

Staging Feminist Politics of History: Women's Counter- Memories in Serbia's Post-1990s Theatre

Mettre en scène une politique féministe de l'histoire: contre- mémoires dans le théâtre serbe après les années 1990

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Abstract

This article investigates feminist theatre in Serbia after the 1990s as a practice of a feminist politics of history and an intervention in a contested memory culture. Focusing on Crossing the Line (DAH Teatar, 2009) and On Conscience (Sanja Kršmanović Tasić, 2014), it analyses how theatre generates feminist counter-memory by reclaiming silenced voices, challenging patriarchal-nationalist narratives, and highlighting gendered dimensions of violence, solidarity, and resistance. Drawing on Berthold Molden's definition of politics of history, feminist theories of counter-memory, and Diana Taylor's concepts of archive and repertoire, the study conceptualizes theatre as a political actor that unsettles dominant frameworks and creates alternative forms of remembrance. Through documentary and participatory dramaturgies, as well as embodied memory, the plays stage women's war testimonies as feminist interventions into Serbia's patriarchal memory culture. The analysis shows how feminist theatre enacts a politics of history by dismantling patriarchal memory orders and opening emancipatory horizons for collective responsibility.

Keywords: Feminist politics of history, counter-memory, female solidarity, Serbia's post-1990s memory culture, feminist post-Yugoslav theatre

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Résumé

Cet article analyse le théâtre féministe en Serbie après les années 1990 comme une pratique de la politique féministe de l'histoire et comme une intervention dans une culture mémorielle contestée. En s'intéressant à Crossing the Line (DAH Teatar, 2009) et On Conscience (Sanja Kršmanović Tasić, 2014), il montre comment le théâtre produit une contre-mémoire féministe en réhabilitant des voix réduites au silence, en remettant en cause les récits patriarcaux-nationalistes et en mettant en évidence les dimensions genrées de la violence, de la solidarité et de la résistance. En mobilisant la définition de la politique de l'histoire proposée par Berthold Molden, les théories féministes de la contre-mémoire et les concepts d'archive et de répertoire de Diana Taylor, l'étude conçoit le théâtre comme un acteur politique qui déstabilise les cadres dominants et propose des formes alternatives de remémoration. À travers des dramaturgies documentaires et participatives, ainsi que par le recours à la mémoire incarnée, ces pièces mettent en scène les témoignages de guerre des femmes comme interventions féministes dans la culture mémorielle patriarcale serbe. L'analyse met en lumière la manière dont le théâtre féministe met en œuvre une politique de l'histoire en déconstruisant les ordres mémoriels patriarcaux et en ouvrant des horizons émancipateurs pour une responsabilité collective.

Mots-clés: politique féministe de l'histoire, contre-mémoire, solidarité féminine, culture mémorielle serbe post-1990, théâtre féministe post-yougoslave

Introduction

“We are fighting for the interpretation of our history” (Pavićević, 2014). With these words, theatre dramaturg and feminist intellectual Borka Pavićević (1947–2019)¹ foregrounds the political stakes of historical interpretation in Serbia. Struggles over memory determine whose experiences are recognized, whose suffering is rendered visible, and whose responsibility is denied (Hirsch & Smith, 2002, p. 1) – dynamics that are particularly evident in the remembrance of women’s experiences of the Yugoslav wars of succession. Within dominant memory discourses, women were represented almost exclusively as victims, particularly in relation to sexual violence (Žarkov, 2003, p. 11). This gendered victimizing frame assumed a concrete form

¹ Borka Pavićević was the founder of the Centre for Cultural Decontamination (Centar za kulturnu dekontaminaciju, CZKD), which she established in Belgrade in 1994 as an independent cultural space for critical art, civic debate, and resistance to nationalism and war (Jovanov, 2019, p. 274-276).

of political violence through the instrumentalization of rape narratives: reports of sexual violence against Serbian women during and after the Kosovo War (1998–1999) were mobilised to reinforce enemy images and cultivate an atmosphere of threat (Banjeglav, 2012, p. 34). Within this logic, women were reduced to collective symbols of national suffering rather than recognized as historical subjects (Banjeglav, 2012, p. 24). Despite the existence of a significant feminist anti-war movement (Biljić, 2012; Athanasiou, 2017), the focus on the “woman as victim” (Žarkov, 2003, p. 9), along with the fetishization of “female victimhood” (Demiri, 2024, p. 22), contributed to the reproduction of gendered power asymmetries and simultaneously obscured women’s active participation in nationalist projects as well as their involvement in war crimes (Žarkov, 2003; Ferizović, 2020).

