses, a slower pace, and the perception of time was something I had not encountered much in my previous work. These elements left an exceptionally positive impression on me, and each day I eagerly anticipated rehearsals. There were

moments when the working method frustrated me and made me nervous, especially after the first rehearsals in the performance space. However, these feelings stemmed solely from my own attitude toward initial challenges in the process and my struggle with how to approach and resolve evident issues in performance or acting.

I was fascinated by the director's concentration and attention to detail. At times, I couldn't believe what Júlio was capable of noticing, but by the end of the process, I realized how this approach had significantly improved my acting endurance. This included every movement in the space, every spoken word, every thought, and ultimately, the energy received from fellow actors on stage.

Finally, the commitment and dedication of my colleagues, Adna and Tamara, likely contributed to creating a positive energy within the creative team, despite the difficult subject matter and the fact that we were communicating in English, which is not the native language of any of us.

Definitely one of the processes I will remember for a lifetime.

What difficulties did you encounter during the rehearsal?

Understanding and having a sincere relationship with the material or text I was delivering posed the greatest challenge in my work.

The director, Júlio Cerdeira, would often say after a monologue or scene that he “did not believe me,” referring to my performance and delivery. At one point, this started to truly frustrate me because I felt that the more effort I put in, the worse it became.

To be fair, the content and material are such that they do not tolerate an interpretation that lacks sincerity—it demands complete honesty and faith in what you are doing or saying. I spent a great deal of time trying to find the right motivations to connect the content of the scene or text with my personal experience or perception, something that none of us in the performing team had encountered in our own lives.

In general, communicating in English and understanding the director's instructions and requirements sometimes led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, requiring additional clarification. However, the best part was that most of these language barriers ended up turning into jokes and laughter.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

The previous question regarding challenges in the process could have also been addressed in my response to this question, which I consciously chose to elaborate on here. Given that Bosnian Herzegovinian society is largely based on traditional and patriarchal upbringing—especially in smaller communities—I

believe that the issue of feminism was very intelligently integrated into the staging.

It was done wisely, primarily because feminism was not used as a political movement or to promote a manifesto, but rather to highlight the unfavourable and undesirable position of women, the fight for equal rights with men, and ultimately, to emphasize the horrifying fact that various military and political systems use rape as a weapon of war or a strategic manoeuvre. This was excellently portrayed through the parallel stories of Mara and Adila—two different time periods, yet the same or similar methods, separated by 114 years.

I believe that feminism was integrated in a way that effectively illustrates its positive impact on a society that does not necessarily hold a favourable view of anything associated with the term feminism. The daily reality of femicide, the unequal representation of women in our country's political system—especially in executive positions—makes this play a powerful response to pressing social issues.

I believe that the greatest and most profound impact will be felt in smaller communities, where it will push the boundaries of understanding feminism as something normal and as part of the fight for a more just society and women's rights.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

What left a particularly strong impression on me was the vicious cycle of violence against women depicted in the play. The author made an excellent parallel between the events of 1878 and 1992, viewed through the lens of Bosnia and Herzegovina's social and national structure. The story is written in a way that underscores how every crime must be condemned, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

In Mara's story, we see the depiction of rape committed by Veli-Pasha, reflecting something that was present under the Ottoman Empire—a regime that was formally Muslim and committed atrocities against women who were not Muslim. In Adila's story, the play precisely presents the systemic rape committed by a regime that was later condemned by the International Court in The Hague. These crimes were predominantly committed against women belonging to the Bosniak national identity and those who identified as Muslim, by individuals who were not Muslim.

This interpretation remains a highly sensitive and dangerous topic for discussion in Bosnian Herzegovinian society. It is still an open wound, and great caution is needed when addressing it—let alone staging and bringing it to public attention. From today's perspective, the play provides a fantastic historical parallel, illustrating the same atrocities occurring 114 years apart.

The monologue in which the actor speaks about these horrific crimes and contextualizes modern-day crimes was particularly impactful. In it, he states that, as a man, he does not want to play this role, yet he does not condemn men as a whole or masculinity itself as responsible for such crimes. The issue lies with individuals or systems, and not all men should be stereotyped as the same.

The acting techniques required by director Cerdeira—emphasizing tension, silence, and a heightened experience of horrific situations for the audience—were a brilliant interpretation of the author’s text. Considering this and the outcome, I can say that I fully agree with the vision and concept of the play.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

For a long time, I believed that the entire performance should have a faster pace and rhythm, which would, in turn, make the play more dynamic. The main reason for this perspective was my fear that we might create unnecessary pathos. However, after fully grasping the essence of the play and witnessing the audience’s reactions during the dress rehearsals and the premiere, I abandoned this way of thinking. I became convinced that the slower pace of the performance had a profound impact on our

intensity, ultimately creating an excellent atmosphere and a powerful experience for the audience.

What I believe was my most significant contribution as an actor to the overall concept was presenting historical and factual insights about the time periods depicted in the play, helping to deepen the understanding of the context and situations. I feel that these discussions greatly benefited the entire creative team in achieving a more precise and high-quality staging and performance.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

With a greater number of performances, the entire play will gain more confidence and fluidity in acting, which will elevate the overall quality of the production. I consider performances in smaller communities particularly significant, as these areas often hold negative connotations regarding feminism.

I believe that staging the play in such environments will contribute to audience education, as feminism is frequently misunderstood and perceived negatively, even though it simply advocates for equal rights, highlights issues such as the use of rape as a military strategy and addresses other critical social concerns.

Ultimately, these performances could lead to tangible solutions or accelerate discussions on femicide and the legal framework surrounding this issue, which remains a taboo topic in many smaller communities.

It will also be particularly interesting to stage the play in Portugal, France, and Montenegro, as their audiences' reactions and interpretations of our stories will provide valuable insight into how these themes resonate beyond our region.

Tamara Miličević-Stilić, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

The first reading of the text was very painful and disturbing, but precisely because I was aware that all those terrible scenes really happened and are still happening today in some parts of the world. The importance of this text is really great, but it took me a long time to get used to it so that I could approach it exclusively from a professional point of view.

How would you describe the creative process?

Until now, I have not had the opportunity to be a part of this kind of process and I am really happy that I now have it in my experience. It's not often that we work with a foreign director and dramaturg, in English, with this kind of text and directorial concept, and in the end without any scenography and props. In this process, we experienced all that at once and it was very instructive and useful for further work. Also, no matter how difficult the topic was, I can freely say that the process was very nice because the entire author's team was very accommodating and friendly. We all participated in the creation of the play and the process was filled with positive energy.

What difficulties did you encountering the rehearsal?

I believe that there were no major obstacles in the work, and we resolved the minor ones together and very quickly. They were mostly related to the text and movement, which were different from what we were used to until now. But with the support of Júlio and Aicha, we quickly overcame obstacles and found new solutions.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

We actresses, as well as the entire issue of the position of women, were really given a lot of space and everything was directed

towards us. We had not only the freedom, but also the incentive to discuss, propose and integrate the struggle for women's rights both in the process and in the performance. Júlio used every opportunity to emphasize the greatness of the woman as such and not to spoil it with anything, be it the mise-en-scene, the lighting, the way of acting or the setting of Mirza's character, as the only man in the text and on the scene.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

Yes, absolutely. We all had the same goal and idea, we believed in their vision and it resulted in a show that we are all very happy with and proud of.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

First, I am already happy that we will be traveling with the show and that people from different parts of the world will have a little better insight into what really happened during the war, with the aim of raising awareness of these horrors and to suppress any idea that it will ever happen again anywhere.

Second, I hope that we will play the show for a long time and often in order to provide hope, understanding and support to everyone in the audience who has experienced any kind of violence.

NO WOMAN'S LAND

by Cátia Faísco

Inspired by the novel “Skočiđevojka” by Stefan Mitrov Ljubiša

Note of introduction:

Only the first and the last scene should always be kept in the order in which they are presented here. All the other scenes can be moved around freely during the staging. Although M is a male character, it can always be played by a woman.

1. Precipice

As the audience enters, they see a line of women walking across a desert. Everything has a parched yellow tone, there are no plants. The women never break away from the line. Their walk is long, gruelling. When they finally come to a halt, they are standing on the edge of a precipice. They knew this moment would come. The last woman in the line taps the back of the woman in front of her. This tap sets off a domino movement that causes their bodies to

swing and tumble, but only the first one falls. They take a step forward. They repeat this movement until only one woman remains.

Ruža

He says that I am a character from *SKOČIDJEVOJKA* (The Jumping Girl). As if I didn't exist. As if I were invisible. He says my name is Ruža and that the moment will come when I will have to decide whether I want to jump or not. Legend has it, according to an old tradition. But I don't remember the tradition. I don't even remember my story exactly, so I don't know how to share it with you. I only know that when I look into this abyss, with all the beauty of the sea in front of me, I have no desire to jump. It's too rocky. My fear is too great. I wonder why they didn't scream as they fell. I wonder why their bodies made no sound. I wonder why I stood there watching so impassive, so serene, as if I were playing a game.

(pause)

Once upon a time...

2. #unwanted

The women begin to speak to the audience, spreading their arms to greet them.

Hello, I am a woman and I'm unwanted.

#Idonotwantyou

#unwanted

#shouldhavebeenaborted

#adaughterisnotason

#familydisgrace

#genderpreference

#notalllivesmatter

#unequalfrombirth

A

In the “Unwanted” campaign, the Centre for Women’s Rights addresses the issue of selective abortion in Montenegro. One of the posters displayed across the capital showed a girl accompanied by the hashtag #unwanted and the following phrase: “That is the

name of many girls in our Montenegro.” Even though there are laws against it in the present time, it still happens. Parents go for a check-up, find out they are going to have a daughter and decide to terminate the pregnancy.

B

Don't feel pressured to have an abortion, he said.

But think well

Do we really want to sentence our first son to this sad destiny?

C

Our daughter, it is a girl, she replied.

A

The cultural preference favouring boys makes me. I don't know.

Sick. Nauseated. It gives me.

Vomits. Damn patriarchal norms! Damn! Damn! Damn! Damn the pressure that society and family put on women to have males.

D

Heirs.

A

Males.

D

Heirs.

B

What's wrong with calling a daughter *son*?

You are the one always demanding to be equal, aren't you? He asked.

A

I said males.

B

And I said heirs.

C

Calling your daughter a son is not gender equality.

Gender equality is giving her the right to be born.

Gender equality is wanting a daughter as much as you want a son, she replied.

A

#Unwanted

A documentary

A campaign

A song

It doesn't matter that there are laws against it. There's always a way to circumvent the system. There's always someone profiting from the flaws in the system. There's always someone who thinks a woman isn't worth anything.

D

You're not even born yet and you're already condemned to die
Like a witch burnt at the stake for something that others have
imagined you to be.

3. Blizzard

It's winter and he is outside,
Calling for me
He's in his pajamas and slippers
There's snow on the ground
I told him it would be quick

It will take just 10 minutes
That I'd be right back
When he started screaming
Crying out for me
11 minutes had passed
11
10+1
My heart started racing

Thump Thump
Thump Thump
Thump Thump Thump Thump
Thump Thump Thump Thump
Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump
Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump
Thump Thump
Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump
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Thump
Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump
Thump
Thump Thump

I couldn't stand hearing him any longer
Him and my racing heart
So I grabbed my heart
And threw it out the window
It landed right at his feet
At first, he looked at it as if he was going to pick it up
But it was my heart
Not his
Then, he pointed to his watch and turned away,
And left it there
Till the falling snow buried it
And the heart froze
It turned into a cold stone
Into a heavy object
That
One day
When found
Could be used as a throwing weapon.

4. The head of a man is always better at rolling

W2 is building a man, M. His head is enormous. Much larger than the body. Completely out of proportion. She dresses him. She puts on his shoes. The purpose of this isn't to joke. It's a ritual of sorts. She prepares him. She takes on his voice. She takes on his movements. They are one body, one voice. As if in a dance.

M

I cherish my relationship with God above all else. And God is a man. That's why men matter. I am the seed. God chose Noah to build the ark and lead the animals. Who remembers his wife's name? Nobody. She was only there to help Noah fulfil God's will. Just as women are there to bear the seed that man deposits in their bodies. That is, to help fulfill God's will for us to reproduce. The man works, just as God worked tirelessly for seven days. And the woman looks after the home, making sure nothing is missing, that everything is cared for and in order. Without a man, without his seed, no child is born.

That's why men matter, as I said.

The birth of a daughter is not a joyous occasion. It is a punishment. For her and for the family. So, to ease the punishment, the man keeps trying. Over and over again. Until a son is born. Until his lineage is ensured. But if no son is born, a man feels cursed and must raise his hands to the sky.

Oh my God, why have you punished me like this? How many seeds will I have to throw before the fruit is finally a man?

A man has to know how to keep his secrets. Such as the daughters who were never born. Who never even had a name.

Oh my God, do you know how many olive trees I had to plant so that their souls could depart in peace?

However difficult it may be for him, a man has to do it for his family. The man is the head of the house and the woman is the neck. But what's a head without a neck worth? After all, it's the head that does the thinking, isn't it? The neck is just there for support. Let me tell you, a house without a head

Is a house

It is a house indeed.

But it is not a decent family home

It's not

My wife and my daughters would be left alone and lost

Left to who knows what fate

I don't know who would save them

From the confusion

From the desert

From the absolute, sterile desert

Oh, God, let me live a long life

Let me be the force that guides them

Let me be the voice that gives them direction

Let me be the reason

For I am the only one who knows

For I am the only one

The head falls, rolling across the stage. W2 watches as it rolls away. She lets the body fall. Next, she picks up the head and places it someplace where it is clearly visible. M's figure remains ever-present.

W2

I won't be Adam.

I won't be a man.

I won't be a son.

I'll be Eve.

I'll be a woman.

I'll be a daughter.

5. Feminism Renaissance

W2 starts her speech before she is even on stage, as if she were being followed by a crowd. In fact, only W1, W3 and W4 are following her. There may be some banners on the stage. W2 automatically approaches the table covered with scattered sheets of paper and starts sorting them as she speaks. W1, W3 and W4 join her. They clap and praise her speech inaudibly.

W2

So, it doesn't matter if we repeat ourselves.

Women matter.

They're not just here to fill a quota

Or to get the coffee

Or to wear the right dress

Right?

Or to look good in a photo

Or to obey

Or to have no opinions

Or to be birthing machines!

As if their wombs don't belong to them!

Feminism is not a threatening word!

It can't be!

(Pause)

It means courage, equality and resistance against oppression,
right?

W4

Bravo!

W3

Exactly! Wow!

W4

I've got goosebumps.

W2

Thank you, sisters! Without

W1

Yes, yes. It was great. But, maybe you're exaggerating.

W2

Me? Exaggerating?

W3

WTF?

W1

Yes, she is clearly stepping onto slippery ground.

W3

Well, of course, how obvious! Because we've been around for centuries without needing to justify our existence. She's really exaggerating in that speech!

W1

Don't you think you're being a bit dramatic? Maybe men just see things a little differently.

W2

And where did you read that? In the TV Guide?

W4

(speaking to W1)

Wait! Do you think it's our responsibility to make everything accessible and explicit, like some damn role that was assigned to us since we were little?

W1

I didn't say that.

W3

Men simply don't want to understand. It's convenient.

W2

Calm down! I didn't call you here to argue. We need to stay united. Simone de Beauvoir rightly said: *Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself.* Therefore, please, let's think about that. For how long have we been the shadows of men? Should we continue to be seen as an extension of man's will? Sisters! It's time to put an end to this!

W1

Please don't start with the *sister* thing. It's the second time you've used that term, and all it does is scare men away.

W3

We are daughters, wives, mothers. Our existence is defined by what we represent in society. Isn't that reason enough to unite?

W1

I don't know. I'm more for the "each for themselves" motto. Sorority is a very nice word, but it only exists in the dictionary. Don't be fools. At the end of the day, it's them who make the decisions. And, if we're smart, we will know how to take advantage of that... sisters.

All the other women look at her.

W4

Let's hear a big round of applause for this exemplary speech!

W2

(speaking to W4)

Do you really want to keep supporting the male narrative that dictates we should be passive, submissive, and completely moldable? I refuse to be an accessory, a complement to anything.

W4

(speaking to W1)

When did you become so

W1

Visionary?

W4

Indifferent, sceptical, call it what you will.

W1

I just think it's easier for us to survive if we know who to unite with. If a woman doesn't have decision-making power, why should I join her? Why should I even ask for her opinion? It's time we stop acting as a pack.

W2

A pack? But what kind of vocabulary is that? How can you compare us to bitches?

W1

I'm sure you know what I mean.

W3

I don't.

W1

Forget about it. You don't matter.

W3

What did you say?!?

W2/W4

Ignore her.

W2

We're curious. Explain yourself.

W1

A woman always does better when she teams up with a powerful man. And, preferably, pretends that she knows nothing.

W4

If you really believe that, what are you doing here?

W3

Her strong beliefs must have hit some wall.

W2

Sisters! Let's take it easy. Women's solidarity, okay? Let's put our differences aside. I called you here because I have a plan.

W1

Let's get this over with.

W2

SCUM

Society for Cutting Up Men

Are you familiar with it?

W4

Never heard of it.

W2

It's a title of a book written by a feminist called Valerie Solanas. Some people might think she's a bit radical or too extreme. But I. I. I've been reading and re-reading it for some time now, and the more times I do it, the more I understand her vision! She was way

ahead of her time. Sisters, it's not possible to reform the male society, we have to destroy it. Not revolting is not an option.

W3

Hang on, fun fact, wasn't she the one who nearly killed Andy Warhol?

W2

Yes, but that's irrelevant. And she had her reasons, anyway.

W3

You are reading a book of the author who defends the idea that we should destroy men and you rely on thoughts of that person, even though you know she nearly killed someone, and you are telling us that's irrelevant. What are you going to say next? That we need to let our body hair grow in order to be feminists?

W1

For someone who has been so quiet until now, you're full of opinions.

W3

I only speak when it's necessary, can you understand the difference?

W4

Hey! Are we going to let her explain or not?

Pause. They all fall silent.

W2

Okay, okay. We're very. Explosive? Yes, ma'am. In a nutshell, so as not to bore you with the details, she wrote a play called *Up Your Ass*, in which she also hits the raw nerve of the patriarchal culture we live in. She decided to show the play to Warhol and he took it to read. Later, when Solanas asked about the play, he said he had lost it. Don't forget, it's the 1960s we're talking about. It was probably the only existing copy and it must have been typewritten! Anyway, it's said that she didn't accept his explanation because she thought that Warhol was plotting against her to steal her text. So, she took a gun and shot him.

W4

Great! And this is the example we should follow? Go around shooting men? Eliminate them from our existence? Is that your plan?

W1

Is that it? You want to eliminate half the world population? Good luck with that. Don't count on me.

W3

Let her finish the story. Is it true? Did he really keep the text?

W4

Even if he did, do you think that justifies a shot?

W2

They say he kept on saying he had lost it. Even after she was arrested. But I don't want you to focus on that. What she wrote is important. The manifesto!

W1

I'm pretty sure you didn't gather us here to start a book club. Before you continue, let me remind you that biology made us different from men. There are tasks we're more suited to do than they are. Why do we always have to hammer on this forced idea of feminism?

W4

Are you trying to be funny?

W1

Sweetie, you will always be someone else's dinner.

W2

Cut it out! I invited you here because I want to propose that we form a group. A group called SCUM. No one but us will know what it means. It will stand up to the laws that have been designed to imprison, isolate, marginalise and, above all, to silence us. The group won't just protest or make empty speeches. Aren't you tired of asking for equality and recognition? Don't you think it's time we impose a change ourselves?

W3

So what kind of action do you propose?

W2

Raising our fists! Slamming doors! Blowing things up!

W1

That 's too vague.

W3

And violent! But go ahead, explain.

W2

We'll organize meetings, lectures and secret courses for SCUM supporters. We will encourage the use of direct-action tactics. Like, I don't know, performances, marches, boycotts, acts of symbolic or not-so-symbolic sabotage! Who knows? The sky is the limit! We will create clandestine networks to support women who want to act in a more extreme way against men. I imagine that one day there won't be just the four of us sitting at the table, but an army of educated women ready to overthrow patriarchal society.

W4

Your inspiration is someone who lived in the 60s? Second wave feminism? The era of burning bras is over. Maybe you need a moment on Wikipedia to realize that a lot has been done since then.

W2

Do you really think the fight is over?

W3

That's not what we are saying.

W4

Currently, we have more symbolic options. Maybe we could be more inclusive. Maybe we can start by changing the name. For example:

SCUM

Sisterhood for Change and Unapologetic Movements

W2

What's wrong with the one I suggested?

(speaking to W3 and W4)

Do you agree? Do you?

W1

I think you're naive.

W2

Me?

W1

Yes, eliminate men, make them vanish off the face of the earth or send them all to Mars, blah blah blah.

