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Discourse on Corporeality and the Logic of Control in the Works of Contemporary post-Yugoslav Women Playwrights¹

Abstract: The issue of corporeality is one of the dominant motifs in contemporary women's playwriting in the countries formed after the collapse of Yugoslavia. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries women's bodies function as a specific open register in their works, where real-life content is included. The body is also an instrument which detects the meanings of social actions and interactions. According to the authors – mainly from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro – the body becomes a constantly-transforming palimpsestic, multi-layered body-text which delivers information about the logic of control. The body-centric perspective here is connected with the problematization of the characters' reactions to some mechanisms of normalization, classification, and increasing productivity of the bodies in their population. The changes in the configuration of control modes and everyday practices in some areas of women's life activity are presented. The female authors, e.g.: Milena Bogavac, Maja Pelević (Serbia), Lada Kaštelan, Ivana Sajko (Croatia), Jasna Šamić, Elma Tataragić (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Nataša Nelević (Montenegro), Simona Semenič (Slovenia) illustrate some rituals and transgressions concerning procreation, female visual representations and the body losing its fitness and becoming isolated. In their artistic descriptions the authors confirm the relationship between the cultural and psychological inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text.

Keywords: beauty myth; contemporary women playwrights; control; corporeality; motherhood; post-Yugoslav region; violence

Introduction

Studies on body and corporeality in art open so far unnoticed gates of interpretation. The area of artistic discussions, explorations and manifestations is entered by inscriptions made on corporeality by the codes of culture and social conventions.

¹ The text is an outcome of research project No. 2017/24/C/HS2/00436 financed by the National Science Center, Poland.

They are related to current representations of sexuality and forms of sexual identity embedded in literary or scientific discourses and produced by pop culture.

According to the thesis presented by Michel Foucault, body is a direct place of social control and therefore also a place of resistance against the dominating order.² This concept inspired an American philosopher Susan Bordo, who prefers interpreting the body as a text of culture and stresses that being simultaneously a co-perpetrator and an area where standards operate, means that the subject – corporeal and limited by physiology – may not simply be a deterministic product of these standards, but it must be an area of tensions and collisions where these standards will be questioned.³

Nowadays, the tragedy of corporeality so experienced by individuals is deemed a constructive property of humanity. That issue was discussed by a Polish philosopher, Józef Tischner, who concluded that the body is a dramatic, polysemous and multi-dimensional structure, which absorbs polarized content and puts it into motion.⁴ The body does not come down to the matter only, but it exists as a continuous and uninterrupted movement of possibilities coming true,⁵ and tragedy of the body expresses man's passing from one level to another – from what is more external towards the internal.⁶

The somatic turn related to the performative turn is becoming more and more common in artistic productions. This also concerns post-Yugoslav playwriting and the theatre of the turn of the centuries, especially in the case of women's works, which are more and more valued. Throughout the last twenty-five years, we can notice a peculiar hyperproduction of such texts in the countries of former Yugoslavia: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Slovenia, Macedonia and Kosovo. These artistic works are considered to be versions of the same movement, even though they are not symmetrical. They vary in terms of quantity (Serbia and Croatia are dominant, Kosovo and Macedonia represented on a lower scale), however, they developed in parallel historical circumstances. An integrative comparative analysis is legitimate because of the similar – especially in the second half of the 20th century – literary tradition and reciprocal cultural circulation. Works of women authors who at the turn of millennium were active in the newly-established countries are linked by de-tabooization and revisionism, as well as by a specific structuring of the description of corporeal experience and practices. The women's bodies function in these texts as an instrument which detects the meanings of social actions and interactions.

Attention shall be drawn to a certain potentiality: the body is recorded and described, but the women authors materialize writing also through the body. In traditional thinking about an archive there is a document which functions as a permanent,

² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977), 63.

³ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 117.

⁴ Józef Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka* (Kraków: Znak, 2001), 114.

⁵ Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 118.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

saved object confirming the actuality of an event. Transposition of the content, preserving it in and on the body, articulating through the body the information about regimes and experiences assumes existence of dynamics and transforming power. Hence, the corporeal archive does not become only a silent, neutral medium where memory or testament is accumulated and preserved. Naturally, a phenomenon may be discussed here of a living archive embedded in the body and voice of an actor in the play staged on the basis of a selected drama work. In this study I will, however, focus on the principle of describing and writing by means of the body in women's plays – without the analysis of stage performance.

The female body, which is subject to bodily functions and social changes in particular, turns out to be functioning as an instrument for perceiving and delivering meanings in these works. The somatic person evolves into the semantic person. It is connected with the possibility of expression in the world, because on the one hand, each embodied subject is somehow an open register, where real-life content is included, and on the other hand, when it appears, it is forced to become some language, to have a meaning.⁷ Women's bodies function as a palimpsestic, multi-layered body-text which delivers peculiar information about the logic of control.