These gendered discursive formations continue to structure Serbia’s official memory culture. The wars are framed as heroic liberation struggles (Đureinović, 2021, p. 22), victimhood and heroism are closely tied to national pride (Jagiełło-Szostak, 2020, p. 76), and Serbia’s own war crimes are systematically excluded from public acknowledgment (David, 2014, p. 659). As a result, the male-coded figure of the Serbian soldier – oscillating between victimhood and heroism – dominates war remembrance and national identity (Stojčić, 2024).

These gendered logics materialize in commemorative practices, most notably in the memorialization of three-year-old Milica Rakić, killed during the 1999 NATO bombing. Her grave and bronze monument function as key sites of remembrance, symbolizing “innocent Serbian victims” (Mandić, 2015, 465). Similarly, the 2017 plaque dedicated to “Serbian mothers” in Belgrade aestheticizes women’s suffering while erasing their political agency, reducing female figures in official memory to affective symbols that stabilize nationalist victimhood narratives (Bracewell, 1996, 25).

It is within this contested field of Serbia’s gendered and militarised memory culture that the two theatre plays analysed in this study intervene: *Crossing the Line* (*Prelazeći liniju*, 2009) by DAH Teatar stages women’s war testimonies from different regions

of the former Yugoslavia through a polyphonic dramaturgy of female witnessing. *On Conscience – An Essay in Motion about Dada Vučasinović* by Sanja Krsmanović Tasić (*O s(a)vesti – esej u pokretu o Dadi Vučasinović*, 2014) addresses the unresolved death of investigative journalist Radislava “Dada” Vučasinović through a participatory performative essay and foregrounds the political significance of her wartime journalism. This article argues that these plays enact a feminist politics of history by positioning women as subjects of history and challenging the gendered logics of remembrance that underpin dominant national war narratives. Read together, the plays demonstrate how collective practices of female witnessing and intimate modes of political mourning can productively complement one another in engaging with the legacies of war.

The article asks: What artistic strategies do *Crossing the Line* and *On Conscience* employ to generate feminist counter-memory, and how do they function as feminist agents of the politics of history within Serbia’s official memory culture?

The theoretical framework of this study brings together approaches from critical memory studies, feminist theory, and performance studies to conceptualize theatre as a feminist agent of the politics of history. It draws in particular on Berthold Molden’s concept of the politics of history, which understands it as the dynamic practices through which social groups engage with the past and strategically deploy historical narratives in struggles over interpretation (Molden, 2009, p. 36). By explicitly including both civic actors and political elites (Molden, 2009, p. 35), Molden’s concept is particularly well suited to framing artistic practices as well as artists as agents of the politics of history. Diana Taylor’s distinction between archive and repertoire provides the conceptual link between memory politics and theatrical practice, allowing the analysis to grasp theatre as a mode of embodied knowledge production in which historical meaning is enacted, contested, and transmitted through performance (Taylor, 2003, p. 19-20). Both plays are analysed through in-depth examinations of selected scenes

based on publicly available video recordings.²

***Crossing the Line* by DAH Teatar: A Polyphonic Dramaturgy of Female Witnessing**

Crossing the Line, premiered in 2009 at DAH Teatar's Research Center in Belgrade, draws on the anthology *Ženska strana rata/ Women's Side of War* (2007), published by Women in Black Belgrade, a feminist anti-war collective with whom DAH Teatar has collaborated since the 1990s (Simić, 2010, p. 188). Founded in Belgrade in 1991 by Dijana Milošević and Jadranka Andelić, DAH Teatar emerged as an independent, anti-war, and feminist theatre collective in response to the Yugoslav wars of succession and has since been a key factor in Serbia's independent theatre scene (Dah Teatar, 2026). *Crossing the Line* was directed by Dijana Milošević and performed by Maja Mitić, Ivana Milenović Popović, and Sanja Krsmanović Tasić. The artists collectively selected sixteen literary testimonies from an anthology documenting women's experiences of war, including their suffering, survival, resistance, and forms of female solidarity. The testimonies are arranged in a fragmentary yet broadly chronological sequence that traces the wars from the siege of Vukovar in 1991 through the war in Bosnia and the war in Kosovo.