W4

I have to say she's right. Do you have any idea how often hate speech starts with that exact verb, "to eliminate"? Maybe we should be building bridges instead of walls.

W2

You are naive! Bridges? Bridges to what, exactly? So that men can maintain control over us? Or do you think that previous generations haven't tried that? The patriarchy won't fall apart just because we build bridges. Kate Millett has already warned us that our lives are subject to the sexual and political domination of men. "Sexual politics" is the most perfidious form of tyranny – it's why the bridges you talk about always end up becoming walls, not for them, but for us! Bridges? I suppose you think that power is just a matter of goodwill!

W3

Looking for radical solutions? Giulia Tofana, 1659.

W4

17th century? Are you for real?

W3

Tofana invented a highly toxic poison that she named Water Tofana. It was colourless, odorless and tasteless. It is believed that she sold that water to women who were being abused by their husbands. Not to mention that ending a marriage wasn't exactly the easiest thing to do in the 17th century. They say that around 600 men died from it.

W2

I never said they should be killed, but maybe there is something in this story that could be of use to us.

W3

I was being ironic!

W4

Bikini Kill, Pussy Riot, Chicks on Speed.

W1

Who are they?

W4

(sings)

Rebel Girl, Rebel Girl/

Rebel Girl, You are the Queen of my World

Don't you know it? OMG! It's Bikini Kill! The pioneers of the feminist punk movement Riot Grrrls.

W3

Fun fact: I remember hearing about Pussy Riot in the news! Didn't they get arrested by Putin?

W4

That's right!

W2

So what do you suggest we do?

W4

Start a band! We can question patriarchal narratives through our music. We would have a much bigger impact and reach many more people. We could travel the world. Spreading the word.

W3

"Go and spread the word of God!" Like a she-Christ of a sort.

(pause)

Hey! Listen up! I've just had a brilliant idea! A genius idea!

W2

You are distorting everything!

W4

Don't you want our help?

W2

I do, but

W4

Then listen to what we have to say.

W1

What do you think, instead of forming a band, we form a theater troupe? We could name our first play Sexual Theatre, and use the title as a bait to attract men. We'd hide the fact that it was a highly subversive feminist play designed to reprogramme men's minds! Well? What do you think of that?

W4

Not a bad thought. But I still think music is more universal.

W3

We can make adaptations of texts that promote patriarchal literature and deconstruct their meaning.

SCUM – 1 / Patriarchy – 0!

W2

I don't know. I think it's very

W3

We are actresses, we are directors! No one will suspect a thing! That's a really good idea. Wait! (pauses) Maybe we can still run a secret network at the same time. That way we can still protect the women who were let down by the system and who had more radical views. But for everyone else, we'll just be a women's theatre company.

W1

Maybe we should change the name after all.

W2

Kate Millet said

W3

We want to hear what YOU have to say.

W2

Kate Millet said

W4

We should call ourselves the Feminism Renaissance.

W2

Kate Millet said

W3

Maybe we can wear masks. Like the Guerrilla Girls!

W4

We'll be so cool! We're going to take over the world! *Rebel girl, rebel girl,*

W3

you are the queen of my world.

W2 picks up the papers from the table and begins to exit the stage.

W4

Are we really going to do this?

W3

Yes!

W3/W4

Feminism Renaissance!

Feminism Renaissance!

Feminism Renaissance!

6. Each time someone says *Once upon a time*, a woman dies

W4 is sitting and cooking. The audience can smell the food she's making. W2 prepares the staging for the supper.

W1

Here is Katna, sitting and...

W2

Stop. Stop. Stop. We can't just move forward like this. We need to give some context to what we're about to tell.

102

W3

But why?

W2

There is no text without context.

If you type the name Stefan Mitrov Ljubiša he will appear as a Montenegrin writer and politician. You will be able to see his photograph with his arms crossed and thick mustache. It doesn't inspire confidence in me. But do the research and let me know. Ljubiša wrote *Skočiđevojka (The Jumping Girl)*, a story which originates from a legend that tells us about Ruža, a girl promised against her will to a man she does not love. In a nutshell, when she realizes that she cannot escape this fate, she throws herself off a cliff into the sea. I don't know if you've ever visited this place, but it depresses me. And yes, it really does exist. It is a path full of herbs that winds down to the sea. But there is no monument or statue or anything to indicate that it's that place. It's as if it never existed. A piece of no one's land. With no one around. So, symbolically, let us now erect this monument and shape the story of Ruža here so that no other woman has to submit to the fate imposed by patriarchal society.

W2 signals to W1 to resume the story.

W1

Here's Katna, sitting and cooking. Next to her, imagine her son Stevan and old Đurađ.

W3

Why don't we start with 'Once upon a time'?

W1

Who starts a play for adults like that? It's children's stories that begin that way.

W3

But we all like stories. Weren't we going to adapt and deconstruct?

W2

We're tired of watching what happens in stories that start like that. There's always a witch or a wicked queen, or a cruel stepmother, or whatever, that turns the protagonist's life into an absolute hell.

W3

So what do you suggest?

W2

I suggest a woman driving the story, Katna, who, like her ancestors, has always been able to read the future, and who tells her son Stevan...

W4

“Tomorrow is Saint Barbara the martyr, who shed her blood for the faith, and it's been a tradition since ancient times to cook boils on that day. After they're cooked, I'll put the covered “lopiža” in the shade, so that the boils cool and drink the water to the last drop; so, when they settle down and freeze, I will cross myself three times, wipe the lid and tell fortune on that surface, will there be good and prosperity for us this summer, if God wills, what kind of summer will it be... and shall we marry you.”¹

W1

But old Đurađ does not miss the opportunity to devalue her, to suspect her rituals. After all, how many women have been called witches throughout history?

¹ All quotations used in this scene are taken from *SKOČIDEVOJKA* by Stefan Mitrov Ljubiša.

W4

“If I prophesy good, it pleases you; if I prophesy bad, those are old wives' tales and fables.”

W4 pours the contents of what she was cooking into a large bowl, adds salt and stirs. She puts on her sandals and lays out a tablecloth and forks on a small table. The three women gather around the table, make the sign of the cross and begin to eat.

W3

That same evening, Katna kneaded bread and prepared Stevan for the trip to Šestan, from where he would bring fish for the celebration of St. Nicholas.

W2

Can we start talking about toxic masculinity yet?

W3

What do you mean?

W2

Don't you think that the way old Đurađ keeps talking about his youthful days is a way to glorify his resilience and determination, forcing his son to follow the same path?

W3

What bothers me more is that all the work falls on Katna. She tells the future, cooks, kneads the bread and prepares her son for the trip.

W4 slams the cutlery against the table.

W1

If we interrupt every time, we question something, we will never make progress.

But isn't that the way it should be?

W3

Let's move on!

W1

The next day, Stevan saddled the mule and set off on his journey. When he reaches the house of old Vuk Mrkonjić, he introduces himself and tells why he's come. Vuk tells Stevan about his misfortune with the fish and invites him to rest.

W2

This is a very important moment, because that's when Stevan sees Ruža for the first time . Pay attention to the description, I quote: “Ruža entered the house, saw a man she didn’t know, humbly approached and kissed his hand. High waist, black hair and eyes, ruddy face, Ruža looked beautiful and appropriate, so that Stevan involuntarily kept his eyes on the girl.” End of quote. Beautiful and appropriate! As if she were a winter coat!

M1

In the story, Ruža is silent. It is said that this is the custom when girls are in the presence of strangers.

There is a video projection of Ruža.

Ruža

Two weeks. That is how old I was when I lost my mother. I don't remember her death. It is all a blank. They say I was left in the arms of the village women who, one by one, breastfed and fed me during the night. A chain of women raising another woman. What a strength. But no man raises a woman alone. And my father was no exception. So he married a widow who also had a daughter. A stepmother and a sister, like in a fairy tale. Just like in a fairy tale. But when I cooked the beans today, they looked burnt, and

although I don't know how to tell fortune, they say it could be a bad omen.

The women start setting the table. Then they fill the bags with fish eyes. Each at their own pace.

They cross themselves.

W3

Fables!

W1

Superstitions!

W2

Old folk tales!

W3

It's not just the fish that Stevan takes back with him. Ruža's image remains clinging to him. It doesn't really matter what happens after his return. There are celebrations. Beheaded lambs. Tales of fighting and blood.

W1

Stevan is sad.

W4

“What are you sad about, son?”

W1

Stevan wants to leave the village. Stevan wants to leave the burden of family traditions. Stevan is discontent.

W4

“You are single without brothers, with a lot of property, until God is exalted. If it has crossed your mind to get married and make a home, good luck: there are girls to choose from in our village, both by family name, by deed, and by beauty.”

W3

Why must he maintain his lineage and marry within the community?

W1

That is not what he wants! Stevan wants to marry Ruža!

W3

You know what I find incredible about this part? When Katna learns of her son's wish, she fears retribution. Moved by motherly love, she seeks the help of her brother, a respected man in the community. He, of course, argues in favour of challenging the old traditions. I can't help but wonder if Katna would do the same for her daughter. And whether her brother would accept it the same way.

W2

Yes, that aspect of Katna is curious and deserves some thought. But we are almost at the moment in the story in which we finally meet Ruža's stepmother. And at this point, we really need to pause and make a choice.

W1

Didn't we decide YESTERDAY that we would tell this part exactly as it is in the original story?

W3

I don't think we should even mention it. I'm fed up with characters that are detrimental to the way we see feminism and sisterhood.

W2

(reading)

“It is rare for a stepmother to be kind to her stepdaughter when she has a daughter from her heart, but Marija Vukova surpassed all others in malice. Brought to her husband the grown-up daughter Ruma from her first husband, she despised and tortured poor Ruža, killed her with tough work and made her go barefoot. Every day she sent her to the most difficult jobs, to break and drown her under that burden and torment; and she nurtured Ruma like a flower. Everything that is said about Cinderella and Goldilocks, all that happened in Mrkonjić's house every day.”

W3

See? That's terrible!

Video projection shows Ruža combing her hair. W1, W3 and W4 repeat her movements. It is as if they are an echo of Ruža herself.

Ruža

She keeps looking at me. There is contempt in her words, in her gestures. My hair and my face offend her. It's as if my very existence is a mistake. But what's wrong with wanting to do my hair, what's wrong with wanting to be seen? It's not true that I'm

dreaming of a wedding, as she says, I'm not trying to adorn myself to please anyone. This comb is not just any comb. It was my father who gave it to me. It is worth nothing to my stepmother. Neither am I. But when she saw me combing my hair,

W4

“And what are you up to with braids? Take that from your head, so that the village does not mock you. What do you want knee-length hair for? Why don't you cut it or tie with a ribbon, instead of combing that hair for three hours straight?”

Ruža

Then she grabbed me by the hair, closed the chest, took my shoes, scarf and basket.

W1

Terrible!

W3

It's perpetuating this kind of narrative that makes us all look like witches!

W1

It makes me feel depressed.

W2

What if we turned Marija Vukova into a good stepmother?

W3

That would alter the story.

W2

We're rewriting it!

W2 takes the book from W4.

W2

Fine. Let's try. (*Pauses*) Ok, let's go with that! Marija Vukova was known for her pragmatism and for being a strong woman. When she brought Ruma into the Mrkonjić's house, she was aware of the difficulties that bringing the two girls together might entail, but she never gave in to prejudice or favouritism. Unlike other houses, where tradition reigned supreme, there was no room for submission or competition in the house of Mrkonjić. Ruža and Ruma formed a strong bond, defying the norms that dictated they had to compete with each other for attention and privileges. They

learned to join forces and fight for what they rightfully deserved, making the Mrkonjić's house an example of female empowerment and cooperation.

W3

I can imagine Ljubiša turning in his grave!

W1

I like it! Shall we continue?

W2

Yes.

W1

Messengers are sent to Vuk to ask for Ruža's hand in marriage. He gives his blessing.

W3

In the original version, the messenger wishes them good fortune and asks God to give them “nine sons like the nine Jugović brothers, and the tenth a daughter for mercy.” But in this version, we'll say that the messenger prayed to God that they would be happy and have all the sons and daughters they wanted.

W4

Why did you promise her to the Paštrović family? I had already promised her to Rade, the blacksmith from Nadlug.

Video projection of Ruža.

Ruža

What they would tell you would reveal that I was nothing but a pawn in everyone else's hands. They all promised me and ignored my will. Father, oh father, why did you promise me to Stevan? Marija, why did you want me to marry Rade? Not even my aunt respected my wishes. A convent! Do they think I am that incapable of making my own decisions? Or to love someone? What kind of frail creature do they think I am?

W1

Did you hear her? Amend it.

W4

Why did you promise her to the Paštrović family? Ruža deserves to choose her own fate. Why don't you ask your daughter what she wants?

Ruža

I will not bow my head. I will never be a neck to any man.

W2

Now let's skip ahead and ignore all the ploys Marija is conjuring to get her daughter Ruma to marry Stevan. We won't let her. We'll stay true to our version.

7. Tick X if you've been asked this question at least once

A

Where do you live?

How much do you earn?

Are you married?

Do you have children?

Why don't you have children?

Is there something wrong with you?

You should become a mother.

You cannot stay single.

You cannot get divorced.

B

When will you get married?

How many children do you want?

In the first year?

The sooner the better.

Pay attention to your biological clock.

Only one?

Why don't you want more than one?

You have a daughter?

Oh, so now you must have a son.

Are you going to breastfeed?

How will you balance your career and family?

Wow, you want to keep working!

Who will look after the kids while you're working?

Your husband lets you do that?

Who's in charge at home? You or your husband?

C

Don't you think you should be more feminine?

Why don't you smile more?

Who are you dressed like that for?

Isn't the cleavage a bit too much?
Don't you think you're too old for that?
Why don't you wear make-up?
Why don't you wear high heels?
Why have you stopped dying your hair?
Don't you think you're too skinny?
Don't you think you need to lose weight?

D

Are you going to live alone?
Are you travelling alone?
Are you going out to eat alone?
Are you going to the movies alone?
Aren't you afraid of staying alone?

E

Don't you think this job is too hard for you?
That is a man's job.
Don't you worry about being too ambitious?
Don't you think you'll put men off by being too independent?
Will you manage to deal with it on your own?

F

Do you have another headache?

Are you having your period? You are, aren't you?

How many people have you had sex with?

So few?

So many?

Don't you think you're getting too emotional?

Don't you think you're getting too aggressive?

8. Everything is fine

The sound of indistinct male voices is audible in the background.

The women are facing the audience. There is a sense of tranquillity. They nod their heads, straighten their clothes, arrange

their hair. They smile. It is a perfect portrait.

Everything is fine.

Everything is fine.

Everything is fine.

Everything is fine.

Everything

Is

Fine

After a while, a slight discomfort begins to set in. As the voices get louder, the discomfort in their bodies grows. Eventually they can no longer stand it. One of the women screams. Others freeze. The sound of the men's voices becomes deafening. They scream each one for herself, then in unison. The sound dies away.

They are tired.

They are exhausted.

Their bodies begin to release the accumulated tension.

First, each one for themselves.

Then they begin to help each other.

There is a soft laugh.

It gets louder.

And louder.

Until they are laughing uncontrollably.

It has become contagious.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

I laugh the way I want.

Whenever I want.

9. I am perfectly capable of hanging myself by myself

A game of hangman. W2 uses M's body again, after having reattached the head that had been detached. All the movements and sounds made by M are produced by W2. The audience can see the drawing of the game.

M

P!

W2

No.

M

R?

W2

No.

M

M!

W2

There are two Ms.

-- M _ _ _ _ M

M

We shall see who loses their head this time.

W2

No one is going to lose their head. We are playing hangman.

M

Helmsman?

W2

Hangman.

M

It can't be marmoset.

W2

Of course not. The M is in the third syllable.

M

I haven't got a clue. Eight letters... I'll take a guess (*pauses*)
Timestamp! It's timestamp, isn't it?

W2

And where did you find room for the P?

M

It's your fault. You chose impossible words.

W2

Oh, come on, it's not that hard.

M

Why did you want to play this game?

W2

Because it's fun. Come on. You're wasting opportunities.

M

An E.

W2

There's one E.

_ E M _ _ _ _ M

M

The more I look, the less I understand. Give me a hint.

W2

It's against the rules of the game.

M

It's not as if anyone is supervising us.

W2

I can tell you that it's a word you rarely use.

M

Very helpful.

W2

It rhymes with cynicism.

H

Come on, give me a real clue.

W2

Do you give up?

M

No. But I have a feeling you are up to something with this game.

W2

I'm not.

M

Well, help me then. A game is supposed to be fun. And I want to play with you.

W2

Do you like playing Monopoly?

M

I do. Why?

W2

When I was little, that game excited me in a way you can't

imagine. I loved buying houses, streets, buildings. The idea of accumulating properties and being rich made me so excited that I would laugh euphorically.

M

I never found it very fun. Maybe because I wasn't the luckiest kid in the world. It's been a long time since I played it.

W2

I played a few years ago. I had to quit halfway because I started crying. The idea of seeing other people losing houses, mortgaging what was theirs just to pay me, or going to jail because they couldn't pay off the debt, distressed me so much that I had to stop.

M

But it's just a game.

W2

That's exactly the point. Nothing is just a game.

M

Do you always have to approach everything with so much seriousness?

W2

Do you know who invented Monopoly?

M

Is this a trick question? Charles Darrow?

M2

No. It was Lizzie Maggie, an American feminist who, through this game, wanted to warn about the dangers of monopolization.

M

Seems like it backfired on her.

W2

A game, even if it's for children, is never just a game. I'll give you another chance.

M

An A. It definitely has an A.

W2

No.

M

This is not fun anymore.

W2

Feminism. There you have it. The word is feminism.

M

I didn't say that I give up!

W2

You would give up eventually.

M

F E M I N I S M. Ok. That's a good word. Is it time for my head to roll?

W2

No. Don't worry. It's not you they are after.

M

They? Whom then?

W2

It's me they want. What I represent. But I am perfectly capable of hanging myself by myself.

M

There's no need to exaggerate. What kind of conversation is this?
This is just a game.

W2

She walked to her death with her head held high. Her steps firm. The executioner tried to help her step onto the platform with the gallows, but she declined. With her elbow raised, she pushed him aside and said: "I am perfectly capable of hanging myself by myself"².

10. Instagram

Two videos are projected at the same time. Both are Instagram Live broadcasts. Both are speaking at the same time, but only parts of each video can be heard. While one is audible, the other

² Last words attributed to Đurđa Vlahović, just before she was hanged

is muted and the sound alternates between the two. It is as if the audience is controlling this switch. Is it? Could it be that the audience is given the choice of who they want to hear?

M

No, I'm not a feminist.

Or maybe I am.

But I don't like saying I am a feminist because

I guess maybe I don't know what it means to be one.

I don't like to think about myself as a feminist, you know?

Ha ha ha

What does it mean to be a feminist anyway?

Let me know what you think in the comments.

He reads a few comments that the audience doesn't hear.

Well, today's live is to tell you that I'm looking for an Instagram wife

Someone who has more followers than me

Who wants to get married

Yes, that's a must

And I don't want to work

Don't judge me, okay?

The days when a man had to be support his family are long gone.

He pauses to read a few more comments.

Well, if you keep making these comments, I'm going to have to turn them off.

Nobody is making you be here

I am not man enough?

What does it even mean, being a man?

And for who?

Go bother someone else.

I'm moving on,

I want a nose like the one I have with the filter on.

I know, I know, my nose is perfect as it is.

But I want one!

What is wrong with wanting it?

My wife will fall in love with me

And give me a card

And I will spend as much as I want on what I want

All men will envy me

A gold card

A perfect nose

And an Instagram wife.

W4

No, I'm not a feminist.

Or maybe I am.

But I don't like saying I am a feminist because

I guess maybe I don't know what it means to be one.

I don't like to think about myself as a feminist, you know?

Ha ha ha

What does it mean to be a feminist?

Let me know what you think in the comments

She reads a few comments that the audience doesn't hear.

Well, today's live is to tell you that I'm looking for an Instagram husband

Someone who has more followers than me

Who wants to get married

Yes, that's a must

And I don't want to work

Don't judge me, okay?

A woman doesn't have to support the family

She pauses to read a few more comments.

Well, if you keep making these comments, I'm going to have to turn them off.

Nobody is making you be here

I am not woman enough?

What does it even mean, being a woman?

And for whom?

Go bother someone else.

I'm moving on,

I want a nose like the one I have with the filter on.

I know, I know, my nose is perfect as it is.

But I want one!

What is wrong with wanting it?

My husband will fall in love with me

And give me a card

And I will spend as much as I want on what I want

All women will envy me

A gold card

A perfect nose

And an Instagram husband.

M/W4

What's the use of being a feminist if I can't have all this?

11. A goodnight story

Her pregnancy was very far along.