In case of control over biological facets of human existence, as a matter of fact we deal with an anonymous, omnipresent and timeless phenomenon, often hardly noticeable. Biocontrol was gaining more power in late modernity and now presents its most distinct and commanding form. Such scale of this control has never occurred in history. Women playwrights, however, do not ignore other forms of subduing women's bodies.

An overview of the selected women playwrights' output enables us to draw a conclusion that in their (hyper)production in post-Yugoslav countries they tend to unmask, and even accentuate controversial and – undesired in public discourse – facts concerning corporeal control. The starting point for their activity was undoubtedly a difficult position of women and local references. Achievements of women researchers from Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, e.g. Svetlana Slapšak, Biljana Dojčinović, Dubravka Đurić, Svenka Savić, Lada Čale Feldman and Nataša Govedić, who contributed to broadening the framework of consciousness (e.g. related to gender studies), and hence to changes in paradigm of creating plays (e.g. encrusting it with descriptions of corporal experiences, creating the “text body and tissue”) shall be noted. However, the women artists first of all come out of the source fact of symbolic oppression, biopolitics, and permanence of gender divisions which were previously addressed by European and global women activists, theoreticians and writers. The theories of such philosophers as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz are also referred to here.

“The phenomenon of economic and political transformation, occurring in the chaos of war, and growing popularity of feminist identity theories not only on local

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 68.

but also on global scene”⁸ contributed to the development of an *oeuvre* whose pattern is difficult to define. The term *feminine playwriting* was imputed of provisionality, hypotheticality and conventionality however, the Croatian theatrologist, Lada Čale Feldman, commenting the increased activity of women authors in the 1990s, several times emphasized that women playwrights of that period proposed poetics-related strategies which became attributes of the niche women authorship, but also impacted the entirety of the contemporary theatrical production.⁹ Artistic proposals of post-Yugoslav women playwrights of the end of the 20th century are interesting cases of affirmation and actualization of women’s playwriting growing out of *écriture féminine* [*feminine writing*]. Its thematic and stylistic determinants are among others mixing of genres (e.g. fiction with non-fiction), autobiographism and confessionalism, inclination to self-analysis, associativity, fragmentariness, collage composition, perspective focused on female characters, thematization of feminine corporeal experience,¹⁰ and these in the post-Yugoslav region started to get reception demonstrating acceptance and appreciation. This model of writing was further developed and differentiated in this area.

The selected women playwrights were not hiding their sources of inspiration, they referred to the *écriture féminine* (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig) concept mentioned hereinabove, but also to gynocriticism (Elaine Showalter), arachnology (Nancy K. Miller), corporeal feminism (Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Donna Haraway), gender studies and gender performativity (Judith Butler). Thanks to the skillful weaving of intellectual net and versatility, female corporeality took a central position in post-Yugoslav playwriting.

A thesis that “to be closer to one’s stories means just to be closer to one’s body”¹¹ is worthy of attention. The principle of translating somaticity into the language of literature may be realized as an attempt to regain the female body, which so far has been at the disposal of male desire. Connotations evoked by the postulate of “writing the body and through the body”¹² are obvious. The matter, biology, and anatomy are treated as a certain textuality, therefore perception of body and communicating with it determines automatically the specific way of writing. Referring to feminine existential experiences is a power, opening, and extraordinary potential, not a limitation.¹³

The material with this artistic message can be categorized. The heroines are sort of doomed to specific bodily practices in the key stages of their lives. The tokens of experiences and transition rituals are inscriptions – physical (such as: wounds, scars,

⁸ Lada Čale Feldman, *Femina ludens* (Zagreb: Disput, 2005), 186.

⁹ Lada Čale Feldman, “Postoji li suvremeno hrvatsko dramsko žensko pismo?,” *Republika* 3 (1996): 29.

¹⁰ Ivana Živančević-Sekeruš, “Historia literatury serbskiej w perspektywie genderowej,” in *Literatury słowiańskie po roku 1989. Nowe zjawiska, tendencje, perspektywy*, ed. Ewa Kraskowska (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2005), 169.

¹¹ Hanna Jaxa-Rožen, “Opowiadanie ciałem: kilka uwag o współczesnej poezji kobiecej,” in *Narracje, (auto)biografia, etyka*, ed. Leszek Koczanowicz, Rafał Nahirny and Rafał Włodarczyk (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP, 2005), 79.

¹² Hélène Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 876.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 878.

bruises, wrinkles, swelling, stretch marks, stitching, implants, artificial limbs) and symbolic. However, it is important for the body to be open to positive cultural filling. The three main thematic junctions are: procreation and maternity, the oppression and terror of aestheticization, the body losing its fitness and becoming isolated.

In the analyzed works, the topic of reflection is the format of the body exposed to discipline, various requirements of experiencing pleasure, adaptation to the current models of utility. The artists elaborating on the subjects connected with body-centricity create alternative counter-discourses and specific manifestoes. They focus on the painful clash of personal, troublesome experiences of the heroines with the social-political public space, medicalization and the influence of legal norms, which aim at governing the female body restrictively, including the most intimate matters. The bodies presented in the works are the places of resistance to control and biopower functioning in the contemporary networked society which are concentrated on increasing the productivity of the population.