Within this contested memory landscape, *Crossing the Lines* generated uneven modes of reception. Seen by approximately one thousand people, the play primarily circulated within feminist, anti-war, and human rights-oriented civil society networks (Simić 2010, p. 125). It remained marginal within Serbia's dominant nationalist public sphere, where it received little institutional support and was often met with strategic silence rather than open engagement (Simić 2010, p. 129).

The following analysis begins with an in-depth examination of the testimony of journalist Alenka Mirković, who

² See *Crossing the line*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN7_11RMPr4&t=2657s; *On Conscience*:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lN7eJTuyh8&t=1390s.

survived the siege of Vukovar in 1991, followed by the testimony of Mejra Dautović, whose children were killed in the Omarska concentration camp in Bosnia.

Vukovar: The testimony of Alenka Mirković

Alenka Mirković's staged testimony³ articulates empathy and female solidarity across national borders in times of war. The scene employs a sparse multimedia stage setting in which a recorded offstage voice delivers the testimony against a backdrop of shifting radio sounds. The actress Maja Mitić appears on stage as Mirković, dressed in a blue coat, recounting the brutal 1991 siege of Vukovar by the Yugoslav People's Army, which devastated the city and involved war crimes (Živić & Degmečić, 2016, p. 185). Minimal props and restrained gestures – such as spilled apples subtly echoing the sounds of bombardment, a searching flashlight suggestive of wartime survival and fragile processes of meaning-making, and circulating letters – structure the stage space.

Performed as an inner monologue, Mirković's testimony reflects on the discovery of a letter written by the wife of a Serbian soldier and found among the personal belongings of the dead. The letter itself is read aloud in an off-voice by Ivana Milenović Popović, giving voice to an unknown woman who urges her husband to return from what she believes to be a military training exercise, unaware that he has been sent to the front and killed (Dah Teatar, 2009). Rather than consolidating the scene into a single testimonial voice, the performance sustains a dialogic relation between Mirković's reflection and the off-voiced letter. Through this encounter, Mirković describes an unexpected sense of empathy and connection with the unknown woman, accompanied by a profound feeling of guilt shaped by her prior knowledge of the soldier's death. Expressed despite her own life-threatening situation,

³Alenka Mirković's staged testimony in *Crossing the Line* is an excerpt from her book *91.6 MHz, glasom protiv topova / 91.6 MHz, A Voice Against Cannons*, published in 1997 (Mirković, 1997).

this response disrupts the binary logic of nationalist wartime memory (victim vs. perpetrator, “us” vs. “them”) by grounding empathy not in national affiliation or collective guilt, but in a recognition of shared human vulnerability (Butler, 2009, p. 43). The scene conveys a sense of solidarity among different lives bound together by war. This interconnectedness not only challenges the Serbian victimhood narrative but also undermines the political power of instrumentalized war memories, thereby giving rise to broader political consequences. As a network of transitory affects, such a staging of female war testimonies constitutes an act of resistance (Butler, 2009, p. 62). By foregrounding female empathy and solidarity, Mirković’s staged testimony reconfigures women as historical subjects of war and opens the staging of the wartime past to alternative (Molden, 2009, p. 36), gender-just interpretations rooted in relational vulnerability and transnational acknowledgment (Genest & Schneider, 2025, p. 12-14).

Drawing on Diana Taylor’s distinction between the archive and the repertoire, memory in this scene is understood not as a stable repository of knowledge but as an embodied, performative process (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). Whereas the archive secures memory through material durability – texts, documents, and records – the repertoire encompasses ephemeral practices such as performance, voice, gesture, and movement, through which historical knowledge is transmitted live and relationally (Taylor, 2003, p. 19–21). As embodied memory, exemplified by the staging of Mirković’s testimony in which empathy and female solidarity are articulated through voice and bodily presence, the repertoire preserves and transforms meaning through enactment, positioning the body as a site where personal and collective histories are reactivated and made sensorially present (Taylor, 2003, p. 3). Theatre functions here as a mode of knowing that stages memory as relational, affective, and open to reinterpretation, thereby unsettling hegemonic frameworks of remembrance (Solano & Sáenz Shelby, 2022, p. 14). The staged testimony is not merely repeated but re-created as a physical and emotional act, unfolding through gesture, vocal modulation, and embodied presence (Scheer, 2012, p. 202).