A belly this big.

But someone had to go get the wood from the field.

So she went.

Then the pain came

No one else around

It was common for women to give birth in the midst of a field

So she

Like so many,

Had her there

Amidst the grass,

the trees,

the smell of earth,

sweat

saliva

blood,

a baby girl

Next

She wrapped her left arm around the wood

Her right arm around the baby

And made her way home

He saw her carrying the load and said: “Woman, you didn't have to bring the wood.”

She replied: “Husband, I didn't want to return home empty-handed.”

12. To be or not to be, that is the question

Before they start throwing stones at me,

or threaten me with the gallows,

let me tell you — this story is my own.

Some people will agree

Others will shake their heads

Like this

In a gesture of indignation
As if to say
How outraging
How dare she talk like that
This isn't even real
What planet is she on
What she needs is a man
These words are mine
I chose them.
This body is mine
I am the one who has lived this
If I wanted your opinion
about how I feel
about what I should have done
about my existence
here
in this corner of Earth.
I would have asked for it.
I swear
I would have asked for it
I would have even made one of those questionnaires on social
media
With three or four options to choose from
And you could even pop in an emoji or two

Or simply pour vitriol
So keep your moralizing to yourselves.
It's obsolete.

And go point your finger at someone else.
I'm going to talk about my country
Which could also be yours
Or yours
I sometimes think the flag might be irrelevant
Because we experience the same
On this side
And that side of the border
One border
After another
And yet another.
Here,
when you receive a job offer,
You have to sign a sheet of paper.
But the paper is blank
Like this one
Let me show you

She writes her name with neat, legible letters on a blank sheet of paper.

There is nothing to see but my name, right?

Then you hand over the paper

And all of a sudden, as if by magic

Wait for it

She writes: "I, [name], am unable to continue working here". She reads the phrase while showing the paper to the audience.

This is what happens.

You sign first

And later

They write whatever they want

And you employer can fire you

It turns out you already signed the paper

You're perfectly capable of working, mind you

But you got pregnant!

And nobody wants a pregnant woman working

The state will pay for your pregnancy

But the boss won't!

I don't know if I've already told you this

Just to give you a bit of context

I'm an actress

I work as a freelancer
Which means I never know when I'll have work
And when I do have work,
Don't even get me started on roles offer to female actors,
Total cliché
But work is work
It's like in that popular saying, *in a house with no bread, everyone
fights and nobody is right*,
Does it sound familiar?

Anyway, I got pregnant a couple of years ago
I guess people don't do it out of any ill intent
But they have this tendency to make lists
Of what a pregnant woman can and can't do
Con-stant-ly
So I decided to keep my pregnancy a secret
I did it for about 5 months
Afraid I would lose my job
Giving classes
Performing on stage
In part because my husband also has a similar profession
Where everything is totally uncertain and unstable
(*pauses briefly*)
So when I finally worked up the courage

And couldn't hide my belly any longer
I told my colleagues
Some of them were happy for me
Others started telling the students that they can forget about me

As if I were about to disappear
As if I had already died
And I was like
Hey!

Look at me!
And they went:
Nobody can juggle motherhood and teaching at the same time!
Hey!
I'm right here!
And they went:
We'll have to find someone to replace her.

When you get pregnant
No matter how much more voluminous your body becomes
You become invisible
You become useless

In one of the plays I was working on

They immediately found someone to replace me
Without even asking
If I wanted to do it
Or not
If I was capable of doing it
Or not
Someone else decided
It made me furious

As if someone said,
Stand back, there's a fireball heading our way!
Nobody asked me anything
Not a thing
That's what upsets me the most.

In another play
They were about to do the same
In one scene, the perspective of six women was to be shown
I begged
I told them they had to let me take part

Wouldn't it be amazing to have a pregnant woman on stage
speaking about women's rights?
What a powerful

That image
That message
They would be so powerful, wouldn't they?
I managed to convince them

And there I was
8 months pregnant
With my belly big and round
On stage
And even at 9 months I went on
My belly even bigger and rounder
Then I gave birth to a baby girl
And

21 days later, I went back to work

It's true that the Corona virus broke out and made things easier
As all work switched to online
I was able to stay at home
And manage classes, breastfeeding, classes, crying, breastfeeding,
breastfeeding, sleep
deprivation
More easily

I won't pretend it is not hard
Really hard
Just imagine this
You're about to go on stage
Everything's set
You start leaking milk
And you...

(pauses briefly)

People who don't have children don't understand what it takes to
manage all these timings
All the struggle
Everything that you have to do in order to be there
But I wanted to show my colleagues
I still want to
Not only to them
To you too
That it is possible to have a daughter and work

I don't know if any one of you are in a position to make decisions
What I mean by that is if you
Write projects
Put on castings

Direct plays

Curate or direct theatres

Or even festivals

If you do

How often do you have pregnant women working with you?

I don't need you to enumerate

I just want you to ask them.

Some people decide immediately, without asking

But you have to ask people who have children

No matter if they have one child or ten of them

And you have to ask the women who are pregnant

If they can take on a project or not

And, most importantly, it has to be their choice

Still, it makes me sad to think that no man will ever be asked that question

That will never be in question.

Do you want to know more?

I have many many more stories to tell and I'm only thirty years old.

Imagine when I'm forty.

Or fifty.

Or sixty.

Or seventy

Or eighty

13. Open mic day

She picks up a microphone. The stage is now a ring. Her body moves as if she were a boxer. At first there is only one woman, but shortly after others join her. They turn words into rap.

A woman doesn't cry
doesn't get angry
does not show that she is upset
a woman doesn't defy her husband
nor her father
nor her brother

He who remains silent gives consent
the voice of reason
at home
on the street
at work
or in the parliament
a woman is always smiling
fixing her hair
serving coffee
where are her rights
when she is constantly diminished? (divided?)

A woman never complains.

Never.

A woman never complains.

Never.

She has to tidy up,
do the cleaning,
Is dinner ready?
she doesn't even dare to object
a woman was made to accept.

The house

the land
she doesn't own anything
she will have to renounce!
In favour of her brother and her husband,
It's them who will win
the race and reach the goal when the party's over
And if she leaves her husband
Children is her arms
Suitcase in hand
and guess how the story ends.
So, you're back home now?
Total resignation.
Father ordering her around again
Mother ordering her around again
Cause a woman is a woman
And she is only a daughter once again

A woman never complains.

Never.

A woman never complains.

Never.

Now let's hear the flip side

The side of revolt

Of discord
Of patriarchy becoming a mess
We will be masters
Owners
Of our entire body
Of a voice
That doesn't go silent
But provokes creeps
And even opens the way
We will be masters
Owners
Of the house or the land
With no kings
No laws
No traditions
That make us obscure
Or even impure

We will adapt
Post a thousand stories
And hearts
We'll be Instagram queens
With or without a fake husband
We'll be whatever we want to be

Straight or gay

Bi or trans

No labels

And honestly

We're fed up with the bullshit

Of plastic surgeons

Of stretch marks and such burdens

Of those who say

You'll end up by yourself

And the therapy will be on your shelf

You can't silence a woman.

Never.

You can't silence a woman.

Never.

You can't silence a woman.

Never.

You can't silence a woman.

Never.

14. Ruža

Ruža

I see a woman standing on the edge of a cliff.

She could be me.

Her legs are shaking, her face and palms covered with sweat.

There are many of them.

The chorus of women

They may be few, but she feels they are many.

Ruža

With every step forward they take, I take one back.

Rade holds out his hand, or a ring, or a promise.

It's all the same to me.

Faced with the choice they've made for me, I'll have to jump.

The chorus of women

No.

Amend this part.

Ruža

Faced with the possibility of marrying a man who wasn't chosen by my father, I'll have to jump.

The chorus of women

He did promise her to Stevan.

However

There's no moment,

Not even one

Ruža

In which I felt affection for Stevan.

I just want to fulfill my father's wishes, because what he wants for me, for my life, is what matters most.

The chorus of women

Does it matter more than what you want?

Ruža

At last, when Rade almost touched my hand — the hand that was promised to Stevan — I decided to jump.

The final choice will be mine.

Nobody will take it away from me.

The chorus of women

We will not let this story repeat itself

We will not allow men's desires to dictate women's actions

This is not the voice that will be made heard

Ruža

I will not bow my head. I will never be a neck to any man.

The chorus of women

In the last instant

Her foot almost slipping

She hears them

Their steps

The melody

The sway

Ruža

Katna

Ruma

Marija

The chorus of women

And all the women who have fed her

A human chain

A long line of women reaching out to her.

The End.

QUESTIONING THE PROCESS OF “NO WOMAN’S LAND”

Cátia Faísco, author

We live in very dangerous times for women. I am not only speaking about my own country, but also about many others where the rights we fought for over decades are being reversed, erased. As if we were nothing more than an accessory to a man’s life. Should I remain impassive and serene in the face of the daily news of violence against women, of hate speech, and of so many other attacks on our existence? I cannot. Even when we are repeatedly told that we must appear less angry. That is why, when I heard the story of *SKOČIDJEVOJKA*, with its female character who jumps from a cliff after so many others have tried to decide her fate, I thought that this play would be the hand extended to keep her from falling. In this context, dramaturgy functions as a gesture of symbolic reparation: rewriting the story to give continuity to lives that were interrupted.

The premises of this project, with regard to dramaturgy, did not focus solely on the re-reading of a classic, but also on our lived

experience as women, drawing on materials as diverse as interviews or theoretical articles, which could add further layers to the text. This openness allowed me to integrate elements such as rap, which brings a vibration of contemporaneity, of street energy, of manifesto, transforming orality into an act of resistance when addressing issues such as inequality.

The way Stefan M. Ljubiša's tragic poem unfolds made it clear that the perspective from which I would work would be that of sorority. By creating an unbreakable bond among women, I was able to turn their stories into points of support that intersect and connect. The use of fragmentation, as an aesthetic tool, opened up space for the writing of micro-narratives, with dialogues, blocks, and viewpoints that function like pieces of a puzzle, enabling the construction of an *à la carte* performance. Freedom is thus also present in this creative gesture, which integrates the director's vision more fluidly, without the obligation to follow a rigid sequence.

It was equally important for me to use fragmentation as a political strategy, in the sense of erasing the dominant voice (which is usually male, patriarchal), the one that decides, that directs the course of the story. Each of the play's blocks represents a possibility of encountering another body, another experience, and,

above all, I am interested in showing that the female experience is not homogeneous, but contains many stories and subjectivities. Fragmentation also calls upon the spectator to occupy the gaps, to connect the dots between narratives, becoming, in a certain way, a co-author of the play.

Although some of the issues addressed in the play refer to Montenegrin reality, such as selective abortion, I also wanted to give voice to more universal problems, because patriarchy knows no borders. In Portugal, for example, obstetric violence continues to be practiced, as if a woman's body did not belong to her. I believe that writing also emerges from the body, from the scars it carries, both visible and invisible. The nationalist idea that we live on an isolated island, detached from the world, concerned only with what happens around our own navel, was something I wanted to challenge in this play. If we look at the collective, we can easily see many points in common: whether in the way we are observed in everyday life — how we dress, eat, behave — or in the way places of power and decision-making continue to privilege patriarchal culture.

In this sense, there is a clear connection with my play *No Woman's Land*. In both texts, the border — whether geographical, social, or symbolic — emerges as a metaphor for the place of exclusion

where women are forced to exist. But it is also in that place that gestures of resistance are born. The female body, so often treated as a territory of oppression, is reinscribed as a space of creation and insurgency. These common threads encouraged the crossing of documentary and fiction. Thus, interviews and real testimonies enter into dialogue with the poetic imaginary, reclaiming space for multiple voices and for the possibility of rewriting history in a plural way.

Meeting the actresses, listening to their stories, and understanding how they read the play was essential to clarifying meanings and introducing some changes to the text. However, due to the way the project was structured, it was not possible to work with them from the beginning. From a creative perspective, I believe that all voices should have contributed more equitably and, in the future, I consider it essential to ensure that. I would have liked to have had a more active voice in shaping the performance because, knowing that this project promotes continuous collaborative work, the editing of the text must also involve the dramaturg and not erase her presence. More than building a project based on a feminist perspective, it is fundamental that its execution is also aligned with feminist practices of collective creation, so that we may break with traditional hierarchies and create a space for the circulation of multiple voices. In this sense, I believe the creative

process is always much richer when it actively integrates all contributions. Shared work, as well as the discussion of ideas, are not only methodological tools: they are political gestures. They are gestures that deconstruct the sovereignty of the director and enable the construction of a performance that is, effectively, a quilt woven by multiple hands.

When I begin to think about writing a text, a great variety of images forms in my mind. As if the words had not yet found their place. My imagination becomes an empty stage where sounds, gestures, or a composition of figures resembling a living picture appear. In the case of *No Woman's Land*, before hearing the voices of the women inhabiting the play, I observed them walking in a desert, in single file and in silence, as if they knew there was still a long way to reach their destination. A poetic image that conveyed not only the aridity of the text I chose to work with but also the reality we live as women. When another artist enters the equation, in this case the director, the text gains new layers and new images emerge. There is beauty in realizing that dramaturgy does not end on the page, but continues seeking dialogue with the stage, with the actresses, and with the audience. In times such as these, of wars, conflicts, and the disappearance of basic rights, writing can, and must, be a political and communal gesture, so that there may be a collective memory of resistance. Writing, for me,

is to leave a living testimony: a memory that does not allow us to be erased and that affirms, again and again, that we are here. That is why *No Woman's Land* is also that gesture of resistance, not only of a playwright, or of Montenegrin women, but of all of us, who find resonance in the words and rise as a single voice.

Laurent Berger, director

What was your initial reaction to the play?

My first reaction when reading the play was one of real enthusiasm. We had already exchanged a lot with Cátia, and she had taken part in the casting and first rehearsals, and really, she took care to give us a text that both transformed the original work through a very contemporary lens and also allowed us a wide range of interpretations, as well as a performative dimension that was ideal in relation to the artistic team's vision. Then there was a second truly fascinating aspect of this text: it presented a genuine challenge to interpretation. Not only because it had a highly original structure with shifting, heterogeneous scenes, but also because it addressed the question of feminism and the adaptation of the original material in very diverse ways, multiplying perspectives. This forced us, in rehearsal, to imagine and test a

great number of situations and staging devices that had to evolve and respond to one another. So, on the one hand, we had quite a complex material—in other words, it was not a ready-made for staging—and on the other hand, it was highly stimulating because it constantly presented us with interpretative challenges: the characters were sometimes enigmatic, sometimes we ourselves had to invent the casting of roles and, above all, the staging context. The orality of the scenes, apart from a few where it was fairly clear, offered us a multitude of approaches to stage interpretation and perspectives on feminism.

What aesthetic principles did you use to construct the staging?

The aesthetic approach was closely aligned with Cátia's text, since it carried a distinctly contemporary dimension. On the one hand, there was this desire to have bodies fully present and to explore the very notion of performance. On the other, that same desire meant that the actresses needed to inhabit a space and wear costumes that highlighted their own modernity—the modernity of women today. Hence the choice of very contemporary costumes, designed not only to offer the most vivid possible image of these bodies but also to resonate with the individual sensibility of each actress. In other words, by wearing costumes they had themselves chosen, they could in some way truly be themselves at the moment of performance—only with a touch of fiction, of glamour, or of

rock attitude that gave each of them a uniquely personal stage power.

From the very beginning, we also wanted to integrate both a musical and an audiovisual dimension into the production. Naturally, this influenced the aesthetic perspective: through digital imagery, but also by bringing the outside world into the theatre, creating a constant back-and-forth between the stage as a space of fiction and imagination, and the real—which was itself mediated and continually reshaped by digital tools.

What difficulties did the play pose for you during its creation?

Rather than speaking of difficulties, I would say challenges. This process confronted us with many of them: on one side, the complex and moving structure of the original text and the need to find both dramaturgical and scenic solutions to bring it to life as fully as possible. On the other, the performative approach and the use of camera, video, music, dance, and movement also presented challenges for the artistic team.

Much of this unfolded, especially in the early weeks of research, through improvisation exercises and training, so that we could rise to the performative demands we had set for ourselves. Then came long discussions and countless trials, trying to weave the scenes

together—a task that was not without its difficulties. Perhaps the most complex moment in the process came when, having found a great deal of material for each individual scene, we had to settle on an overall structure. Until then it had remained somewhat underlying, not entirely clear either for me or for the actresses.

But we always placed our trust in the truth of rehearsal, the truth of the stage, and in the sheer pleasure of performing this text. Whatever challenges arose, there was always this desire in rehearsal to find something that gave strength to this feminine presence. And whenever we connected with that energy, we knew we were on the path toward our truth—the vision we wanted to share with the audience.

How did you work with the author and the actors?

As for working with the author, the first priority was to understand the full scope of what the text was asking of us: to ask her whether there were keys, priorities, or elements she considered absolutely essential to preserve, knowing that inevitably we would have to make cuts. It was also important to take her sensitivity into account when she came at the beginning of the process to attend rehearsals.

With the actresses, the work unfolded in three stages. The first was truly exploratory, about forming a group. Some of the actresses already knew each other, others did not, so we had to find a collective energy, a shared enthusiasm, and a way of working together—especially since we came not only from different countries but also with different approaches to theatre and performance.

In the second stage, starting from the material we had, the task was to open up as many possible directions as we could, without yet deciding how the performance itself would be staged. And in the final rehearsal phase, the work became about choosing: selecting among the materials we had generated those that best highlighted the scenes, clarified the stakes of the project for the audience, and—above all—gave coherence to a structure that was not obvious from the outset.

Throughout the process, though, the priority was always the joy of working together. Sometimes we did things we knew would never make it into the final piece, but we did them to preserve and nurture that collective energy and the sheer pleasure of play. And that dynamic carried all the way into the performances themselves.

How did you construct the visual and sound dimensions of the show?

The musical and audiovisual work was present from the very beginning of rehearsals. I myself brought in sound tracks and video concepts, which were gradually enriched by the actresses' own proposals. We created several video clips to train with the audiovisual material, and each of those stages guided us toward selecting sound tracks, defining ways of shooting digital images, and experimenting with editing effects in preparation for the final performance.

Finally, we set up collective training for the more performative sections—the spaces devoted to movement—which allowed us to be fully present, active, and above all receptive to the musical and visual world we had defined together.

How did you take the audience into account in your staging?

Cátia's text is already deeply shaped by its relationship to the audience, by a concern for exchange and dialogue that sometimes takes an explicit form, and at other times remains more implicit. So there were many elements within the text itself that allowed us to prepare for this interaction.

Beyond that, we were truly committed to sharing the visions of feminism embodied by the actresses themselves, and to making this presence, this ongoing reflection on feminism, resonate through direct interaction with the audience. In that sense, the question of the audience's presence was always underlying our work, with a constant awareness that the performance was ultimately addressed to them.

How did you develop feminist issues in the process?

Being myself a man and the director, I had decided from the very beginning that the most important issues related to feminism should be resolved by my female colleagues—whether it was the author, the actresses, or our producer Aleksandra, who was present throughout the entire process and who always brought a deeply enriching perspective. We did not always agree on these questions or on the ways of addressing them, but whenever I had doubts, I tried to give them the floor, so that together we could choose the best possible option for the performance.

This was not without long discussions; in fact, the whole process was one of constantly asking ourselves, at each step, what felt truly modern and what seemed to come from outside. There were, of course, intercultural dimensions at play: the author being Portuguese, myself French, and the actresses Montenegrin.

Understandably, our approaches to feminism differed. Yet it was precisely through respecting each other's affinities and perspectives, and through the fact that each actress could, in her own way, embody and propose her own vision through performance, that we found a path toward making this production a reflection of a feminism that is both contemporary and plural.

Where do you think you could have gone further in this project?

The reception in Montenegro, and indeed in other countries where the production was presented, was very positive—even in its more militant or polemical aspects. This opens the door not only to touring the play in venues that are less culturally hegemonic than the Budva Festival, and in smaller towns where audiences have less access to theatre—something that makes this project especially worthwhile. It can also serve as an anchor point within Montenegrin theatre, which still remains largely under the influence of patriarchy, to become a tool of emancipation and a catalyst for the creation of other feminist and women-led performances.

Milica Šćepanović, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

I found it interesting how Catía managed to transform the story. I was worried about how we would be able to weave it through the theatrical language. All in all, it was interesting to me on the first reading. It is a fragmented dramaturgy that was familiar to most, but one that I always look forward to. The text offered space for imagination and play.

How would you describe the creative process?