This artistic translation of Mirković's testimony operates through a double movement. On the one hand, it refers to the historical specificity of the 87-day siege of Vukovar, a wartime reality that remains largely underrepresented in Serbia's official memory culture. On the other hand, it creates an immediate encounter between the audience and embodied experience on stage through the affective negotiation of empathy and sorrow (Scheer, 2012, p. 211). This is the potential of the repertoire to function as embodied memory – a form of knowledge that exceeds the purely discursive by becoming affectively transmissible through the body, without being inherently bound to a particular political project (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). The scene also exposes what María Litvan describes as the paradox of representation: the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of depicting traumatic experiences, which remain mediated and fragmentary yet indispensable for transmitting memory (Litvan, 2023, p. 138). By holding this tension open, the performance creates a multidirectional space in which distinct experiences of suffering, including those of the siege of Vukovar, Mirković's personal wartime experiences, and the loss endured by the unknown Serbian woman, are brought into relation without collapsing their political and historical specificity (Rothberg, 2009, p. 5).

Omarska – The testimony of Mejra Dautović

Mejra Dautović's testimony addresses the mass violence during the Bosnian War and focuses on crimes against humanity committed in the Omarska concentration camp, where her children were killed alongside other Bosniak and Croat civilians (Sesar, 2008, p. 215). The testimony is staged as an inner monologue and delivered as a recorded off-voice, while Sanja Krsmanović Tasić embodies Dautović on stage. The scene unfolds within a reduced stage setting and is accompanied by video projections of a barren landscape and persistent wind sounds, which can be read analytically as articulating both the mother's inner emptiness and her ongoing, restless search of her missing children. Dautović describes identifying her son's remains

after the war, a process confirmed by a doctor who demonstrated that the bones fit together and corresponded to her son's age and height. During this narration, Krsmanović Tasić remains seated silently on a podium in a domestic-like setting and mends a shirt. This gesture evokes the maternal role as one of both care and repair, while also signaling a mother's struggle to expose a torn social fabric and to resist the forgetting of her children and of collective violence through public mourning (Butler, p. 22). Image and body are staged with such restraint that attention is directed toward the voice and the spoken word. At the same time, the play relies on the expressive force of subtle gestures, which function as modes of mediation of Dautović's inner state of grief and restlessness. Through these embodied practices, the significance of the war testimony is conveyed on stage without the need for additional theatrical means. The act of sewing on stage, therefore, is not merely illustrative but performative: it becomes a material metaphor for repairing memory in the face of collective erasure (Taylor, 2003, p. 193).

Through the staging of Dautović's memories, private, feminized grief is reclaimed as a form of public political intervention and articulated as agonistic mourning in Athena Athanasiou's sense – one that resists closure and disrupts hegemonic regimes of memorability (Athanasiou, 2017, p. 91). This agonistic dimension becomes performatively visible when maternal care work appears not as an apolitical affective practice but as a resistant presence in public space (Gkitsa, 2023, 7.). By transforming care labor into a gesture of resistance, the performance interrupts nationalist narratives of silence and denial and produces a counter-history that renders Bosnian war victims visible, acknowledging both their suffering and their losses within the Serbian public sphere. In contrast to Serbia's official commemorative practices that mobilize motherhood as a symbol of national suffering, the play foregrounds the grief of a mother whose children were killed by violence perpetrated by Serbian forces. It politicizes mourning and exposes the selective logic through which some maternal losses become publicly grievable while others are excluded from dominant regimes of remembrance.

The scene enacts feminist counter-memory by exposing gendered and national asymmetries in recognition, mourning, and historical legitimacy, while intervening in Serbian memory politics by challenging dominant frameworks of wartime memorialization (Foucault, 1977; Molden, 2009). *Crossing the Line* thus mobilizes witnessing and transmission through a testimonial aesthetics that positions audiences as secondary witnesses (Phillips-Hutton, 2020, p. 58); this carefully staged listening practice translates testimony into a shared ethical encounter and reaches the audience “on a verbal and emotional level” (Simić, 2014, p. 59).

Moreover, the performance embodies what Phillips-Hutton (2020, p. 54, 66) describes as the ephemeral and iterative quality of repertoires of remembrance. Rather than fixing the past as a stable object of memory, remembrance is staged as a present-oriented practice whose ethical significance unfolds only through repeated enactment (Ibidem, p. 66). Rather than asking what should be remembered, the performance foregrounds what remembrance is for – namely, the assumption of responsibility, the recognition of denied suffering, and accountability for historical violence (Krasniqi & Petrović, 2019, p. 14). Remembrance thus appears not as an identity-affirming practice but as a political positioning in relation to the wars of the 1990s and the associated regimes of violence (Ibidem, p. 28). From the perspective of the Belgrade-based DAH Teatar, feminist responsibility is staged as an obligation to name and confront violence committed in one’s own name, rather than displacing guilt solely onto external perpetrators (Ibidem, p. 12). At the same time, responsibility emerges through an attentive engagement with the suffering of others beyond ethnic or national belonging, thereby undermining nationalist logics of exclusion (Ibidem, p. 11). A feminist politics of history thus functions not as a means of reconciliation or closure, but as a necessary condition for an ongoing ethical engagement with historical violence in the present (Ibidem, p. 14).

In *Crossing the Line*, memory is directed both toward those whose pain have remained publicly unacknowledged within Serbian memory culture and toward audiences who have been systematically denied access to such knowledge through dominant

representations of the wars. In this aesthetic condensation, feminist counter-memory circulates as embodied practices of memory transmission enacted through performer physicality, the immediacy of spoken testimony, and theatrical atmosphere (Jestrović, 2020, p. 120). Theatre functions here as a site where memory – particularly memory that has been denied archival legitimacy – demands enactment rather than static preservation (Ibidem, p. 122). Across the two scenes, the staging of testimony mobilizes theatrical repertoire as a specific mode of memory work: testimony is not simply archived or commemorated but restaged as an urgent performative event demanding audience recognition of what official memory politics in Serbia has erased. At the same time, the act of voicing testimony performs an alternative space of justice (Simić, 2014, p. 63), where art intervenes in the silences of official institutions and gives form to what remains excluded from legal and political discourse (Ibidem, p. 67).

***On Conscience* (2014) by Sanja Krsmanović Tasić: Performing Feminist Counter-Memory**

On Conscience – An Essay in Motion about Dada Vujasinović premiered on 7 April 2014 at the BITEF Theatre in Belgrade and marked the twentieth anniversary of the death of the journalist Radislava “Dada” Vujasinović (Hleb Teatar, 2026). The play was directed and performed by Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, a trained dancer and former member of DAH Teatar, who is now a member of the Hleb Teatar collective (Ibidem). Since its premiere, *On Conscience* has been staged annually on the anniversary of Vujasinović’s death and has become an established component of Serbia’s alternative memory culture (Fridman, 2015, 213). The title fuses *svest* (consciousness) and *savest* (conscience), underscoring the play’s universal dimension by linking awareness of the personal, sociopolitical, and historical significance of Vujasinović’s death to the defense of core democratic values, including freedom of expression and press freedom. Radislava “Dada” Vujasinović was an investigative journalist who, in the early 1990s, came under severe pressure due to her reporting on the wars

in Croatia and Bosnia and her investigations into the connections between the Milošević regime and organized crime (International Federation of Journalists, 2026). On 8 April 1994, she was found dead in her apartment in New Belgrade. Although the authorities classified her death as a suicide, subsequent forensic findings have called this conclusion into question (Veljović, 2016).

Krsmanović Tasić has explained her decision to address Vujsasinović's story only twenty years later by pointing to the necessity of first processing her personal grief over the loss of her childhood friend before engaging with the subject professionally (Kožul, 2017). The play was met with critical acclaim and received several awards, including the *Zlatna maska* (Golden Mask) at the Art Trema Festival in Ruma and the Branislav B. Čubrilović Theatre Prize at the PatosOFFiranje Festival in Smederevo (Hleb Teatar, 2026).