My first association is: a women's process. I enjoyed working with the five of them. We had the freedom to express ourselves and to get to know each other better. I would also mention the great support from the people who worked on the technical side, and our Aleksandra who supported us and followed every rehearsal — that is not common. Loran was open and ready to embrace our humor and ideas.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

In my opinion, there weren't any difficulties unusual for the process. At one point during rehearsals, we had differing views regarding the setup of certain elements within the play, but we quickly overcame that with good communication.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

Mostly through humor, in my opinion. Dark humor. Which suits us.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

Well, it depends.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

I believe I contributed with a sense of ease in creation and collaboration in general. I offered solutions that I consider easy to “read.” An example is the solo rap scene, in which I rebelliously express, together with the girls, our stance — we worked together on adapting the text.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

I believe the play should be performed wherever we have the opportunity. For the play to live, it needs to be staged, that is, performed.

Andelija Rondović, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

Katja wrote the text in fragments, and we had the task of selecting the scenes to stage. I choose the ones that were the most ambiguous. It was interesting for me to see what stood out to someone who is not from Montenegro, but who had spent a year doing research.

How would you describe the creative process?

Both the casting and the beginning of the play were completely movement-based. I thought we would continue the process in that way. However, when in the second part of rehearsals for the play on sexual theatre we brought in a couch, I was a bit disappointed because I thought we would abandon everything we had been practicing for the past month.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

The difficulties I personally encountered were connected to deciphering what each scene meant individually. I think I took on too big of a task—the director’s task—of trying to stage scenes for which we couldn’t find a solution. Some of those scenes didn’t work, and I often felt that it was because we weren’t smart enough,

we hadn't researched enough, we hadn't worked hard enough, and we simply didn't know enough.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

I often went online searching for images, slogans, and trying to recall things I had read or heard. The situation was that Katja had written the text, and after she wrote it and after we read it, we didn't really have any opportunity—apart from an interview Katja did with us—but the text itself essentially didn't change. Even though we wanted some things to be clarified, written more clearly, or for some elements to be added, that never happened.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

I think there wasn't really anything specific for me to agree or disagree with. I believe the text was good, and that the direction was somehow done collectively, as a group.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

For the second-to-last question, I won't even answer because I've already spoken so much about it earlier.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

I think in the future what we really need is just an audience, and we need to keep performing this play. And that's it.

Mirjana Spaić, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

My first impression after reading *No Woman's Land*, written by Katja, was a genuine sense of joy at how clearly and precisely the issues of women were articulated on multiple levels. The layered nature of the text sparked inspiration, and my initial excitement quickly turned into motivation and a strong desire to perform in this piece. The fragmented dramaturgy created space for reflection, re-examination, and connecting different themes, building a bridge between the past and the present. Katja's contemporary poetic expression gave the entire work an added sense of elevation, which I see as a gesture of deep respect toward women whose voices must be heard.

How would you describe the creative process?

The initial phase of experimentation was playful, with a focus on discovering movements and physical leaps that would help shape

Skočidevojka. As the process went on, we carefully selected what would remain, making sure every choice served the story and the concept, while leaving us, the actresses, space for play and enjoyment. The second phase was like a rollercoaster – full of ups and downs, uncertainty, and sudden discoveries. We drew inspiration from many sources: images, films, music, music videos, social media, and real-life events. As a small ensemble, we shaped scenes together and attentively listened to one another, which I see as the most precious and intimate part of the entire process.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

Creatively speaking, every challenge was more than welcome – nothing develops an actor like the moment you have to find your own solution in a vacuum of ideas. The language barrier, of course, was a minor obstacle, and all the difficulties that arose on a personal level ultimately became valuable lessons for future professional experiences.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

As I mentioned earlier, through various sources and Katja's research, the refinement of the text, and our creative solutions – that was the process.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

The author's vision, for me, was precise, poetic, and brave, as if every line carried both aesthetic and ethical weight. Her writing gave me the sense of participating in something larger than the performance itself, a kind of cultural dialogue that transcends the stage. As for the direction, it could be described as a sort of minimalism. That openness created a space that allowed us as an ensemble to find our own shared language, to shape scenes and discover solutions, and ultimately, perhaps in our own way, deepen the play.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

The process was a dialogue, sometimes even a clash, where my vision collided with those of others and transformed into something third – something that belongs neither to me nor to them, but to the performance itself.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

My wish is that the play continues to be performed after the project ends – partly because of the story it tells, and partly because we have become such a well-coordinated team (and here I include the technical crew from Budva Grad Teatar). It would certainly be interesting and productive to organize a round table

after each performance, to exchange impressions with the audience and vice versa. I believe we are still searching for the right way and approach to raising awareness about the position of women.

Marija Liješević, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

My first reading of the text was really interesting because I hadn't worked on a piece like this before. Up until now, I'd only done classical texts, so this one pulled me into a slightly different dimension.

How would you describe the creative process?

At first, I had no idea how it could all come together, but once we got into the process, the ideas started to flow. It was wonderful that I had amazing colleagues and a director with whom I could create without any hesitation.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

As I mentioned, the structure of the text is completely different from the classical ones we're used to, and I think that was the most challenging part for me.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

In my opinion, there were more feminist issues integrated into the text than in the actual performance. We made an effort to avoid easy, surface-level solutions and instead tried to bring out the best from the text and present it on stage.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

I feel like each of us had our own vision of what the play should look like and the ideas behind it, but in the end, there's a part of all of us in it. So it doesn't really matter if I fully agree with everything, because in the end, the play truly carries a piece of each of us. Which I think is the most important element in creating a play everyone wants to be a part of.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

My main vision was for everyone to enjoy what they're doing and for the feeling of female power and unity to come through.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

I hope the play will have a life beyond the festivals we have participated in.

Since we already have a translation in English, Portuguese and French, I believe it won't be a problem to translate it into other languages as well. Considering the kind of team we have, it would be a shame for the play not to live on.

Milica Kekic Martinovic, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

The text is written in a fragmented way, so each story evoked different emotions in me—laughter, sadness, confusion, and anger.

How would you describe the creative process?

I joined the team later, so I became part of the production halfway through the process. Because of that, I don't know what happened before I arrived, but when I did, I was welcomed—and that atmosphere continued throughout—with a lot of positive energy. The women are amazing, energetic, and intelligent, and the directors as well. We had a great deal of freedom in our work.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

Since the play is made up of fragments, yet still connected by a thread—the story of the rose—it was difficult to arrange the scenes and their order in a way that created any sense of logic or continuity. Of course, it's all within the same theme, but at the moment when I joined the team, the sequence of scenes was definitely a challenge.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

This is the story of the Rose, whose life decisions were made by others. In our version, we change the course of that story. Through the other stories, we speak about the relationship between husband and wife, about women in the modern age, about abortions, about girl children, and about patriarchy.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

I simply followed the team; they felt good about it, and I still feel free in that sense. I didn't really overthink it.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

Again, I would connect this to my previous answers: I joined later, so I didn't go through a long or complete process. But everything radiated with good energy and freedom.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

I don't know—if we continue performing the play, we'll think about it then.

A BEAUTIFUL VOICE

by Nedžma Čizmo

Inspired by the novel “The Nun” by Denis Diderot

ACT I – Liberté

There are abysses in the world, but I do not believe one descends into them down such a gentle slope.

CHARACTERS:

ACTRESS 1 / SUZANNA

ACTRESS 2 / THERESE

ACTRESS 3 / MOTHER SUPERIOR / PRIEST

DIRECTRESS

FEMALE PRODUCER

VOICE

Suzanna, dressed as a nun, kneels in prayer before the altar. The Mother Superior approaches her from behind.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: I must admit, the passion with which you pray always brings tears to my eyes...

SUZANNA: I did not hear you come...

MOTHER SUPERIOR: It is touching how fervently you love God, yet you so desperately wish to leave this place.

SUZANNA: I am aware that only He can save me.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: And where does your aversion to monastic life come from? I have a feeling you have not told me everything...

SUZANNA: I have, Mother Superior. I've told you everything.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: The habit suits you so well. And you are so lovely. Has no one ever told you how lovely you are?

SUZANNA: Yes, Mother Superior, they have.

The Mother Superior moves closer. Suzanna takes a step back

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Poor child, when I think of everything you've been through in the previous convent, it is no wonder you loathe this calling. Those cruel, wicked creatures! To bind these hands with rope! To soak these eyes with tears! To tear these tender shoulders with the whip!

The Mother Superior lowers Suzanna's robe from her shoulders and begins to kiss her

SUZANNA: Dear Mother, what if someone comes...?

She steps away

MOTHER SUPERIOR: You spoke with the confessor again today?

SUZANNA: Yes, I did.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Did you speak of me?

Suzanna remains silent

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Did you feel any inclination toward him?

SUZANNA: No, not at all.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Hasn't your heart ever felt anything?

SUZANNA: No, never.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Do you not love me?

SUZANNA: I do, Mother Superior. How could you think otherwise?

The Mother Superior moves close, a centimeter from her face

MOTHER SUPERIOR: You are so pure...

SUZANNA: And I intend to remain so.

She steps away

MOTHER SUPERIOR: I believe you. But you do not know the world. And you cannot imagine the allure it may have for you...

SUZANNA: I only long for freedom.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: You do not know men... You do not know the trouble they can get you in... Have they ever cast fiery glances at you when you were outside?

SUZANNA: I would lower my gaze in such moments.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Without any stirring... In your heart? In your stomach?

She begins to touch her body

SUZANNA: Please, the confessor said we must not...

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Forget about the confessor. I am in charge here...

She starts kissing her. Suzanna submits. At that moment, with a sound resembling to thunder from a horror film, Sister Therese enters.

THERESE: What is going on here?

ACTRESS 1: Excuse me, can we stop?

ACTRESS 2: Why do you always interrupt on my entrance?

ACTRESS 1: I'm sorry, it's not about you?

ACTRESS 2: Hell no...

DIRECTRESS: What's the problem?

ACTRESS 3: The little one has a problem with groping on stage

ACTRESS 1: That's not why...

ACTRESS 3: It's like trying to kiss a fucking metal spring...

DIRECTRESS: Do you have a problem with physical contact?

ACTRESS 1: No... It's just... I'm not sure my character would so easily give in to this.

DIRECTRESS: We've discussed this before... This is her moment of liberation. She feels drawn to her. That's why she prays—because her conscience torments her.

ACTRESS 1: Yes, but...

ACTRESS 3: Really? Are we seriously going to talk about this again?

ACTRESS 1: I mean, in the novel...

DIRECTRESS: In the novel, what? This is the exact dialogue from the novel. What's your problem?

ACTRESS 1: She doesn't give in there.

DIRECTRESS: That's not true. She does. They have physical contacts multiple times...

ACTRESS 1: That's because Suzanna doesn't understand what's happening. The Mother Superior deceives her into being kissed

DIRECTRESS: Listen...

FEMALE PRODUCER: Let me handle this. At what age did you start feeling sexual attraction? Not necessarily attraction, but when did you begin sensing the closeness of another body differently?

ACTRESS 1: I'm not sure... Around 13 or 14, I guess.

FEMALE PRODUCER: And how old is Sister Suzanna?

ACTRESS 1: Sixteen.

FEMALE PRODUCER: Do you really think she feels nothing when another woman kisses her? That she doesn't understand what's happening?

ACTRESS 1: In the novel, she doesn't! And I think...

DIRECTRESS: This is an 18th century novel. We're staging this today. We won't pretend physical desires don't exist. When someone kisses you, you either feel pleasure or disgust. Your character feels pleasure.

ACTRESS 1: But I don't...

DIRECTRESS: Then fake it! Let's pick it up from Therese's entrance!

The actresses return to their positions

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Without any stirring? In your heart? In your stomach?

Mother Superior kisses her. Suzanna abruptly pulls away.

THERESE: What is happening here?

ACTRESS 1: I am sorry, I can't do this...

ACTRESS 2: Again!

DIRECTRESS: What now?

ACTRESS 3: The little one is a prude. That's what it is... If you want to be an actress, you're going to have to kiss a lot worse lips than mine, just so you know...

ACTRESS 1: The Mother Superior clearly abuses her authority to manipulate her...

DIRECTRESS: It's not an abuse of power if it's mutual.

ACTRESS 1: What if the Mother Superior were a man?

FEMALE PRODUCER: But she isn't. This is a story about women—about liberating female love and sexuality.

DIRECTRESS: The Mother Superior is a woman in a position of power. It is natural that a woman leader takes on masculine traits...

ACTRESS 1: That's not true...

FEMALE PRODUCER: Trust me, it is. A woman leading such a group of women must have balls!

DIRECTRESS: Remind me why I agreed to direct a play with an all-female cast?

FEMALE PRODUCER: Because the project required it.

DIRECTRESS: Is it too late to hire two male actors?

FEMALE PRODUCER: We don't have the budget for that.

ACTRESS 1: There's no need, especially since this actress is clearly playing a man in this production!

DIRECTRESS: Fine. Let's try something.

ACTRESS 3: Try what?

DIRECTRESS: Play the Mother Superior as a man.

ACTRESS 3: You want me to play a man?

DIRECTRESS: Yes. The text remains the same, but you'll be a priest.

ACTRESS 3: Just so you know, prude, they'll still be my lips!

ACTRESS 2: I have a suggestion. Can my character be on stage since every time I enter, my colleague has an ingenious question...

DIRECTRESS: We can also try cutting your character off entirely if this continues!

ACTRESS 2: She can have a hundred suggestions, but I can't have one!

DIRECTRESS: When you're the lead, you'll do it, too.

Actress 2 storms offstage in anger

FEMALE PRODUCER: Take it easy on her. She's clearly trying to impress you... She's literally begging for your attention.

DIRECTRESS: She's spoiled... Positions, everyone! Let's go!

Actress 3 transforms into a priest.

PRIEST: I must admit, the passion with which you pray always brings tears to my eyes...

SUZANNA: I did not hear you come...

PRIEST: It's touching how fervently you love God, yet you so desperately wish to leave this place.

SUZANNA: I am aware that only He can save me.

PRIEST: And where does your aversion to monastic life come from? I have a feeling you have not told me everything...

SUZANNA: I have, Father. I've told you everything.

PRIEST: The habit suits you so well. And you are so lovely. Has no one ever told you how lovely you are?

SUZANNA: Yes, Father, they have.

He moves closer. Suzanna takes a step back.

PRIEST: Poor child, when I think of everything you've been through in the previous convent, it is no wonder you loathe this calling. Those cruel, wicked creatures! To bind these hands with rope! To soak these eyes with tears! To tear these tender shoulders with the whip!

He lowers her robe from her shoulders and begins to kiss her.

SUZANNA: Dear Father, what if someone comes...?

She steps away.

PRIEST: You spoke with the confessor again today?

SUZANNA: Yes, I did.

PRIEST: Did you speak of me?

Suzanna remains silent.

PRIEST: Did you feel any inclination toward him?

SUZANNA: No, not at all.

PRIEST: Hasn't your heart ever felt anything?

SUZANNA: No, never.

He moves close, a centimeter from her face.

PRIEST: You are so pure...

SUZANNA: And I intend to remain so.

She steps away.

PRIEST: I believe you. But you do not know the world. And you cannot imagine the allure it may have for you...

SUZANNA: I long for freedom.

PRIEST: You do not know men... You do not know the trouble they can get you in... Have they ever cast fiery glances at you when you were outside?

SUZANNA: I would lower my gaze in such moments.

PRIEST: Without any stirring... In your heart? In your stomach?
He begins to touch her body.

SUZANNA: Please, the confessor said we must not...

PRIEST: Forget the confessor. I am in charge here...
Therese enters.

THERESE: What is going on...

DIRECTRESS: Stop! This is unbearable to watch...

FEMALE PRODUCER: It's revolting!

ACTRESS 2: Will I ever get to finish my line?

ACTRESS 1: Do you think she would agree to this?

DIRECTRESS: Of course not.

FEMALE PRODUCER: But this confirms that we were right.
This is a story about women and free love.

DIRECTRESS: Absolutely.

ACTRESS 1: Don't you see this is a trap? Can't you tell?

DIRECTRESS: What trap?

ACTRESS 1: The trap set by Denis Diderot! So, women like the Mother Superior end up as sexual predators, manipulators who abuse their position!

DIRECTRESS: Okay. Let's go again, slowly. I understand you. I was like you at your age... Full of feminist shit... Life teaches you that not everything is so black-and-white. This adaptation is a new reading of Diderot...

ACTRESS 1: What's new here? Pornography?

DIRECTRESS: What do you think we should have focused on here?

ACTRESS 1: I don't know... Maybe her relationship with her mother, which is very complex...

DIRECTRESS: The mother pushed her into all of this.

ACTRESS 1: Yes, to justify the sins from her past...

DIRECTRESS: Don't you think she might be looking for the lack of maternal love in another woman? A motherly figure? Huh?

ACTRESS 2: Brilliant conclusion! Can we start now? I'm boiling from the heat...

ACTRESS 3: Really, it's like a hundred degrees...

DIRECTOR: Let's go again from Therese's entrance!

ACTRESS 3: Am I a man or a woman?

DIRECTRESS: A woman.

Therese enters.

THERESE: What's happening here?

MOTHER SUPERIOR: I told you to stay in your room tonight!

THERESE: I wanted to spend the night in prayer.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Fine. Suzanna, go to bed.

SUZANNA: I, too, would like to spend the night in prayer.

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Suzanna, I expect you in my chambers in the morning.

The Mother Superior exits

THERESE: I saw you. You promised you wouldn't be alone with her.

SUZANNA: I didn't promise you anything.

THERESE: Why did you call her to your room last night?

SUZANNA: She came to me...

THERESE: You're lying.

SUZANNA: It's the truth. She wasn't well. She was freezing

THERESE: So, you warmed her?

SUZANNA: I didn't do anything!

THERESE: Why are you here? Huh? Before you came, she only loved me! Get out of here already! Why won't you leave?

SUZANNA: That's all I want! To leave this place!

THERESE: I saw you. You gave yourself to her with your body. And that is a sin. Everyone knows what happens to sinners.

Therese pulls out a whip and hands it to her

SUZANNA: Sister Therese, please don't...

THERESE: You shouldn't be pleading with me but with Him. I'm only worried about you and your soul. You've chosen carnal love over Him, and love like hers quickly turns into cruelty. So, repent!

SUZANNA: Sister Therese!

THERESE: Repent! Or everyone will know what I saw tonight!
Suzanna takes the whip and kneels. Therese strips her robe from her shoulders. Suzanna swings the whip across her back, hitting herself. Therese kneels and leans close to her face.

THERESE: And be honest.

Suzanna strikes herself again. Silence.

DIRECTRESS: Why did you stop?

ACTRESS 2: She has a line!

DIRECTRESS: Then let her say it.

ACTRESS 1: I'm sorry, I... I can't...

FEMALE PRODUCER: Sweetheart, what's the problem?

ACTRESS 3: I'll tell you; the prude is a believer. She's upset that we're portraying the church this way.

FEMALE PRODUCER: Is that true?

ACTRESS 1: It has nothing to do with this...

DIRECTRESS: The real question is, why did you take this role?

ACTRESS 3: For the money!

ACTRESS 2: She wants to play the lead role for which she's not cut out.

ACTRESS 1: The real question is, why are you two acting like men?

DIRECTRESS: Believe me, I'd love to be a man right now, because you'd all be talking to me differently! What are you looking at? You can't say a word to male directors! You kiss their asses, sleep with them to get roles! I know everything! Do you know how many of those same male asses I had to kiss to get this damn opportunity? Huh? How many women are there on the repertoires of French theaters today? Do you know? Miserably few compared to men! And I fought for all of us to tell a woman's story, and if I have to turn into a man for us to tell it, by God, I will! Now, if I need to grow a dick out of my forehead for you to respect me, I will! Because the sentence I hate will prove true: A woman is a wolf to another woman!

FEMALE PRODUCER: Listen, darling, everything will be fine. No one can make you do anything you don't want to. You should speak up about anything that bothers you. This is a safe space, a play about women, and no woman should feel hurt. Okay?

ACTRESS 1: Okay.

FEMALE PRODUCER: You're wonderful and talented...

DIRECTRESS: And she has a beautiful voice!

FEMALE PRODUCER: And you have a beautiful voice... But you're taking up a lot of our time. Time is money. Work suffers because of you.

DIRECTRESS: Let us explain everything again, hoping you'll understand. We're working on a project about woman's liberation. We chose this text because it directly connects to the physical and mental liberation of a young girl. Do you think you can play it? If not, let us know now so we can find a replacement in due time.

FEMALE PRODUCER: Give me five minutes with her.

ACTRESS 2: The young lady's getting extra lessons...

They leave the two of them alone.

ACTRESS 1: She hates me...

FEMALE PRODUCER: It's natural for them to hate you when you're the lead role. Get used to it.

ACTRESS 1: Then let her play it. Let's do a swap.

FEMALE PRODUCER: She doesn't have what you have—your gentleness, fragility, purity. That's what we're looking for in Suzanna.

ACTRESS 1: Then why does my body resist this play?