Krsmanović Tasić's use of the performative essay, or “essay in motion”, resists closed narratives in favor of tentative thinking, echoing what Theodor W. Adorno described as resistance to systematic totality (1980, p. 21). This essayistic openness is transferred to the stage as the play unfolds not through a linear retelling of Vujsasinović's biography or an artistic reconstruction of her death, but as a heterogeneous mosaic of image, text, movement, and sound. The stage design evokes the apartment of Dada Vujsasinović. Through the arrangement of objects such as a desk, books, and a red armchair, the stage reenacts the media-circulated images of Vujsasinović's apartment. Low-key lighting and the performer's black costume visually articulate mourning as well as the uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of her death. Through audience participation in the play, the separation between stage and auditorium is dissolved, thereby constituting the stage space as a shared site of memory. The scenes are structured as selectable “footnotes”; their order is determined by the audience, who respond to the artist's question of which one should be performed next. Each of the fourteen footnotes – including keywords such as *Blok* (Block), *Rad/ tna biografija* (War/ Work Biography), *Etika* (Ethics), *Lično* (Personal), *Uticak* (Impression), *Danas* (Today) or *Istraga* (Investigation) – draws either on the artist's personal memories of

Vujasinović or on historical source material presented as evidence of the wartime past. Some footnotes also point to contemporary sociopolitical conditions or to Vujasinović's professional legacy, such as the footnote *Today*. This participatory structure creates an open space of thought in which contradictions are exposed rather than resolved. At the end, the last, unselected footnote remains hidden – a blank space functioning as an analogy for the still unresolved circumstances of Vujasinović's death. Through this device, the play enacts a staging of the essay which is according to Adorno a personally motivated attempt to approach a subject from multiple perspectives (1980, p. 27). The play as essay in motion thus becomes a political gesture: it invites the audience into shared responsibility while refusing to provide simple answers to the unclear circumstances of Vujasinović's death.

The following sections focus on two selected footnotes – *Chips and Beer* and *Danas/ Today* – to analyze how feminist counter-memory is staged through embodiment, archival material, and intergenerational dialogue.

Footnote “Chips and Beer”

After the audience selects the footnote “*Chips and Beer*” to be performed by Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, a letter written by Dada Vujasinović in November 1992 to a friend abroad is heard as an offstage audio recording. The letter is accompanied by Krsmanović Tasić through dance movements, while the stage is only dimly illuminated by the flickering light of a screen.

In the letter, Vujasinović sketches an image of Belgrade in the early 1990s, paralyzed by international sanctions and state propaganda. The war in Bosnia appears as a televised event, consumed with chips and beer, as if it concerned “someone else, somewhere far away” (*On Conscience*, 2021).

Over the course of the scene, Krsmanović Tasić's movements become increasingly unstable: she repeatedly slips off the chair, attempts to stand up, and ultimately collapses to the floor – a bodily disintegration that creates the impression of her being struck by invisible forces. The collapsing body functions as a counter-

archive, registering forms of historical violence systematically displaced from dominant memory regimes (Molden, 2009, p. 34). The performative realization of the text translates this attitude into a bodily experience of apathy, and shame: the performer hides her face behind her hands, as if attempting to shield herself from the violence described. Shame here operates not as a private emotion but as a historically situated affect that signals ethical implication within gendered regimes of remembrance (Paletschek & Schraut, 2008, p. 15).

Particularly striking is the passage in which Vujasinović refers to Sarajevo:

Even in Sarajevo, they say, on the day the war started, they thought there was no chance anyone would shoot – you can't, man, with chips and beer in your hand, watch our artillery flatten a city and not wonder how I, my child, my sick grandmother, or anyone else would fare if someone sat on Mount Avala to fire down on us from above. You can't look at crippled children, dead children, with chips and beer in your hand. You can't. Assuming you're human. If decay sets in in one part of your body, but you behave as if you were completely healthy, you will breathe out in pain (*On Conscience*, 2021).