FEMALE PRODUCER: This is a tough job. You won't always fully believe in everything you're doing. That means sometimes you'll have to act even behind the scenes. Sometimes you have to respect the director's vision, the sponsors' conditions, and

swallow some things. Grit your teeth and do it like a professional. And remember, in this job, you can't trust anyone. They'll always be around you, but you'll always be alone. Especially when working with women. They're envious. A woman is a wolf to another woman, right? Come on, let me see that smile. Smile.

Actress 1 gives a faint smile

FEMALE PRODUCER: That's it. Good.

The others enter

DIRECTRESS: Shall we?

FEMALE PRODUCER: Yes.

DIRECTRESS: Let's pick up from the scene with Therese.

Actress 1 and Actress 2 take their positions.

THERESE: I saw you. You promised you wouldn't be alone with her.

SUZANNA: I didn't promise you anything.

THERESE: Why did you call her to your room last night?

SUZANNA: She came to me...

THERESE: You're lying.

SUZANNA: It's the truth. She wasn't well. She was freezing.

THERESE: So, you warmed her?

SUZANNA: I didn't do anything!

THERESE: Why are you here, huh? Before you came, she only loved me! Get out of here already! Why won't you leave?

SUZANNA: That's all I want! To leave this place! But you should come with me! She's clearly manipulating us, exploiting us. She's pitting us against each other to elevate herself!

ACTRESS 2: She's making up lines...

SUZANNA: We need to leave, Sister Therese, because neither our bodies nor our voices belong to us here. We are prisoners of someone else's twisted fantasies.

DIRECTRESS: This is your last warning! Stick to the script, or you're out!

FEMALE PRODUCER: What's wrong with this woman?

SUZANNA: This is anything but sisterhood, Sister Therese. Instead of sticking together, they're making us rivals!

ACTRESS 3: This one's protesting... Hey, girl, you've got the wrong institution!

SUZANNA: Sister Therese, here violence is called freedom!

ACTRESS 2: Am I supposed to improvise on this? What do I do?

SUZANNA: You need to listen to me!

DIRECTRESS: That's it. Leave the rehearsal!

ACTRESS 1: Gladly. No money is worth you and your false illusions of freedom! If only her mother had stood by her... If only...

Actress 1 exits.

VOICE: That was just another rehearsal in a shitty dark space with stinking linoleum and walls from which the plaster is falling off. A space that kills, but the dreams of a young actress are hard to kill. The dreams of a young actress can't be killed by a shitty rehearsal space, only by a female director staging a bad show. The dreams of a young actress can only be killed by a cramp. A cramp the body produces when it resists. It resists someone else's commands. Because while we dream, the body is still. Surrendered to the waves of sleep. That was just another rehearsal in a shitty dark space interrupted by the protest of an actress who tried to tell her colleagues that she is not a wolf. Because if she is a wolf, they are sheep. And as she was leaving the rehearsal from the shitty dark space, sentences from a novel—whose bad adaptation she had almost played the lead in— were spinning in her head: “Don't be afraid, I love to cry. It's wonderful for a delicate soul to shed tears. You must love tears, you'll wipe mine, and I'll wipe yours, and maybe we'll be happy while you tell me your sufferings; who knows where our compassion might lead us...” Touched by her own thoughts, maybe she would have returned if she hadn't heard a voice from the dark shitty space...

ACTRESS 2: Can I get her role?

VOICE: And somewhere at the other end of the world. Somewhere at the other end of the world, dreams of another young actress are being born...

ACT II – Égalité

"Ah, poor mother, ah, poor child!"

CHARACTERS:

MOTHER

DAUGHTER

VOICE

Mother and Daughter. They sit and talk. Or maybe each speaks only to herself. Maybe they hear each other, maybe they don't. Maybe they hear each other, but they don't understand.

DAUGHTER: I was lucky that the tickets were affordable.

MOTHER: Time has passed so quickly, and yet I thought we had plenty of it.

DAUGHTER: Usually, tickets are very expensive this time of year. This is a good sign.

MOTHER: No matter how much you plan, something always comes up at the last moment. You have to be ready and not lose nerves...

DAUGHTER: The room I'll be living in is small, but it will be enough for me. It's tidy, and that's what matters.

MOTHER: And in the end, you always invite more people than you planned, afraid that someone might feel offended...

DAUGHTER: And I'll be in school all day, on stage—I can't wait!

MOTHER: And happiness should be shared with everyone. At least in that, one shouldn't be stingy...

DAUGHTER: I have terrible stage fright! But I think everything will be better once I get there.

MOTHER: In the end, things always turn out better than you can imagine... The important thing is that we're all in this together...

DAUGHTER: It has to go well! I've dreamed about this for so long...

MOTHER: I've dreamed about it since you were little...

DAUGHTER: And now I've finally made it...

MOTHER: I've finally made it to see the day...

DAUGHTER: To study what I love!

MOTHER: To see you in a wedding dress!

DAUGHTER: Because nothing else matters...

MOTHER: Because nothing else matters...

DAUGHTER: Except for my happiness!

MOTHER: Only your happiness!

DAUGHTER: And to live the way I want!

MOTHER: And to live the way you should...

DAUGHTER: Mom!

MOTHER: And to have your own family...

DAUGHTER: Mom!

MOTHER: To be safe and protected!

DAUGHTER: Mom!

MOTHER: Because if you continue with this nonsense about university, you'll send me to my grave!

Silence, because now they definitely hear each other.

P.S. They still don't understand each other.

MOTHER: A year ago, we gave our word to those people. A whole year!

DAUGHTER: How did we give them our word? You tricked me! You and my sister begged me to agree just so that his rich cousin wouldn't break off her engagement! And you promised me that as soon as that wedding happened, you would break off my engagement!

MOTHER: I thought that in this year, you would have matured! That you would see your responsibility toward the family and get those silly ideas about acting out of your head!

DAUGHTER: I warned you! You knew I applied for my master's! I told you I was planning to go to France... You just didn't want to hear me!

MOTHER: I didn't, and I still won't listen to you! You'll do what's right!

DAUGHTER: Mom, I'm leaving. It's done.

MOTHER: Fine. Go. But you won't have a home anymore. Let's see where you'll come back to when France chews you up and spits you out. Where will you go then?

DAUGHTER: You have so little faith in me? You're that sure I'll fail?

MOTHER: Child, that's not the world you know. They are different from us. It's a cruel place, more than you can imagine. Especially for a woman. They won't respect you; they won't treat you as one of them. You'll always be a foreigner!

DAUGHTER: Mom, those are just prejudices. Many young women study there...

MOTHER: And they come back here to get married! Or they look for someone there...

DAUGHTER: You're talking about marriage again! I'm not going to France to get married; I'm going to become an actress! Mom, you know that's been my dream my whole life...

MOTHER: Fine, go. Chase your dreams. And leave us to wake up in the nightmare you'll create. Why are you looking at me like that? If you leave now, the consequences will be terrible. First, when we break off your engagement, we'll have to face that honorable and respectable family. We'll disgrace them and ourselves. No one will want to marry your younger sister! You won't think about her while you're off chasing dreams, will you? When people find out that my daughter went to a country that has done us so much harm, to take off her clothes and kiss men on camera, we'll be lucky if we're not driven out of town... Or maybe I'll leave myself, out of shame... How will people look at your older sister and her children? They'll be marked by your sin forever... Oh God, what have I done to deserve this... Will I ever atone for my sins...

DAUGHTER: Mom, you're exaggerating...

MOTHER: And you... you'll be alone there... like a lamb among wolves... You have no father, no brother. No husband. No one to protect you.

DAUGHTER: I can take care of myself. I don't need anyone to protect me.

MOTHER: Oh sure, you can do everything on your own, and I'll be left to deal with this mess. I'll have to stand before those people and break off the engagement!

DAUGHTER: I'll gladly do it for you!

MOTHER: Just so they can see how big your mouth is, that they lost nothing... God help me... Disgrace and shame!

DAUGHTER: They'll regret it even more when I come back...

MOTHER: Oh? So, you will come back?

Silence.

MOTHER: I don't understand why you have to go so far... You can perform here, you have a lovely voice—why don't you join a choir...

DAUGHTER: It's not the same.

MOTHER: They'll take your soul, your upbringing, everything you've learned, and twist you into something else...

DAUGHTER: Mom, I'm going among artists, not to prison... They're good people, young people like me, from all over the world!

MOTHER: They'll give you drugs and alcohol until they completely cloud your mind...

DAUGHTER: I'm not a child; I know what drugs are...

MOTHER: In the end, you'll end up as a prostitute...

DAUGHTER: You're exaggerating...

MOTHER: Better take a knife and kill me now than wound me slowly like this...

DAUGHTER: Mom, pull yourself together! What are you saying...

MOTHER: You're tearing my heart out alive...

DAUGHTER: Please calm down!

MOTHER: How will I face people? How will your sisters face people?

DAUGHTER: What people? The ones who have judged you your whole life, no matter how much you tried to please them?

MOTHER: And your stepfather? What do I tell him?

Silence.

MOTHER: He tried to raise you as his own child. And this is how you thank him...

DAUGHTER: He tried. For you.

MOTHER: Shame on you.

DAUGHTER: Let's not talk about that... It all seems terrible to you now, but if you look at it from another perspective and see how happy I am about this opportunity... You'll be able to stand

proudly in front of all those people and say, “Yes, I supported my child in being happy!”

MOTHER: I can't support you in this!

DAUGHTER: Please!

MOTHER: You made the decision on your own... You say you can do everything by yourself...

DAUGHTER: I can. But it would be easier if I had you on my side.

Silence.

DAUGHTER: It doesn't matter, does it? Nothing I say matters...

MOTHER: My words don't matter to you either. You're just as heartless as your father.

DAUGHTER: They do matter, Mom. But you don't see that with every sentence, you break my heart.

MOTHER: You're a woman. Your heart will be broken anyway. Sooner or later. I'm trying to protect you, to make it as painless as possible. Life. People. Men. Everyone will hurt you at some point... A woman's only happiness is becoming a mother. Only love for her children can mend that heart. And can you imagine how much it hurts when even your own children turn against you...

DAUGHTER: But it doesn't have to be that way! Not all people are bad, and not every woman has to be a mother. I can't imagine having children now. I'd be unhappy, and my children would have an unhappy mother! Unfulfilled! I'd sit trapped in some house,

waiting for a husband I don't love and thinking about the life I could have had but didn't. Is that what you want for me?

MOTHER: If you leave, you'll face the wrath of the whole family.

DAUGHTER: What family? I don't have a family.

MOTHER: How dare you? I did everything to make sure you grew up in normal conditions. So you wouldn't just be a child abandoned by her father! And this is how you thank me?

DAUGHTER: You worked hard to build a family for yourself! So people wouldn't judge you! So you wouldn't just be a woman left with a child!

MOTHER: I don't deserve this! I don't know how you're not sorry!

DAUGHTER: I am sorry, Mom. You didn't deserve it. You didn't deserve to be seduced and abandoned by some jerk who got you pregnant.

MOTHER: Stop it.

DAUGHTER: You didn't deserve to be rejected by your family because of it. You didn't deserve to work two jobs to feed me. You didn't deserve that slightly crooked right shoulder from always having to hold my hand because I was afraid of everyone and everything.

MOTHER: Stop it, please.

DAUGHTER: Even now, when you talk to me, you always lean a little to the side, as if you're still trying to catch me down there

and hide me behind your skirt, away from everyone's eyes. You didn't deserve to marry the first man who accepted you, a man you didn't love. You didn't deserve to still live with a man you don't love.

MOTHER: That's not true...

DAUGHTER: You didn't deserve to spend all these years proving you're worthy of him and his family. You didn't deserve to neglect yourself and all that you dreamed of being, just to be a good housewife...

MOTHER: It's not true, it's not...

DAUGHTER: You didn't deserve to have me, in your beautiful traditional family, to always exist as a reminder, as a mistake, as an outsider. And I know how hard you tried to make me perfect. To show everyone that I wasn't a mistake. That it was worth giving birth to me. And I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry. I'm not just leaving. I'm running away.

MOTHER: You're running away from me?

DAUGHTER: If you see me off, if you hug me and say, "Let me know when you arrive," then I'm not running away. Then I'm leaving with your blessing. Mom, I'm sorry you couldn't be happy. But I still have a chance to be. Will you help me?

VOICE: If only her mother had stood by her. If only Sister Suzana's mother had stood by her and hadn't sent her to the convent. Then no one would have been able to decide her fate. If

only her mother had risen from that piece of paper and spoken loudly to Mr. Diderot, saying, “Mr. Diderot, who are you to decide my daughter’s fate?” Because a mother’s love is stronger than anything—except when both the mother’s and the daughter’s fates are in the hands of a man. If only my mother had stood by me. If only my mother’s skirt had been wide enough for me to hide behind and never step out of that shelter. Instead, in my tiny prison, in my small basement apartment, I fell to my knees and prayed to God for inspiration. I prayed for a long time, my face pressed to the ground.

ACT III - Sororité

HIJAB IS PRESENT

CHARACTERS:

WOMAN 1

WOMAN 2

WOMAN 3

WOMAN 4

WOMAN 5

VOICE

VOICE: A woman, who might have dark skin, or might be completely white. She might have no name, or maybe her name is Lejla. She might be married, or maybe she is divorced. She might be happy, or maybe she isn't. She sits on a chair, or maybe it's a bed. Maybe she's resting, or maybe she's waiting. A woman who might be named Lejla covers her hair with a light fabric, which might be a headscarf. Lejla sits, and they approach her.

WOMAN 1: Your friend was the first to notice that something was wrong.

WOMAN 2: The psychologist was the first to ask how you were.

WOMAN 3: The policeman took your statement that night when you came to the station.

WOMAN 3: The chairwoman of the feminist organization was the first to promise you help.

WOMAN 4: The female social worker was the first to ask about your family situation.

WOMAN 1: Your friend was the first to notice that something was wrong with you, but she didn't ask what, because it wasn't her place to interfere in your privacy.

WOMAN 2: The female psychologist was the first to ask, *How are you?*, and that was something no one had asked you for years.

WOMAN 3: The policeman took your statement that night when you came to the station, but he knew it wouldn't help much.

WOMAN 4: The female social worker was the first to ask about your family situation, but you didn't want to talk about it.

WOMAN 1: Your female neighbor heard that your husband beats you but didn't call the police because she was afraid to get involved.

WOMAN 2: The woman working in the store where you buy bread and milk every day greets you politely, but she hates you.

WOMAN 3: The feminist promised to help you but secretly judges you.

WOMAN 4: The female social worker promised to find you a job but suggested you take off your hijab.

WOMAN 1: Your aunt knows you endure violence. She endures it too.

WOMAN 2: Your mother suspects you endure violence but is afraid to tell your father because she doesn't know how he will react.

WOMAN 3: If you tell your father your husband beats you, he will kill him and end up either in prison or dead.

WOMAN 4: *I am that husband, and I beat you because you irritate me. And you always find a way to irritate me!*

WOMAN 1: I am the female gynecologist who took a vaginal swab when you reported rape, but I also asked you why you wear *that* on your head—this is not a circus.

WOMAN 2: I am your female legal representative, and I will give you a pile of paperwork to fill out and collect so you can prove you are a victim of violence.

WOMAN 3: I am the police, and we will issue a restraining order against your husband for a while, but after that, you're on your own...

WOMAN 4: I am the female social worker who asked if it was really such a problem for you to take off your hijab at work.

WOMAN 1: I am a left-wing politician, and if you ever decide to take off your headscarf, I will be the first to protest in your support!

WOMAN 2: I am a right-wing politician, and in the last election, I told you to go back to where you came from—I don't know why the fuck you're still here.

WOMAN 3: I am a covered woman, just like you, and I told you not to talk to anyone here because they don't like us.

WOMAN 4: I am a liberal young woman, and I believe you have the right to wear whatever you want—I smile at you too obviously when I see you on the tram, just to show you that you don't bother me.

WOMAN 1: I am a liberal man who judges you for being covered but secretly jerks off to porn videos featuring veiled women on Pornhub.

WOMAN 2: I am a model citizen, and I'm afraid you'll blow me up on public transport.

WOMAN 3: We found you a job in a hotel laundry, but you don't like working in a basement. What's the problem? You can wear your scarf there, away from people's eyes...

WOMAN 4: I am your husband, and I gave you four children so you would have as little time as possible to leave the house! What job are you looking for? You're irritating me again!

WOMAN 1: Do you remember that random hooligan who once spat on you in the street when you passed by with that scarf on your head?

WOMAN 2: Do you remember the female clerk who spoke to you as if you were stupid when you came to ask for help?

WOMAN 3: I am the shelter that didn't have enough space to take you in.

WOMAN 4: I am France, and I did nothing to protect you from your abuser.

WOMAN 1: I am Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I wouldn't have done anything to protect you either.

WOMAN 2: I am Montenegro, full of the bones of women killed by their husbands, and I did nothing to protect them.

WOMAN 3: I am Portugal, swallowing the bodies of murdered women into my soil, from which beautiful grass then grows.

WOMAN 4: I am your brother, because of whom you renounced your right to the family inheritance, and now you have nowhere to escape.

WOMAN 1: I am a nun, and my hair is covered just like yours. And they make horror films and porn about me, just like they do about you.

WOMAN 2: I am Sister Suzanne from Denis Diderot's novel, with whose fate he played while taking revenge on the church.

WOMAN 3: I am a female Christian, and my morality is measured by how I dress, just like yours is.

WOMAN 4: I am a female Christian, and my husband beat me too. I reported him to the same police station.

WOMAN 1: I am a female Christian, and I prayed to God with my face on the ground, asking for help, just like you.

WOMAN 2: I am you.

WOMAN 3: I am the bruise on your neck from being strangled.

WOMAN 4: I am your weak hands that tried to stop him while he strangled you.

WOMAN 1: I am your lips that begged for mercy.

WOMAN 2: I am your lips that whispered prayers.

WOMAN 3: I am the prayer rug on which you pray, and only I have heard all your cries to God.

WOMAN 4: I am your soul, which has risen high into the sky, where it no longer hurts.

WOMAN 1: I am Sister Suzanne from Denis Diderot's novel, and I, too, never stopped believing in God—just like you.

WOMAN 2: I am all your dreams that you never fulfilled but dreamed until the end.

WOMAN 3: The mother who didn't support you when you needed it.

WOMAN 4: The imam who will pray over your body at your funeral— and you were so young.

WOMAN 1: The tears in your children's eyes.

WOMAN 2: I am a woman like you.

WOMAN 3: I am a woman with a beautiful voice, just like yours.

WOMAN 4: I am a woman. And you are a woman. If a woman is a wolf to another woman, I have come so we can howl together.

WOMAN 1: I have come so we can howl together with our beautiful voices.

WOMAN 2: Because wolves always travel in packs.

WOMAN 3: Because wolves know they are stronger together and that no one can touch them when they stand united.

WOMAN 4: I am a woman and a wolf from your pack—I recognize you even when you wear a veil.

WOMEN 1: *Awoooooooooooo!*

WOMEN 2: *Awoooooooooooo!*

WOMEN 3: *Awoooooooooooo!*

WOMEN 4: *Awoooooooooooo!*

VOICE: If only I had been a wolf. Maybe I would have shown my teeth to everyone. Maybe I would have torn him apart with my teeth the first time he raised his hand against me. Maybe I would have sunk my claws deep into his face and gouged out those eyes that looked at me like I was nothing. If I had walked into the police station like a wolf, maybe I would have lined up all the officers, and they, pissing and shitting themselves, would have forgotten on which side their gun hung and, full of respect, would have asked me, "Mr. Wolf, what do you need?" If I had been a wolf, maybe my neighbors would have called animal protection services when they heard someone abusing me in my apartment. If I had been a she-wolf, maybe my children would still have a mother. Maybe I would have been a mother to other children too. Maybe I would have taken in some abandoned children, like Romulus and Remus, and they would now be building some new Rome. If I had been a wolf walking with a piece of cloth on my head, no one would have asked me: "Mr. Wolf, who made you wear that? Mr. Wolf, you are not welcome here with that fabric on your head. Please remove it." If I were a wolf looking for a job with a piece of cloth on my head,

no one would have told me to hide away in a hotel laundry
where no one could see me. Because everyone wants to see a
wolf. Because you can't force a wolf to do anything. Because for
a wolf, there are no laws. Because a wolf is not a dog. Because a
wolf is not a woman. Maybe everybody would have feared me.
If I had been a wolf, and if other women had been wolves,
maybe we would have been a pack, and maybe I would be alive
now, howling at the moon somewhere in the mountains.

I flee from darkness into complete darkness.

I flee from silence into sound.

At night in the forest, I don't see faces,
only the glow of eyes.

Here, I am not a loner—

I am just a wolf.

A tree does not whimper when you touch its bark,
and my pain has no sound.

Only when I see the moon
do I scream from my lungs,
for I am not a loner—

I am just a wolf.