As these words reverberate, Krsmanović Tasić writhes on the floor, as if carrying the pain of Sarajevo within her own body and the blank screen becomes a symbol of the silencing of wartime violence in Bosnia. The absence of images thus mirrors mechanisms of exclusion through which certain histories are relegated to the margins of collective memory and rendered politically inert (Molden 2009, p. 32). Read through the lens of agonistic mourning, the blank screen does not signify mere absence but stages mourning as being addressed by the unmournable, confronting the spectator with a spectral demand that resists visual representation, narrative closure, and symbolic appropriation (Athansiu 2017, p. 291). Additionally, this scene illustrates what Taylor calls the intertwining of archive and repertoire: the letter belongs to the archive – fixed, linguistic, and

documentary – but it is only through Krsmanović Tasić’s corporeal translation that it is transferred into the repertoire and rendered present as embodied memory. Memory unfolds here not only in words, but operates through the body, generating knowledge through action (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). The scene connects the archival trace preserved in the letter with embodied performance and opens up a space of memory in which social passivity and the suffering of others become inescapably visible.

Thus, the letter as staged counter-memory of the siege of Sarajevo undermines the image of Serbian victimhood that is entrenched in the public memory discourse by foregrounding the suffering of the civilian population in Bosnia. This reversal of hegemonic forms of memorialization renders memory visible as a contested field in which historical meaning is actively negotiated and hierarchized (Molden, 2009, p. 40). Krsmanović Tasić’s body functions as a living archive in which memory is accumulated, inscribed, and activated through performative practice, enabling embodied memory to operate as a site of resistance and subversive rearticulation of dominant historical narratives (Solano & Sáenz Shelby, 2022, p. 2). The scene concludes as the offstage voice falls silent and the performer turns toward the audience to recite Vujasinović’s letter directly: “*I’m sorry. I need to know what kind of monster people really are. How easy it is for people to become monsters*” (*On Conscience*, 2021). Addressed to the audience, this direct recitation transforms private doubt into an ethical demand, implicating spectators in the question of how violence becomes normalized rather than allowing moral distance or retrospective judgment. By privileging embodied vulnerability and testimonial subjectivity over heroic representation, the scene articulates a feminist politics of history that challenges the masculinist bias of national memory cultures (Paletschek & Schraut, 2008, p. 10).

Footnote “Danas/ Today”

In the footnote *Danas/ Today*, *On Conscience* emphasizes the contemporary relevance of Dada Vujasinović’s journalistic work. *Danas* is also the name of one of the few remaining independent

newspapers in Serbia, which has reported critically since 1997 and continues to face repression. After the audience selects this footnote, a short film is shown featuring journalism students from the University of Belgrade, who are asked about the duty and responsibility of journalists, the potential of their profession to effect social and political change, and their knowledge of Vučinović. Their responses – ranging from ideals of truth-seeking and critical responsibility to references to Vučinović as professional role model – create an intergenerational dialogue about her death.

Due to the absence of Krsmanović Tasić in this scene, the stage is literally handed over to a younger generation, who address the audience with a forward-looking stance, situating Vučinović's legacy as a living point of reference. This gesture is reinforced by the choice of filmic reportage, which mirrors the form of Vučinović's own profession and extends her presence into the present. As Sandra Obradović notes, intergenerational transmission of memory is never passive but an active negotiation, where younger generations inherit, contest, and reinterpret narratives of the wars (Obradović 2020, p. 18). The students' reflections embody precisely this process: they receive the memory of Vučinović not as a closed past but as an open call for professional ethics and social responsibility in the present.

The staging of this footnote thus exemplifies how the play interlaces temporal layers: it translates remembrance into a transgenerational process, transforming mourning into a shared search for meaning and linking the unfinished past to the responsibilities of the present. In addition, the act of handing the stage to the younger generation articulates what feminist politics of history demands: that women's voices – once silenced or erased – be reclaimed as living legacies, shaping not only memory but also the horizon of future political responsibility (Genest & Schneider, 2025, p. 17). This multilayered dynamic becomes especially significant in contexts where state-orchestrated memory cultures are shaped by militarism or patriarchy. In such settings, theatre can function as a counter-memory (Židek, 2022, p. 32), foregrounding silenced perspectives and disrupting normative gender roles (Bhattacharjee, 2025, p. 84). Here, responsibility is articulated not only through affect but through deliberate ethical

positioning that foregrounds agency, solidarity, and political responsibility rather than passive victimhood (Genest & Schneider, 2025, p. 13). With this scene, *On Conscience* enacts a feminist politics of history by performatively constituting a feminist lineage – one that emerges through intergenerational dialogue and embodied practice rather than being inherited as a fixed canon – thereby orienting political responsibility toward the future as a present-oriented historical practice (Genest & Schneider, 2025, p. 21).