THE END

QUESTIONING THE PROCESS OF “A BEAUTIFUL VOICE”

Nedžma Čizmo, Author

To those who believe...

The literary classic that served as my basis for writing the dramatic text is Denis Diderot’s novel “*La religieuse*.” The main heroine of this novel is a young girl forced to take the veil and become a nun at the age of 16, and throughout the novel she tries to escape from the convent. At first glance, it seems as if Diderot is speaking about the freedom of a young woman and her attempt to shape her own destiny, but I could not ignore the “traps of patriarchy” he set along the way.

With that in mind, I extracted three problematic motifs that I want to explore in the real world and from which I want to begin the deconstruction of this literary classic. The first motif was: false sisterhood. Diderot portrayed the nuns in the convent as the main villains of the story, as a menagerie into which his heroine falls. The women in the convent judge Sister Suzanne, abuse her both psychologically and physically, betray her trust, and even those

who support her soon end up dead—as the weakest links in the chain—or it turns out they wanted to exploit her in some way. The second motif is her complex relationship with her mother. The mother is depicted as a highly negative figure, emotionally cold towards her daughter, and someone who pushes her into ruin to atone for her own sins. Although she herself is a victim of patriarchy. And the third motif is women in positions of power, who necessarily abuse that power.

With that in mind, I began my research in France and came across intriguing situations where these problems are present in real life. The whole time, in my head, there was a verbal coinage very popular in the Balkans: “*Žena je ženi vuk*” (“A woman is a wolf to another woman”), which is in fact a reversal of the Latin phrase “*Homo homini lupus est*” (“Man is a wolf to man”). People adapted it to best describe the insincerity of women toward women and the danger they represent to one another. Which led me to ask—why a wolf? A wolf symbolizes a beast and danger, but wolves are animals that move in packs. And that became the core idea of my play: we should not be enemies to one another, but a community.

That is why my play is structured in three different acts, each dominated by one of these three motifs, but also by the importance of community. It was very important to me to start from myself, so I focused, among other things, on the misunderstandings

among women in the world of theatre, but also within the feminist community. We all sometimes fall into these traps, and it is important for those of us who speak publicly about them to recognize and change that within ourselves. The three acts are also different in genre—from meta-theatrical elements, with actresses making a play in the first act, through realism and the emotional relationship between mother and daughter in the second, to complete deconstruction in the third act. I wanted to tell the story of three women inspired by the character of Sister Suzanne from the novel.

The first thing I liked about Sister Suzanne's character was that she believed until the end. She believed in her right to freedom, in God, and in the happy ending she deserved. I wanted as many women as possible to experience that, and that is why I chose for my play to have three main heroines. The title of the work in French is "*La religieuse*," which I translated for myself as "*the one who believes*," and that is how I built the female characters in the text.

Because of the very nature of the novel, I also wanted to explore the position of women in religion. It was especially important to me to speak about the position of Muslim women wearing the hijab in French society. I was deeply shaken by the discrimination these women face, from being unable to work in the profession they want, to the discrimination they suffer in everyday life, on

the street, at the doctor's office, in state institutions. I say this, inspired by certain testimonies, believing that this is not the global experience of all veiled women. But as an author from Bosnia and Herzegovina, where femicide, unfortunately, happens constantly and where we try to encourage women to turn to institutions and report abusers before it is too late, I was interested in what happens when a woman who, because of the way she dresses, faces discrimination from institutions and from those who should be helping her, tries to report violence.

During the work on the play, we encountered many cultural differences. The director of the play and I are both from the Balkans, so we understood each other quite well, but it took us a bit more time to reach an understanding with the actresses. Still, it seems to me that the language of art was the common language we needed, and through it we ultimately brought this story to the stage together. The text itself did not undergo major changes. We shortened some parts, and others emerged from their improvisations, which we then incorporated into the play.

Through this drama, my wish was to send a message to women not to judge other women on any grounds—whether it be appearance, clothing, age, religion, race, level of education, whether they are mothers or not, whether they have a career or not—sisterhood should have no exceptions. Support should have no exceptions. I wanted to tell mothers that they should raise their

daughters to be braver than they were. To tell women in positions of power that they should not imitate male leaders, but learn for themselves how to be leaders. And finally, to tell all women—**Je ne suis pas solitaire, Je suis juste un loup.**

Minja Novaković, director

What was your initial reaction to the play?

My initial reaction to *The Nun* was one of both fascination and urgency. I was struck by how something written in 1760 could still so boldly reflect the society we live in today. What captivated me most was not just the historical content, but how brutally concrete the parallels are with modern institutional power, especially in how it silences women. I felt strong need to let that silenced voice finally speak- not in a way that is "beautiful" by patriarchal standards, but in a way that is true, raw, and resistant.

What aesthetic principles did you use to construct the staging?

The aesthetic was shaped through a blend of emotional truth and political clarity. The process was both experimental and

exploratory. I was deeply interested in creating a space where the actresses could build authentic voices—an organic female code of expression, rooted in their own experiences and truths. There was a deliberate move away from beautifying pain or packaging resistance in a digestible form. Instead, I leaned into instinct, emotion, and imperfection, prioritizing raw expression over polished spectacle.

What difficulties did the play pose for you during its creation?

The biggest challenge was preserving the complexity of Diderot's ideas, while freeing them from historical distance. It was essential that the themes didn't remain locked in the 18th century, but spoke directly to today's audience. Another significant challenge was navigating cultural differences within the international collaboration, especially while testing the strength female solidarity across those divides. But these difficulties were part of the process- they made the final product more truthful and layered.

How did you work with the author and the actors?

The process was deeply collaborative. With playwright Nedžma Čizmo, I spent a month in residency in France, where we conducted research, visited monasteries and feminist organizations, and had conversations with people from all walks

of life. With the actresses, each of them developed their own authentic voice, and we collectively explored the dynamics of sisterhood and solidarity in real time, not just as themes but as working principles.

How did you construct the visual and sound dimensions of the show?

The visual and sound design were constructed as extensions of resistance. We didn't aim for decorative beauty. Instead, we built a world where oppression and rebellion could coexist visually and aurally. The sound dimension was rooted in the human voice itself. I deliberately chose a cappella singing as a central element, to keep the focus on raw emotion and the authenticity of the voice. Without instrumental distraction, the voice becomes more than just sound-it becomes a carrier of pain, truth, and hope. I wanted to touch something invisible but powerful, something that guides every person-a kind of inner force or longing that transcends words. The visual language of the show mirrored this minimalism, aiming not to decorate but to frame the emotional and spiritual journey of the characters as they struggle against silence and suppression.

How did you take the audience into account your staging?

I believe theatre doesn't have to provide answers, but it must have the courage to ask the right questions-bravely and without calculation. The audience was never meant to be passive; they were implicated from the start. I wanted to create a space where they would be uncomfortable, challenged, and emotionally engaged. The play sparked intense discussion, especially around the hijab and the selective application of the law *laïcité* in France--showing that the audience was not just watching, but responding and thinking.

How did you develop feminist issues during the process?

Feminist questions were not a theme--they were the foundation. This was part of a broader project to deconstruct canonized narratives through a radical feminist lens. I wanted to expose the harmful myth that "women are wolves to women", which is a consequence of patriarchy, not a truth. The process was a test of solidarity, and it proved that feminism is not just ideology--it's a practice. From resisting the savior complex imposed by male narratives to reclaiming agency, the feminist lens shaped everything--from research to rehearsal.

Where do you think you could have gone further n this project?

Perhaps we could have gone further in dismantling the inherited power models entirely --not just reinterpreting them. While we deconstructed the narrative from within, the institutional frameworks of theatre itself-funding structures, time limitations, audience xpectations-still shaped what we could or couldnt do. There's always more to uncover. The next step might be to completely reimagine not just the story, but the very way we make and present theatre.

Ximena Primera, actress and assistant director

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

A lot of questions specially for the third act. I found the play direct and a little bit fade, but full of emotion and hidden messages, and comic potential for the first act.

How would you describe the creative process?

Classical in the path, tables discussions to start, and then scene work. In the everyday making a lot of talks about philosophical and political matters, such as: feminist issues, religions, what does the play stands for.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

I would say cultural differences in the way of working. In my experience the relationship between the director and the actors is less hierarchical, and the relationship is more symbiotic. The effort of explaining of cultural references o symbols can be interpreted so differently from one country to another. Meet the logistics standards the director is use to work with.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

By the text (woman and faith, sexism between women, gender violence, breaking generational curses between women). The choosing of symbols: nuns, woman in hijab, wolf, actress, female director. To talk about power dynamics and feminist.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

For me is not as black and white as agreeing. In some point yes, I think the exploration of the pression and violence that women exert on other women is really interesting and a less explored territory in feminism, and for me is was really interesting.

Specially the idea that the bias in unconscious and women sometimes don't realize it, and applied violence even with love - the example of the mother-

For me in that sense the first and second act are really interesting, and fun to play.

The third one for me, arrives like a intruder. I agree with what was being said and defended, but the form for me, feels like, it belongs to another play.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

A part little part of the text, referring to my relationship with France -and that I wrote for my audition- is in the play.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

Maybe high schools, is a little bit strong in some points, but the form is simple and with the correct guidance is an opportunity to talk about difficult subjects.

Manon Guettaf, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

I was surprised with how direct it was. All the scenes are straight forward In the treatment of the subjects witch was quite unsettling. It made me wonder how we would manage to make it work.

How would you describe the creative process?

Tumultuous. Like navigating through shallow water with no idea where the north is. Like a ship where the captain and the crew can't understand each other, yet they have to maintain the ship above water.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

The main difficulty was the language gap and the problem of communication with our director. Coming from very different countries and habits it was a bit of a clash for all of us. Also, we were aiming at different esthetics and the outcome took a while to meet our expectations.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

The feminist issues were integrated by the text, the subject, but mainly by the fact that only women worked on it. Actually form

me, the whole creative process and the whole festival was a clearer representation of feminist issues than the play itself.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

I don't. I agree with the main topic but I struggle to agree with the treatment of the subject and the whole creative process. For me it is very superficial and lack a bit of depth. Also, I fell like the vision of both the author and the director was single-sided which resulted in some clichés that discredited the main objective of the play.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

I think that for all of the actresses, our vision of the issues impacted a lot the creative process, it was impossible to make it differently. We proposed a lot of different path for the director to take, new ideas, modifications, a variety of style in the way we were playing. Each one of us had something different to say about the subject and we tried to put it on stage to make the play really about us.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

It could develop on the treatment of the topics, try to enrich the proposition of the play. It could go and try to complete the speech

with a different vision of the subject to make it more nuanced and complex.

Pauline Auzuret, actress

What was your initial reaction to reading the play?

As an actress who freshly graduated from her 5th year of studies, I was obviously very glad to learn that I was selected for the play *Une belle voix*. Indeed, I appreciate the fact that to walk through a feminist reading of classic literature, this project has in its participants young and emergent artists : those generational gaps are essentials to keep a large vision of this politic subject.

Before reading the play, I read *La religieuse* - Diderot, from which the play was written off. Obviously, it finally went very far from what Diderot did. I adored Diderot's work, I found it indeed in advance of its time, depicting a girl who's rebellious of an institution, who values her beliefs but asks herself if she has to become a nun. So, when I read the play, I had a lot of expectations but not so much from the book was later on in the play.

I liked the first act very much because of its comic sense. It is not so current to use comic mechanics to denounce or criticize a matter and I thought it was very clever to open the play like this. But, later on in the reading, there were some representations I did not approve of. I felt it was a bit naive about the feminist issues. But I especially the poetic moments that Nedjma wrote for transitional monologues.

How would you describe the creative process?

Hard but also efficient. Our cast and the author and director had some disagreements, especially about the representation of the muslim woman at the end of the show. It made the creative process difficult because for the first weeks, we had a lot of debate around the dramaturgy of the text and we did not manage to understand our different point of views. But because of this time took to talk, at the end, we were a bit in the hurry to finish and the play and it made us very efficient.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

Political differences which led to esthetic differences and it was very complex to interpret something I sometimes did not believe in. There were debate also around the representation and how to direct or represent some scenes, especially for the rape scene of

the first act. I found it, sometimes in the process, very violent and that, while the intent was to criticize it, it could value a pornographic imaginary we already suffer from.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

In various parts of the play, we have the figure of the wolf; symbol of ultimate indépendance which, to me, was our feminist image. Also, the fact to put on stage only actresses felt important to me because a lot of times, in plays which are qualified feminists, there are actors to interpretate the part of the oppressor. Indeed, the man is the oppressor but very often, it makes the actor have the bigger part, with a lot of lines, a potential large scale of emotions and reduce the parts of the actresses as victims. I enjoyed being only with women on stage.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

No, I don't but I value this experience (especially the opportunity to play in their country) to understand where those political or esthetic differences come from and since I saw the cultural context of the author and director, I have more keys to appreciate their work and where it's coming from.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

We had a lot of time of dialogues and exchanges. At some point, it was hard to feel heard : because of the language but also of the short time of creation we had which made changes (especially in the text) nearly impossible. I think, I found some intimate and inner purposes to make me go through the play as an actress and instead of focusing on the parts where I disagreed, I focused on the values which we had in common : of inclusion, respect, consent, equality, freedom.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

To be sincere, I don't quite know because although I do not agree with the whole play, I find it very complete. The bridges with Diderot's work could maybe be clearer because sometimes, we do not quite get them although there a lot in the writing and it could ease the understanding of the fraction in 3 acts.

Elsa Trehen-Giacobazzi, actress

To begin with, my English isn't that good. When I read the text for the first time, several things made me wonder about the staging. And then I was moved by the opening scenes, but a certain scene in the text raised political questions for me. It was about a Muslim woman, mother of four children, beaten by her husband, who suffered domestic violence and was stigmatised because of her religion and her hijab. I immediately told myself that I did not want to play this clichéd, one-dimensional and negative character representing my French Muslim sisters. Should Muslim women be reduced to this cliché? I certainly agreed with the observation that Islamophobia exists in France; it is real. But the way it was represented and combated seemed risky to me and made me uncomfortable.

I expressed my doubts and, above all, my explicit desire not to play this character for political reasons, but the role was assigned to me almost immediately at the next meeting with the team, with a little laugh.

I accepted the role, saying that I trusted the artistic direction and that my doubts would be heard and addressed. I was ready to change my mind.

The creative process was very complicated. I felt like I didn't have the right to speak, that it was 'annoying' to ask for dramatic clarifications. The dialogue between the actresses and the director was very complex. The gap grew wider and wider. I made it clear that my role was the most complex, that I needed help and support to play it as well as possible, to do justice to the woman who inspired the scene. My colleagues and fellow actresses tried to plead my case, to explain on my behalf. Communication broke down, and I became the 'pain in the neck' of the group for the director.

The show was called 'A Beautiful Voice,' but I wasn't allowed to use mine.

I was eventually offered a telephone appointment with the author (who was much more concerned with Islam and who was able to bring me more peace of mind) so that she could explain the challenges of the scene to me and ask me about my limits. We talked and afterwards I felt better. I just needed to understand the challenges of my scene, as an actress, not as a puppet.

We later realised that there was a real cultural difference in the creative processes between our three countries. But we regularly felt that our opinions didn't matter, that our questions weren't acceptable and that our emotional balance wasn't being respected. There are scenes where we would have liked to have been asked, 'Are you OK?' 'Do you feel safe?'

I strongly disagreed with the script and the staging. But with time and hindsight, I have softened my opinion of the play and its content. I realise now that what I hated was the creative process. I regret that my relationship with the director was so damaged, that I felt so unsafe. Today, I separate my bad memories from the play itself, and I understand the authors' point of view better. Even if it's not my own, I respect it.

When I realised that my voice would not be heard as an active participant in this work, I decided to treat it as a professional experience rather than an artistic one. It wasn't going to be the first time in my career that I would disagree with the artistic vision, and I had to do my job properly. I learned a lot about my discipline and my professionalism. I did my job and respected the director's vision. Our director was a woman, our age, an artist like us. Despite our disagreements, I couldn't 'ruin' her work. Sisterhood came into play here. Older, more experienced men in this feminist project were waiting to judge her work. I wish the best for my entire artistic team.

Lola Ferrini, assistant director

What struck me most upon first reading the text was its political ambition: to give voice to the experience of religious French women today. To approach feminism through this prism (exploring how Christian and Muslim women relate both to France and to their own institutions) was a bold wager, one that risked slipping into easy comparisons or stereotypes. Yet the collaboration between Nedžma and Minja, enriched by the French actresses' perspective, gave birth to a theatrical project that brought together diverse visions of feminism. This was made possible through an ongoing dialogue between the author, the director, and the actresses, and through the text's evolution during the creative residency.

One of the greatest challenges we faced in the creative process was how to portray, on stage, a Muslim woman wearing a veil. None of the actresses shared this faith, and so the question of symbols weighed heavily on us, forcing us to confront our own sense of legitimacy in using them theatrically. The danger was clear: to reduce them to mere aesthetic props, stripped of their spiritual and cultural depth. I am thinking here of the costume (a veil and an abaya) worn by one actress, or of the scenography that sought to stage a Muslim funeral ritual. This issue, inseparable

from the feminist question, shaped many of our debates: as women, can we truly speak in the name of all women, or should the cultural and religious specificities of each prevail over any attempt at universalization? Reifying womenkind was a trap we wished to avoid, yet I doubt we entirely succeeded. My own French vision of feminism leads me to believe that the women embodied in the play could have been given more nuance, especially the Muslim woman, who too often in France is burdened with stereotypes: jobless, mother of many, dependent on social welfare, beaten by her husband... The play reflects some of these elements. These days, this negative portrait is precisely the one exploited by today's reactionary right in France, and stands in contradiction to the political spirit of the play, though the clichés still persist within it.

And yet, this distance between the French gaze and the Balkan gaze is what ultimately enriched the creation. The same social question, concerning the same religious and social identity, carried by women with the same political intent, can produce radically different artistic responses depending on nationality. To discover and confront these differing feminist perspectives, each shaped by our own origins, was, for me, the most precious gift of the project. The conversations we shared, shaped by our impressions and lived experiences as women from Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, France, Lebanon, and Venezuela, revealed

the extraordinary richness of feminist realities in 2025. Our intimate lives diverge, of course, but so too do the ways we imagine and interpret the world. This multicultural artistic journey illuminated those differences.

COME OUT AND FIGHT?

by Stela Mišković

Inspired by the the book “New Portuguese Letters” by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Velho da Costa and Maria Teresa Horta.

CHARACTERS:

Sara

Elsa

Maria

Jorge

Rodrigo

António

Beatriz

Headmistress

A friend

Each scene begins with a quote from the book *New Portuguese Letters*, written by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Velho da Costa and Maria Teresa Horta.

1. The first scene about Sara

Sara is sitting on the edge of a chair, as if she's about to get up. She is calm and serene, were it not for her strange posture. From time to time she raises her hands to her face as if to wipe away tears.

SARA:

I knew that the shirt had to be dry by 5am. Oh, it's nothing, I just had a feeling that my face was wet. Lately it happens often, I'm walking down the street and I feel tears running down my cheeks... I guess I must be crying. I don't really know. That is the reason why I am here. Pardon? Excuse me, I have trouble hearing out of the left ear... Everything is fine, everything is absolutely fine, the children are all grown up, they have their own lives, jobs, families of their own. They look after me and phone frequently. We have lunch together once a week. Everything is fine. (*Tears are running down her face. Sara takes out a handkerchief and wipes them away.*) There they are again, I'm sorry, it just happens, it is completely unintentional.

Sara's friend enters the scene with her hands full of photos and runs up to her. We have travelled a few decades back in time.

A FRIEND:

Sara, Sara, where have you been? I've been looking all over for you. Look, I've brought these for you. Take your pick.

She hands half of the photos to Sara. They both start going through the photos.

SARA:

What is all this?

A FRIEND:

Look at this one, isn't he handsome? I couldn't find you anywhere, so I had a quick peek. You don't mind, do you?

SARA:

No, no way, I am not doing this! I told you it is out of the question!

A FRIEND:

How unpatriotic of you! Our men are dying, and all you do is sit around and put bits of fabric together.

SARA:

Is that so? I'll have you know I have more customers than bakeries selling hot cakes. Your mother also came to order a dress for you.

A FRIEND:

Did she? What kind of fabric did she bring?

SARA:

Wouldn't you like to know? This one is cute.

A FRIEND:

That one is mine! You can't have him.

SARA:

I don't want nobody, I told you!

A FRIEND:

Saraaaaa!

SARA:

A war godmother! Even the name is creepy.

A FRIEND:

It is not creepy, but noble. Just imagine, for example, this one, all alone there, with no family, no friends, sleepless, hungry... All the way in Africa, among insects, in the heat, defending our territory.

SARA:

It is not our territory.

The friend looks around herself in panic.

A FRIEND:

Be quiet! Are you trying to put us in jail?

SARA:

I'm just saying...

A FRIEND:

Stop talking and pick one.

SARA:

And what if I don't? Will I go to jail? Is it an order?

A FRIEND:

It is. An order from the government and, much more importantly, from me!

SARA:

Fine, this one.

A FRIEND:

You sure have a good eye.

SARA:

Do you want him for yourself?

A FRIEND:

Thanks, but I've already picked mine.

SARA:

So, what now?

A FRIEND:

Now we write them letters to boost their morale.

SARA:

You are such a... It's as if I am listening to a radio broadcast!

A FRIEND:

The name and address are on the back of the photo. I'm sooo excited! Perhaps he is my future husband!

SARA:

Do we have to marry them???

A FRIEND:

You can do what you like, but I'm going to!

2. The first scene about Elsa

Elsa and her daughter are home. Jorge enters.

JORGE:

Hello, I'm Jorge, the dance teacher.

ELSA:

Hello, nice to meet you. I'm Elsa and this is my daughter, Beatriz. Thank you so much for coming. It wasn't easy to find a private teacher, and this is very important for my daughter.

JORGE:

I see. Your house is quite big, there's even a small studio where we can rehearse. I don't see any problems.

ELSA:

When we spoke on the phone, you mentioned that it would be helpful if you had somewhere to stay...

JORGE:

If it's possible, that would be brilliant... You said that you'd like her to have three lessons a week, and traveling back and forth to Braga that often would be cumbersome. If I stayed here, we could have lessons every day. And the price would be the same, of course.

ELSA:

There are several rooms on the upper floor, you are welcome to choose one.

JORGE:

You have a good life.

ELSA:

My father, who passed away not long ago, did his best to give us a good life. But now things have changed... Still, we have this house and I have some inheritance... It's enough for the two of us.

BEATRIZ:

Mother

ELSA:

Excuse me, I'm talking on and on...

JORGE:

What about your husband?

BEATRIZ:

They're divorced. Is there anything else you'd like to know?

ELSA:

Beatriz!

JORGE:

No, she is right! Forgive me for being so curious.

ELSA:

Let me show you your room.

3. The first scene about Maria

Maria is recording a video for a Tik Tok challenge, using her phone connected to a Bluetooth speaker to play music. The music keeps getting interrupted by incoming message notifications. She tries to continue recording the video, but the messages keep coming. Annoyed, she turns off the music and starts reading the messages.

ANTÓNIO:

Hey

What are you up to?

I've been waiting for your post.

You said you'll post it today.

The first like will be mine.

You looked great today.

I'm just saying.

We're going out on Saturday.

You promised me.

Saturday.

I'll take you to the best party.

DJ N Fox.

Do you like him?

I know you do.

When are you going to publish the post?

MARIA:

Do

You

Really

Have

To

Type

Each

Word

In

One

Line?

You

Drive

Me

Crazy

ANTÓNIO:

(laughing emojis)

That's the whole point. To drive you crazy.

Crazy about me.

Ok, I'll stop.

Promise.

(laughing emojis)

MARIA:

Btw, I didn't make any promises about Saturday.

There's no reply for a while. Maria waits a few moments, then turns the music back on and continues the "challenge". All of a sudden, she turns off the music and starts typing

Are you angry with me?

She decides to delete the message without sending it. As soon as she does, she receives a new text.

ANTÓNIO:

Maria was typing... Are you worried that I am angry with you?

Maria screams and throws the phone away.

4. The second scene about Sara

Sara meets her soldier. He's carrying flowers.

SARA:

It makes me happy to know that I gave you comfort during the times of war, but that was all there was to it. I am sorry.

This is followed by a sequence in motion - wherever Sara turns, he appears right in front of her. Whatever direction or side she takes, she ends up bumping into him. At the end, they are standing hand in hand. Sara accepts the flowers, which turn into a wedding bouquet.

SARA:

I thought it was destined to be. Not that other men didn't show interest or try talking to me, but none of them ever spoke to me again. I never saw any of them more than once. It was only later, after I married him, that he told me he used to stop them in the street and warn them not to come near me. As soon as he told me, I forgot about it. Destiny. It must have been destiny. It's easier when it's not up to anyone. And he was lovely. I almost fell in love with him. Or maybe I did, I don't remember. I forgot that too. He was lovely until the moment he put this in my hands (*she points to the wedding bouquet*). Sometimes flowers can be chains, and you can't hear the music because of a shirt. It is a strange thing.

5. The second scene about Elsa

Music. Jorge is dancing by himself. Elsa walks in.

ELSA:

I'm sorry, I thought the lesson was over.

JORGE:

Come on in, the lesson is over. I was just practicing a little bit. To tell you the truth, I don't have the best working conditions at home.

ELSA:

Please go on, I don't want to disturb you.

JORGE:

Don't go. I don't even remember the last time I had a normal conversation.

ELSA:

Conversation I can do, but I'm not so sure about the "normal" part.

Both of them smile.

JORGE:

I haven't asked what it is that you do?

ELSA:

I'm an English teacher.

JORGE:

So we're in the same line of work. We both teach.

ELSA:

Can you make a living from art?

JORGE:

Art can be lived, but... I'll be completely honest – my debts and my creditors, from whom I escaped by hiding here, show that you can't really make a living from art, maybe not even survive. (*He laughs.*)

ELSA:

And that makes you laugh?

JORGE:

Doesn't it make you afraid?

ELSA:

Of what?

JORGE:

I just told you that you're hiding a fugitive.

ELSA:

I'm hiding an artist.

JORGE:

What if they come knocking on your door?

ELSA:

I will not open.

JORGE:

Does that mean I have found my safe haven?

ELSA:

Nevertheless, I'd like to have an artistic profession.

JORGE:

Art is a matter of feeling, not a profession.

Jorge offers his hand to Elsa. They begin the dance of falling in love.

6. The second scene about Maria

The melody changes into electronic music. Maria and António are dancing. It's Saturday night. They kiss passionately. The music fades out and António leaves. Maria is now in her room, texting with António.

ANTÓNIO:

Photo.

Photo.

Photo.

Maria takes a selfie and sends it.

That's all?

Hum...

I need more.

She sends another selfie, pressing her lips together in a kiss.

Turn the camera down a bit.

Maria takes a photo of her feet and sends it.

That's not what I meant.

MARIA:

Go to sleep.

ANTÓNIO:

Just a bit... Don't be like that.

MARIA:

Go to sleep.

ANTÓNIO:

Fine.

After a while, Maria sends a photo of her cleavage.

7. The third scene about Sara

Sara is humming a song while cooking. She is pregnant. Rodrigo enters. Sara runs up to him, takes off his coat and hangs it. She pulls back a chair for him to sit at the table.

SARA:

Lunch will be ready in a minute. You're just in time, take a seat.

Rodrigo sits down.

SARA:

How was work? Has the new painting arrived?

RODRIGO:

It has, but we don't have the paints with the right colours to restore it. They will have to be custom-made. It will delay everything.

SARA:

It happens all the time and everything always works out in the end. Don't worry.

Sara sets the table and serves Rodrigo soup. He tastes it and hurls the spoon away.

RODRIGO:

It's tasteless. Did you put salt and pepper?

SARA:

I was just going to put pepper to your plate. It doesn't agree with me since I'm pregnant, so I didn't put any to the pot.

RODRIGO:

Everything will work out, you say. Why didn't lunch work out?

Rodrigo walks over to Sara and grabs her by the hair.

SARA:

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

RODRIGO:

You're incapable of doing the bare minimum, but you have the nerve to tell me not to worry, and that everything will work out. Are you going to make the colours? Are you?

SARA:

I'm sorry for not having put the pepper, it was a selfish thing to do. I'll add it right away, there is time, the soup is still boiling.

Rodrigo pushes Sara away.

RODRIGO:

Just shut your mouth and get out of my sight. Only then will everything work out.

Rodrigo leaves.

SARA:

We lived in my house. He and I lived on the upper floor, and my parents downstairs. It would have been enough to stomp my foot a couple of times, my father would come up running. After all, I was to blame. He was out working all day and I was at home. I was also working: making one dress per month, at most, and that was all. I didn't take care of my man like I should have. I never stomped my foot. I never left him.

8. The third scene about Elsa

Elsa and Jorge. Elsa is packing bags, Jorge is watching TV.

ELSA:

I was thinking we could visit your family. I've never met them. Now that we've cleared the debts, we could pay them a visit.

JORGE:

We can pay them a visit once you lose some weight and get a bit more fit. I can't have you meet them looking like that, they've only ever seen me with hot girls. Once you're more presentable.

Besides, you have to understand, I've never been with an older woman, so I also have to prepare them for that.

ELSA:

Seven years isn't much of a difference.

JORGE:

Well, it wouldn't be if you only looked seven years older.

Elsa goes silent. She is struggling to hold back her tears. Jorge approaches her.

JORGE:

There she goes again. I can't even make a joke without you making a fuss.

ELSA:

I didn't say anything.

JORGE:

You don't have to. Just making that face is enough to make me not want to go anywhere with you.

ELSA:

Forgive me, you know it hurts my feelings when you joke like that.

Pause.

ELSA:

I've been meaning to ask you... When I gave you the money to pay back your creditors, you told me that your sisters sometimes helped you with your debts, but they had no idea what I was talking about when I asked about it.

JORGE:

You asked my sisters about that? You're out of your mind! When did you talk to them?

ELSA:

When I asked them for their address to send the Christmas gifts.

JORGE:

Why on earth would you ask them that?

ELSA:

You lied to me.

JORGE:

What are you talking about? Why would my sisters tell a stranger that their brother owes them money?

ELSA:

A stranger??

JORGE:

That's it! We aren't going on vacation. I don't care if I already paid for the trip. We're not going.

ELSA:

You paid for the trip? With whose money?

JORGE:

There it is! You've finally cut to the chase! Always looking for the opportunity to throw money in my face. It was you who paid my creditors, it was you who paid my debts, it is you that buy my clothes, my food, take me on holidays, it is you who support me. Here, my angel, a bow of deep gratitude, here is another one.

Jorge bows frantically.

ELSA:

Hold on, calm down, I didn't mean it like that. You know I didn't mean it. I'd never do that. What is mine is yours, calm down. Forgive me, forgive me.

They hug.

9. The third scene about Maria

Maria and António, at her place.

MARIA:

I don't understand what is going on.

ANTÓNIO:

Stop playing dumb.

MARIA:

Then explain it to me, so I know what I did.

ANTÓNIO:

I could make you a list.

MARIA:

In that case, we better go through it item by item.

António takes out his phone.

ANTÓNIO:

Who is this guy? What does this comment mean? “Maria, you’re beautiful.”

MARIA:

He’s just some guy, I don’t even know who he is. A random follower. What’s so terrible about it?

ANTÓNIO:

About leaving comments like this one to my girlfriend?

Maria picks up her phone.

MARIA:

There. Removed. Blocked. Happy now? What's next?

ANTÓNIO:

How many times have you gone out with me this week? And how many times did you see your friends?

MARIA:

How should I know, I wasn't counting.

ANTÓNIO:

Two times with me, three with them.

MARIA:

Alright...

ANTÓNIO:

It's not alright. What time did you get back home last night?

MARIA:

2 am, I already told you.

ANTÓNIO:

And what time did you text me to say you got home?

Maria checks her phone.

MARIA:

At 2:47

ANTÓNIO:

Now who's lying?

MARIA:

Nobody's lying, man!

ANTÓNIO:

What were you doing for 50 minutes?

MARIA:

Taking a shower, having a snack, taking off my make-up, going to the loo, I don't know.

ANTÓNIO:

So that's how it's going to be? I'll show you. This will teach you not to go out without my permission.

António picks up the keys, walks out and locks the door. Maria is left inside knocking on the door.

MARIA:

António, António. Stop fooling around. It isn't funny. Open the door. António.

At first, I panicked. I kept banging on the door and shouting... nothing. He was gone. I normally don't get frightened very easily, and it wasn't the first time I had run into a jerk. Being a woman in this world means learning from a very young age that it's normal for some moron to rub up against you on public transport, for a professor to give you a "compliment", for a friend to slap you on the butt when you walk by, for a stranger to try to push you into the bathroom at a nightclub. I know how to deal with these situations. Sometimes it's with a slap, sometimes with a smile. These are not isolated incidents, it's just the way things are. It's not even one of those things that you tell anyone about, like "Imagine what happened"! You get on with your life. But the feeling of powerlessness that came over me in that moment... that was something I had never felt before. And then I got angry. I'm not a "damsel in distress". I refuse to be. I don't accept it. I opened the window. And I jumped.

10. The fourth scene about Elsa

Elsa and Jorge. Elsa gives him his suitcase.

ELSA:

That is all that was left. You need to give me back my car. And don't ever show up at my work like this again.

Jorge keeps shouting. Elsa looks around to see if anyone can hear him.

JORGE:

You went to the police, you bitch. You will pay for this.

He slaps her across the face.

ELSA:

Keep your voice down, I beg you. This is a school, children can hear you.

JORGE:

Oh, the teacher is worried about her reputation! I don't give a rat's arse about you or your school, do you hear me? Drop the charges or I will make you pay.

ELSA:

I've paid enough already. You can't do anything to me. I will go through with this no matter what.

JORGE:

First take a look at this and then talk.

He shows her a video of them having sex.

ELSA:

I'll go to the police with this as well.

JORGE:

Go ahead. It'll take three months for the court to issue a warrant to get my phone, and by then the whole school and the whole town will have seen it. They'll make me pay a fine and that'll be it. That's all your stubbornness is going to get you.

Jorge leaves and the Headmistress enters the scene.

HEADMISTRESS:

I beg your pardon, Elsa, but I really must ask you to settle your private affairs at home. After all, this is a school, and we must

maintain at least a certain degree of decorum. I think you should take some time off.

ELSA:

Am I suspended?

HEADMISTRESS:

I am sorry.

11. The last scene about Sara

Rodrigo is waking up. Sara is ironing.

RODRIGO:

Give me my shirt. I have a meeting.

SARA:

It's still damp, another 15 minutes and it will be dry enough for me to iron it. Wasn't your meeting at 10? I have everything planned out to the minute...

RODRIGO:

I need to be at the office sooner, you idiot. You have everything planned out? Now you're planning my time?

Rodrigo grabs a slipper and hits Sara across the ear. She falls to the floor. Blood drips from her ear. Rodrigo is shouting "on mute" and hitting Sara who is lying on the floor. She cannot hear him, her ears are ringing. The audience sees the scene from Sara's point of view. They can only see Rodrigo's face grimacing and his mouth moving. Rodrigo repeats these gestures as Sara stands up

SARA:

No, no, it's been 23 years since he hasn't abused me. He's dead now, thank god. And I am fine. The children are fine, they have their own lives. They phone frequently. I'm perfectly happy, it's just that those damn tears turn up from time to time as I walk down the street. I have no idea why, when everything is fine. Excuse me? I'm sorry, I don't hear very well...

12. The last scene about Elsa

ELSA:

I also filed a report about the recording. It took ten months to get the court order. During that time I had to pay for his trips to Berlin, Paris, Sri Lanka and Amsterdam. I was even forced to go with him on several occasions. He never gave me the car back. It's in my name, but the police didn't lift a finger. Finding a lawyer was another nightmare. "Domestic violence? You're still breathing, you don't even have a broken bone, he didn't throw acid in your face, there's not much for us to work with", they kept telling me. When we finally got to the hearing, they left me alone in the room with him, because the judge asked to be left alone with the lawyers. It was then that he whispered in my ear: "You will never sleep peacefully again." Now I'm waiting for the trial and I can tell you one thing: I've always been the kind of person who would not stay silent in the face of violence, the kind of person who would fight back, who would do whatever it took, if only to set an example. But if you were to ask me now - and if I knew what to expect - I would never have gone to the police. Because you're all alone. There is no police, no court, no state. You have no one.

13. The last scene about Maria

Maria

MARIA:

I live on the first floor, so I wasn't hurt too badly. Why didn't I call the police? It didn't occur to me. Since when have the police been interested in stories like mine? My boyfriend locked me in my flat? Big deal! Who cares about a simple argument between a boyfriend and a girlfriend? And why did I let him in in the first place? No, I didn't report it to anyone. But I was no longer afraid.

MARIA:

Don't write to me. Don't call me. Scram.

ANTÓNIO:

But, babe, try to understand.

MARIA:

Scram. Decontaminate.

ANTÓNIO:

I'm sorry, it won't happen again. I love you so much that jealousy makes me lose my head.

Maria doesn't reply.

ANTÓNIO:

Please don't ignore me, I'll do whatever you want.

Maria?

Maria?

I love you.

Maria doesn't reply. After a few moments, she receives explicit photos that she had previously sent to António, as well as videos of the two of them having sex.

In that case, here's how it's going to be, whore.

Let's see if you answer now.

If you don't answer me, I'll post everything.

The photos, the videos, everything.

MARIA:

Post it.

THE END

QUESTIONING THE PROCESS OF “COME OUT AND FIGHT?”

Stela Mišković, author

How did you choose the starting material? From which repertoire?

I choose *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* (The New Portuguese Letters) by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, a seminal feminist text from the 1970s, as my starting point. It belongs to the canon of feminist literature but is at the same time a collective act of political resistance. By drawing on this repertoire, I wanted to connect the historic struggle of women against censorship, silencing and institutional injustice with our contemporary experiences of gender-based violence and systemic neglect. For me, this book stands as both a literary classic and a manifesto of courage, which is why it felt essential to reinterpret it within the framework of feminist readings of classics.

What are the main aesthetic principles behind your writing?

The main aesthetic principle behind my writing is to create a form that mirrors the urgency and fragmentation of women's lived experiences. I often work with polyphony – multiple voices that resist a single dominant narrative – because this allows me to embody both intimacy and collectivity. Language, rhythm and repetition are crucial: I use them to evoke the pressure of social imperatives, but also to carve out spaces of resistance. Another important principle is the tension between documentary and poetic registers. I want my texts to be politically sharp yet theatrically open, where emotion, testimony and imagination coexist. Above all, I seek to make visible what has been silenced, by exposing how private pain is linked to systemic structures of power.

What were the main thrusts of your rereading of the original material?

My rereading of *The New Portuguese Letters* focused on three main thrusts. First, I wanted to highlight the voices of women who testify to gender-based violence, making their speech direct and urgent, rather than mediated by institutions or ideology. Second, I emphasized the question of responsibility — how societies and systems repeatedly fail to protect women, and how this failure produces silence, shame, and isolation. Third, I was interested in

the performative aspect of resistance: how to transform testimony into a collective act on stage, where vulnerability and defiance coexist. By doing so, I aimed not only to revisit the radical spirit of the original text but also to confront its themes with the contemporary realities of violence and systemic neglect.

How did you integrate feminist issues into your writing?

Feminist issues are not something I add afterwards; they are the foundation of my writing. I integrate them by questioning the very structures of narrative, authority, and representation. Instead of a single, dominant voice, I work with multiple female perspectives that interrupt, contradict, and support each other, creating a chorus rather than a monologue. I also focus on the materiality of women's experience — the body, desire, fear, endurance — and make these visible as political realities, not just private emotions. Formally, I use fragmentation, repetition, and shifts in register to reflect the way patriarchy fragments women's speech and experience, while reclaiming those fragments as sites of resistance. In this way, feminist issues are embedded both in the themes and in the dramaturgy of the text.

What is the modernity of the play in relation to these issues?

The modernity of the play lies in the fact that, although it draws on a feminist classic from the 1970s, it speaks directly to our present moment. Many of the issues addressed in *The New Portuguese Letters*—such as gender-based violence, systemic indifference, and the silencing of women—remain painfully relevant today. By staging these voices in a contemporary theatrical language, I connect past struggles with today’s social and political realities. The play acknowledges the persistence of patriarchal structures but also highlights new forms of solidarity, awareness, and resistance that have emerged. Its modernity is therefore twofold: it reveals the continuity of injustice, while at the same time insisting on the urgency of confronting these issues here and now.

If you were involved in the process of creating the show, how did you work with the director and actors?

Yes, I was involved in the process from the beginning. Lajla Kaikčija, the director, and I discussed the concept and aesthetics already while I was writing, so the collaboration started very early. It was a genuinely equal, collegial exchange in which both of us shaped the framework of the piece. Once the text was finished, she worked intensively with the actors, and when I joined them

later in Braga, I was pleased to see that most of what we had imagined together was already present on stage. I only offered a few small notes, but the performance was very much in line with the shared vision we had established.

What changes did you make to the text in the course of creating the show?

In terms of changes to the text during the creation of the show, they were really quite minor. Most adjustments were just about fine-tuning the rhythm of certain scenes or making some lines flow more naturally in translation, since the text was adapted into Portuguese. What's quite characteristic for this process is that there was absolutely no pressure to cut anything down—on the contrary, the team actually asked me to write two additional monologues to enrich the performance. As someone who tends to write very concisely from the start, I was actually happy to expand a bit rather than having to trim down.