Across its participatory structure, essayistic form, and shifting temporal orientations, *On Conscience* positions feminist politics of history less as the stabilization of counter-narratives than as an ongoing practice of responsibility. By inviting audiences to actively navigate archival traces, embodied affects, and contemporary legacies, the performance transforms remembrance into a shared, future-oriented task. Feminist counter-memory thus operates here not primarily through the restitution of silenced voices alone, but through the creation of a performative space in which historical knowledge becomes actionable, ethical positioning is demanded, and political responsibility is continuously rearticulated in the present.

Conclusion

Theatre does not merely express memory but also articulates a desire for it – for continuity, witnessing, justice, and change (Jestrović, 2023, p. 122). The analyses of the plays demonstrate how this desire is addressed through the staging of memories silenced within official Serbian memory politics, opening new approaches to the past (Molden, 2009, p. 39). At the same time, the plays generate tensions between document and fiction, narrated and unheard stories, as well as between mourning, responsibility, and absence. Rather than resolving these tensions, they sustain them and thus turn tension itself into a prerequisite for ethical and political engagement with the past, acting as agents in the negotiation of a politics of history (Molden, 2009, p. 40). Memory here does not appear as a fixable object but as a situational and

exposed practice that resists the narrative closure of war, responsibility, and the past. In a societal context marked by denial, perpetrator–victim reversal, and selective grievability, theatre becomes a space in which memory is negotiated beyond state recognition and historiopolitical interpretive authority is redistributed (Gluhović, 2020, p. 12). The plays do not merely develop alternative narratives; rather, they make visible which forms of memory work are possible under post-conflict conditions. In *Crossing the Line* and *On Conscience*, memory operates not only retrospectively but as a future-oriented practice of social orientation toward gender-just remembrance, shaping how the present is interpreted and delineating the political and ethical horizons of the future (Davidović, 2025, p. 330).

Crossing the Line juxtaposes individual women's voices, compelling the audience into a position of listening and responsibility. Rather than producing a unified account of the past, the circulation of these testimonies sustains the visibility of power relations and historical asymmetries. Responsibility emerges in the moment of performance (Simić, 2010, p. 122) as a concrete practice of feminist politics of history that reorganizes interpretation, guilt, and listenership. Through the act of listening itself, denial is practically undermined. In this way, *Crossing the Line* enacts a feminist politics of history by organizing witnessing as a practice that redistributes listening, responsibility, and historical asymmetries.

On Conscience unfolds memory around an absence – the unresolved death of Dada Vujasinović and her interrupted journalistic practice. The play works with ruptures, repetitions, and theses, deliberately keeping memory open. Uncertainty is not overcome but foregrounded as a central condition of engagement, as it prevents narrative closure and keeps institutional responsibility visible. Mourning does not appear as an individual exceptional state but as an ongoing political situation that points to structural violence and institutional irresponsibility (Gkitsa, 2023, p. 7). Responsibility thus becomes visible as a continuous practice that must be repeatedly taken up and renegotiated (Gluhović, 2020, p. 14). In this way, *On Conscience* intervenes as

agent of a feminist politics of history by making institutional irresponsibility perceptible as a present-day problem.

Against this backdrop, the plays unsettle core assumptions of the Serbian memory discourse as well as liberal models of memory that posit recognition, inclusion, and pluralization as normative endpoints. Recognition can coexist with denial, inclusion can empty responsibility of its substance, and pluralist narratives can stabilize existing power relations if they are not sustained by concrete forms of ethical implication (David, 2020, p. 14). These insights arise from the dramaturgical organization of memory work itself – from the question of who is addressed, which relationships are produced, and which forms of response are enabled or withheld.

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