In what ways do you think the staging is faithful to or betrays your initial vision? Where do you think the show could be developed further?

Honestly, I think the staging aligns almost perfectly with my original vision, so there's no sense of betrayal at all. If I were to suggest any area for further development, it would really be on my side as a writer. I feel that I could have provided a bit more depth in the characterization of one or two characters, maybe given one more layer to their arc. In other words, the production itself didn't miss anything—it's more that I see now where I might have enriched the script even further to give them more to play with. But as it stands, I'm genuinely pleased with how faithfully it reflects what I intended.

Lajla Kaikčija, director

What was your initial reaction to the play?

I knew that Stela was writing a play based on true stories of women she had interviewed. The drama contained authenticity due to these testimonies, but the lack of obtaining copyright for parts of "The New Portuguese Letters" left a sense of

incompleteness in relation to the original idea. The very strong dramatic form imposed a specific style for the staging.

What aesthetic principles did you use to construct the staging?

For me, it was important to have a naked scene so that we could emphasize the invisible paths and placements of the performers. Two stories that happen on the same stage and somehow seem to push each other forward in a set made only of lights, cables, and microphones that reinforce this slow atmospheric feeling of pathways being opened and closed in history. This is also one of the purposes of theater, to create a distortion of time and reshape narratives, as Mara says.

What difficulties did the play pose for you during its creation?

Overall, we did not encounter difficulties during the work. We lacked more time to explore the topic more layered, as the text is very basic, and the theme is quite broad.

How did you work with the author and the actors?

Collaboration with the author and the actors was very good, but there was also a lack of time to communicate all the questions and ideas that arose during the working process.

How did you construct the visual and sound dimensions of the show?

The visual and sound elements of the performance were created during the process. Their purpose was to support the idea of the play and create an atmosphere. They were also used to differentiate the various stories and help the audience follow the nonlinear dramatic action.

How did you take the audience into account in your staging?

The audience was initially envisioned to sit on three sides of the stage, like a ring, to observe the "struggle" of the female characters for their rights and freedom. As the playing spaces did not allow for this, it was important for the audience to be as close to the actors as possible to feel the emotions and see the faces of the women telling their stories.

How did you develop feminist issues in the process?

The performance deals with different forms of abuse against women: physical, psychological, digital... These women are betrayed again by the state system, the police, and the judiciary. The feminist thread of the performance is that only female solidarity, support, understanding, and empathy can restore women's desire and strength to fight for their rights. Only united

in a common goal can women move forward. Alone, they are often condemned to give up, withdraw, and suffer.

Where do you think you could have gone further in this project?

In the given circumstances, I believe we extracted the maximum from the text, the actors, and all the authors who participated in the creation of the performance. It is a pity that women from smaller Portuguese communities could not see the play.

In different circumstances, with an emphasis on more available time for working on the text with the actors, we would surely have deepened the topic and delved much deeper into the socio-political and historical issues of women's rights in Portugal that reflect on the present day.

Inês Lago, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

When I first read the play, I found the text to be very raw. I was also quite surprised not to find a clear connection to *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*. Regarding the scenes, I felt that more information

was needed to discover who the women portrayed in the play are, what drives their actions, and which characteristics should be layered onto the characters.

How would you describe the creative process?

I found the creative process to be very smooth. Delving into these stories of violence was not exactly a walk in the park, but we were very lucky with the team that was assembled. Lajla is the most sensitive director, and Tamina, the translator who accompanied our work, played a very important part in bridging different territories, both geographical and emotional. As for my fellow actors, there aren't enough words to describe their commitment and generosity: working with such a wonderful cast was an absolute privilege.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

My biggest difficulty was filling in the gaps in my character's story so I could find her body, her gestures, and her motivation. Elsa, the character I play, could have been a number of different women and played from very different perspectives. However, the knowledge that I was playing a real person I had never met made it difficult to make decisions regarding certain viewpoints that influenced my approach to the character.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

The simple portrayal of the acts of violence in the play is very powerful in conveying the idea that feminism is an issue we should all address as a society. On the other hand, I feel the staging adds some hope to the violence. Some scenes are very cruel, but they are born from reality—from the present lives of many women, be they in Portugal or in the Balkans.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

I believe this theme is very sensitive, and in our case, coming from actual stories of real women, even more so. I understand that both the author and director took care to honour that premise. This notion might sometimes block the path to the idea that we are making a theatre play. I feel that Lajla did a tremendous job in making that leap from reality to a show, adding new textures to ideas that otherwise could be paralysed by the fear of not doing justice to the lives of the women who so generously gave their testimonies.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

My vision of feminist issues was very much in tune with the rest of the team: there is an enormous problem of violence against women that needs to be addressed in order to overcome it.

Everyone had stories to tell about the abuses of men. As an anecdote, I can tell you that in the first week of rehearsals I developed a strong pain in my right arm. I later realised that my body was reacting so strongly to what was being performed that I was fighting an urge to hit something: the patriarchy.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

I believe the show could be developed further by exploring the lives of the women outside of the violence they suffered. The current portrayal is a strong and necessary statement against violence, but I feel that adding layers to the characters' stories — showing their hopes, dreams, and everyday realities—would create an even more profound connection with the audience. This would make the women feel less like victims and more like whole, complex individuals, honouring their strength and resilience beyond their trauma.

Joana Maria, actress

What was your initial reactions to reading the play?

I was curious to see what the show would become, and also to see how the text could really connect with *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*.

I also felt a huge responsibility because these were true stories of women who had been interviewed, but at the same time this reinforced my motivation to give voice not only to them, but to all women who face violence on a daily basis.

How would you describe the creative process?

The creative process was undoubtedly a journey that ran the whole spectrum of emotions. Right from the start, our director, Lajla, encouraged a safe space for sharing opinions and views on our characters and scenes, and also personal stories and experiences regarding the theme. Because of this, it was clear from the beginning that we were all on the same page when it came to the sensitivity and openness needed to address gender-based violence. This openness made it almost inevitable that we would give ourselves over completely to the rehearsals and performances. It also made it possible to be vulnerable on stage and during moments of discussion and rehearsal. Going through moments of both tears and laughter, our team truly built a solid network where we could support and help each other. I would describe the creative process as one not only of growth, but also of questioning the violent world around us and the systems that fail to protect us. A process where, while I felt hurt by the constant reminder of the countless forms of violence that women experience every day, I

was also reminded that there are still many people who want to fight against these forms of violence, who do not conform to unjust societies or the growing lack of empathy. And how wonderful it is to work with people like that.

What difficulties did you encounter in the rehearsal?

Since my character represents hope for women in the future, one of my biggest challenges was figuring out how to do that in a fair and honest way, while being aware of the state of the world today and that many women don't get a happy ending. It was obviously also very hard to deal with such a triggering topic and scenes on a daily basis.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

From my point of view, practically the entire performance was staged with feminist issues in mind. Starting with the choice of the setting itself and how we would engage with it, consisting of a ring with three chairs for three women who interact with each other and with the only element that enters and leaves the ring—the man. For me, this placement of people alone already constitutes a very strong message. The connection between the wrestling ring and the atmosphere of a group therapy session, also brought a strong sense of sorority and a call for women around the world to unite. In general, the staging and

choice of movement and posture for the actors on stage for every scene, inside the ring, as well as the reaction of the others who watch and are never off stage, also fostered a dense and overwhelming atmosphere that, in my opinion, gives no rest to those watching, in order to portray a subject in which people shouldn't be looking the other way either.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

I am very grateful that both the author and the director of our production have such a strong and transparent vision when it comes to defending women's rights and motivating people to give voice to this urgent cause. Highlighting our director in particular, with whom I worked more directly and for longer, I can identify with and applaud the humane and sensitive approach with which she handled this project and the fact that she created a raw, powerful, and simple show, without ever diverting attention from the most important thing: the women in question, their stories, and their abandonment by the system. At the same time, throughout the process, and dealing with such a difficult subject, she always respected our limits and made room for joint creation, which to me is also very important.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

My vision was inevitably integrated into the creative process in the construction and development of my character, as well as in my interaction with my colleagues, both on and off the stage. We were all on the same page, with a serious, sensitive, and empathetic attitude toward this issue. And with a tremendous desire to fight against it.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

It would be interesting for this show if the text was more developed and if it created a clearer connection with *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* not only in terms of structure but also of content. A denser script would allow for greater development and humanization of the characters and, consequently, greater visibility for these women, both within their violent experiences and outside of them.

David Salvado, actor

What was your initial reaction to reading the play?

My first reaction, even before reading the text, was to its brevity. I was surprised by how short it was. Of course, I am aware that length does not necessarily equate to quality, but the conciseness of the play still caught me off guard.

After reading, I found myself questioning its content. Perhaps this was because I had certain expectations of what a Feminist Play might entail, especially one inspired by such a landmark of Portuguese literature, *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*. I was curious to see how the themes would connect to the novel, and how Stela would establish that bridge. However, by the end of my first reading, the correlation was not entirely clear to me, and I found some of the topics overlapping.

Thus, my initial reactions could best be described as surprise and critical questioning.

How would you describe the creative process?

The creative process was arguably the most enriching aspect of the project. The cast, together with Tamina (translator) and Lajla (director), established a genuine human connection very early on. This fostered a collaborative environment where every idea was treated as worthy of consideration.

Working with Lajla was a true pleasure. Our creative approaches are remarkably similar, and her ability to guide the ensemble was both inspiring and enjoyable. Tamina played a crucial role, not only in translating the text but also in bridging cultural perspectives. The process of discovering my characters alongside Lago, Filipe, and Joana was undoubtedly a collective endeavor—one that I will carry with me for a long time.

What difficulties did you encounter in rehearsal?

The greatest challenge lay in the limited rehearsal time. Working within such a compressed schedule inevitably created moments of pressure. This was felt most acutely toward the end of the process, when we, as actors, needed access to final props, costumes, and technical rehearsals. At times, these elements were not fully ready or aligned with the stage of work we required.

How were feminist issues integrated into the staging?

The text entrusted us with a profound responsibility, as much of the play draws upon the stories of real women. Their voices and their struggles—particularly their fight to define what it means to be a woman—were present organically within the work, and thus naturally informed the staging.

Do you agree with the author's and director's visions?

What appears on stage originates with Stela's vision, but Lajla elevated it to another level. She succeeded in layering remarkable complexity into such a concise play. Through her guidance, we were able to explore depths that were not immediately evident in the written text.

The feminist concerns were already present, but Lajla gave them greater density and nuance, all while maintaining the respect and honesty that the subject matter demands.

How did your own vision of these issues factor into the creative process?

As someone who is read and treated by society as a man, I recognise that my relationship with feminism is that of an ally and critical observer. My approach in the rehearsal room was therefore to listen as attentively as possible, to absorb the lived experiences of the women around me, and to contribute only when I felt my own perspective would be constructive.

My vision was also reflected in how I sought to approach the antagonistic roles on stage, ensuring that they were presented with depth and responsibility.

Where do you think the show could be developed further?

The production would benefit greatly from further development of the text. Given the brevity of the play, there is little opportunity to fully explore the characters or to deepen the situations they inhabit.

A longer version would allow the audience greater immersion in the realities of these characters and their messages. With more space, the dramaturgy could expand, allowing for the exploration of additional themes and a wider variety of approaches.

The Sexual Theatre Project

The Bosnian National Theatre Zenica

The Bosnian National Theatre Zenica (lead partner) was founded in the early 1950s. Repertoire of the theater is carefully assembled to be modern and socially engaged.

BNT Zenica is a producer and host to various cultural and entertainment programs and events, significant for the cultural life in the city itself, as well as in the Zenica-Doboj Canton (population 385.000). There is a Children and Youth scene, a dedicated production segment that produces plays and festivals for children and youth, as well as a production segment dedicated to producing plays, festivals and cultural events for adults.

BNT Zenica annually produces approximately 3-5 plays for children and youth and 4-7 plays for adults.

BNT Zenica is the official coordinator for Bosnia and Herzegovina of the European Theatre Night, the International cultural event that is simultaneously hosted in over 30 European countries. BNT Zenica also annually organizes the Festival of Bosnian Drama, the only theatrical Festival in Bosnia and

Herzegovina that is representing and awarding plays based on the dramatic works of Bosnian authors.

Nedžma Čizmo

is a dramaturge, who was born in 1996 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2020, she graduated from the Department of Dramaturgy at the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo. Her first play, *Majka ili Sve lutke idu u raj* (Mother or All Dolls go to Heaven), was premiered at the Sarajevo War Theatre in 2018, and was directed by Dubravka Zrnčić-Kulenović.

The same play was later translated into Polish and was published in the anthology *Obudź mnie, Obudź mnie, gdy to się skończy. Wybór nowych dramatów z Bośni i Hercegowiny* (Wake me up when it's over: A Selection of New Plays from Bosnia and Herzegovina). In the field of drama education , she has carried out several projects with children and young people. She writes theatre, literary, and film criticism.soci

Lajla Kaikčija

is a Bosnian-Herzegovinian theatre director. She graduated in directing from the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo in 2000. Since 2001, she has been employed as a director at the Bosnian National Theatre Zenica.

In addition to a large number of directing in the home theatre, she directed in all theater houses in Sarajevo and Mostar. She directed shows for children and entertainment programs on state television. She also directs several advertising and promotional TV spots. Her performances were hosted at numerous domestic and foreign festivals, where she won some significant awards. Visits were recorded, apart from all over BiH, also in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Turkey...

Project coordinator: Denis Krdžalić

University of Montpellier Paul-Valéry

University Paul Valéry, Montpellier/France – beneficiary
Montpellier University was France's third university, established after Paris and Toulouse. Founded on 26th October 1289 by papal bull under Pope Nicholas IV. Located in woodland to the north of the city, Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 University, Faculty of Letters, Arts, Languages, Human and Social Sciences, is named after Paul Valery, the great writer from Sète.

With a registered, labeled „20th century heritage site“ campus. Paul-Valéry University confirms its role as a major regional player in the field of culture through professionalization and excellence. With the University Cultural Centre (CCU), and its three major facilities: La Vignette Theatre, Museum of Mouldings and the University Symphony Orchestra.

The University works in close partnership with the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs (DRAC LR), as well as many other major cultural institutions and organizations.

Aïcha Euzet

is a writer, actress and director. She holds a bachelor's degree in Philosophy and a Master's degree in Creation of Live Performances. She joined the playwriting department at ENSATT in 2018. NJËL- Aube à Thiaroye, her first play, was awarded the Beaumarchais – SACD grant and the ARTCENA national grant for the creation of dramatic texts. Route sans nom, the second text in the NJEL triptych, is a Collisions committee prize-winner.

From January to June 2023, she was awarded an Artist –in-Residence grant by the Theatre National de la Colline to write the final part of the play, Les Porteuses, which examines the little-known role of Senegalese rifleman during the first French colonial conquests.

Laurent Berger

is a director, dramaturge, educator, and researcher. He currently heads the Theatre Department and the Master's Program in Live Performance Creation at Paul Valéry University in Montpellier. He has translated works by William Shakespeare, Molière, Jean Genet, and Jean-Luc Lagarce into Spanish.

He has edited a volume on contemporary Argentine theatre for *Alternatives Théâtrales*, and another on the work of Rodrigo García for *Théâtre/Public*. He also published *Shakespeare Material* with TC-TNA Editions in Buenos Aires. As a director, his recent productions include *3 8 S M* (Shakespeare's material) at the Teatro Nacional Cervantes in Buenos Aires as part of the FIBA (Buenos Aires International Festival), and *D. Quixote* at the Théâtre National de Chaillot and the Seville Biennale in 2017.

In 2018, he directed *Urashima* at the Fukuoka Theatre in Japan, followed by *Measure for Measure*, after Shakespeare, at the Galpon Theatre during the FIDAE (International Festival of Performing Arts of Uruguay) in 2019, and *Tartuffe*, after Molière, at the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán Theatre in Bogotá in 2022.

Project coordinators: Laurent Berger, Ximena Primera

Faz Cultura

Faz Cultura is the Municipal Culture Company of the city Braga/Portugal, responsible for the management and programming of the venues Theatro Circo and gnraton, as well as the projects Braga Media Arts, UNESCO Creative City for Media Arts, and Braga 25, Portuguese Capital of Culture 2025. Its mission is to provide a public service in the field of cultural promotion and support for artistic creation in the municipality of Braga, promoting access for the people who live in, work in, and visit the area to a high-quality, diverse, and inclusive cultural offering, through the sustainable and transparent management of cultural spaces and projects.

Faz Culture promotes, through its activities and in complementarity with the Municipality, the implementation of a long-term cultural policy for the city, anchored in the Braga Cultural Strategy 2020-2030. Faz Cultura's vision is to be a driving force for cultural and artistic activity in Braga and the surrounding region, as well as to solidify its status as a leading municipal company at both national and international levels in the field of culture. To achieve this, it is guided by the values of innovation, cooperation, responsibility, transparency, and sustainability.

Cátia Faisco

is a writer from Portugal. She is a professor and researcher at the University of Minho, where she teaches dramaturgy. She serves as the coordinator of NIEP (Research Group for Performance Studies) and is a member of GIARTES (Research group for Artistic Studies).

She holds a PhD in Theatre Studies (Lisbon), with a dissertation focused on sexual desire in contemporary British drama. Her research interests also include the period of „in-yer-face“ theatre, particularly the work of Sarah Kane. She published *Undressing Sarah Kane: A Portuguese Perspective on In-Yer-Face Theatre: Remnants of a Theatrical Revolution* (Palgrave, 2020). As a playwright, she wrote *Abstinência de Purpurina* (2019) for colectivoCASA, directed and performed by Roberta Proisler.

Júlio Cerdeira

is a dance, performance, theatre and multidisciplinary creator. In 2015 he graduated in Theatre at Universidade do Minho. In 2018 he obtained a Master degree in Scenic Arts at ESMAE. In 2019 he co-founded BANQUETE - Associação de Investigação e Criação em Artes Performativas. He is currently teaching in the Theatre program and the Scenic Arts Masters degree at ESMAE. As creator and performer he has collaborated with artists and

institutions such as Né Barros, Elisabete Magalhães, Rogério Nuno Costa, Sandro William Junqueira, Ballet Contemporâneo do Norte, Festival DDD, Hosek Contemporary, Centro de Arte Oliva, Festival TRÊSPÊ, among others.

Project coordinator: Hugo Loureiro

Budva Theatre City

Budva Theatre City, Budva/Montenegro – beneficiary „Theatre City“ was conceived as intersection of contemporary achievements first of all theatrical, and the art, musical and literary creations, and by its program quality still confirms its prestige not just as a host to many troops and creators, but also with the quality of its production activities with which it questions authentic cultural heritage of Budva and Montenegro, and ability to implement those questions into modern models of artistic practices.

We boast with our interesting and numerous scenes – picturesque squares, churches, ancient basilica, which are all in the very heart of Old Town Budva. But that is not all we offer to our audience.

Our guests are used to having their artistic disposal the entire Municipality of Budva. For specific plays, trying to fulfill the director's artistic vision, we like to activate other venues. Beaches, convent complexes, old fortifications around Budva and an authentic natural rural environment are venues we are proud to have worked on and continue to explore.

Stela Mišković

is a dramatist, graduated and completed her master studies in Dramaturgy, at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Cetinje/Montenegro. She worked as a dramatist, assistant to the dramatist and she is author of more than 30 plays. She is the screenwriter of numerous short films, shown at festivals in the Balkans. Since 2012, she has been part of the criticism team at the MESS Festival, and since 2022 she has been a member of the Artistic Council of the same festival. She was the President of the council of RTV Cetinje from 2022, until the beginning of her mandate as the Artistic director of the Royal Theater „Zetski dom“. Winner of the 2022 Annual Criticism Award and the 2023 Dramatization Award at the MESS Festival in Sarajevo.

Minja Novaković

is a Montenegrin theatre director, born in 1996 in Podgorica. She graduated at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Cetinje, on the study

program Drama and theater. In 2021, as a final year student of the department of theater directing, directed her first play „Half-half“ with people with total sight impairment (Minja Bogavac, KC Homer). She directed the play „Mother Earth“, (inspired by the life and works of Emma Goldman, Drama Studio „Prazan Prostor“ 2022). Since 2018, she has been engaged in the PR sector of the Kotor Theater Festival for children. Since 2022, she has been engaged in the protocol sector of the Sarajevo Film Festival as the coordinator of the Red Carpet. As a long-term student of the Drama Studio „Prazan prostor“ since 2017, becomes a full member and drama pedagogue in the same. She completed her internship at the Montenegrin National Theater. Since 2023, she has been working as a drama teacher and in an art studio „Žiža“.

Project coordinator: Aleksandra Maslovar

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