Body in the face of change – motherhood

A segment of post-Yugoslav women's playwrighting which is connected with the thematization of motherhood is the broadest, and it is abundant with examples which are woven into the themes of sexual abuse, aestheticization and medicalization of the body.

Maternity has become a category which is still subject to public discussion and assessment. Even though civilization offers many religious and secular images of the mother, new models of experiencing and interpreting the procreational function are being created. Examples which deserve more attention are the ones breaking the taboo by describing the physical and psychophysical dimensions of maternity. This is an alternative for cultural texts, which are filled with seemingly descriptive, but in reality normative content covering institutionalized maternity and the myths accumulating around it.

*Matrophors*¹⁴ which are introduced to the discourse bear both positive and negative semantic potential, but the basic goals of their usage are demystification and reinterpretation of female physiology. In these drama works, existential experiences connected with processes unknown to male corporality and also complications that go with them are depicted by distinctive biological signs which often connote pain and discomfort.

Artistic realizations of women authors constantly rub a tensed border rope stretched between physiology and philosophy of pregnancy, a narrowed – reproductive and broadened – creative field of women's activity. Stages of metamorphosis and adaptive mechanisms of the inseminated, reacting to hormonal stimulation, and then delivering female body, that is basic biological facets of being a mother presented

¹⁴ Rebecca Dakin Quinn, *An Open Letter to Institutional Mother* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 113.

from a woman's perspective ceased to be the big absent theme in texts written by women playwrights, mainly from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is important that they put the emphasis on the issues of infertility, pathophysiology of pregnancy, but also contraception and abortion as defense techniques against coercive attributes of motherhood.

Managing female fertility is described by Milena Bogavac (1982). The author begins her controversial drama *Red: sex and consequences* [*Crvena: sex i posledice*, 2002] with a report on birth control in Serbia. The artistic comment, which is not only on abortion, but also on pain discovered by women throughout their lives, is provided by a nameless doctor and three female characters: She, Eve, and Lilith. The pain is multilevel – physical relating to menstruation, defloration, abortion, childbirth, but also emotional – resulting from the inability of living up to social expectations. The imperative of experiencing one's own femininity through pain is presented here. It is linked with red color from the title which symbolizes blood. An extraordinarily interesting perspective is also offered by Tanja Šljivar (1988), who shows the phenomenon of forced abortion in the case of teenage girls. In the play *All adventurous women do* [*Kao i sve slobodne djevojke*, 2016] the Bosnian author presents also the issue of body objectification.

Medical procedures are also part of everyday life of women trying to get pregnant. The *Sterile* [*Jalova*, 2012; triptych written by Magdalena Lupi Alvir, Ivana Sajko, Jelena Kovačić and Anica Tomić] project is noteworthy. In one part of the trilogy, the exposed body of a woman is reduced to the role of a prop in a theatrical play about a political debate on in vitro fertilization. The Croatian author Magdalena Lupi Alvir (1968) created an autobiographical and self-mocking retrospective monodrama, in which she depicts scenes, experiences and procedures, e.g. hormonal stimulation, during the fight against “Diagnosis N97” – female infertility.

These authors conclude that the woman should be treated as an individual capable of managing her own body and making decisions about her health and family. Institutions which are far from the experiences of a female body cannot decide about its functions.

A Croatian woman author, Lada Kaštelan (1961), in many different ways looks into the theme of fertility and motherhood. In *The Last Link* [*Posljednja karika*, 1994] play, the main character, who is pregnant, does not want to be another link in the chain of subsequent women's generations. Since, in her opinion, the fetus growing in her body would enhance the cycle of the transferred, most often inadequate, roles. Therefore, the woman is thinking of putting an end to this process, that is of a suicide. Fertility disorders and methods of birth control are described in the Kaštelan's play *Before Sleep* which will be further discussed below.

The issue of motherhood is highlighted in the works of Croatian playwright and performance artist Ivana Sajko (1975). The reproductive capability is untypically described in her play *Woman-bomb* [*Žena-bomba*, 2003]. Utilizing the symbol of futuristic maternity, the author analyses performative acts in the construction of femi-

ninity which has both life-giving and life-taking powers. The author depicts a female bomber who commits her body to the organizers of a terrorist act. The bomb fixed to it is treated as ticking new life. The woman experiences the simulation of pregnancy. This specific fusion of organic and technological elements evokes associations with the *Mother Machine* (by Gena Corea) but also resembles the concept of the cyborg. The “cyborg metaphor” used in the play contains certain re-visions of femininity, and at the same time a potential, which enables to go beyond them. In the work of Donna Haraway, the cyborg itself is an “illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism.”¹⁵ Placed in the post-gender order, it is a phenomenon negating the myth of Eden, because it is was not born, it does not have a mother, but it originates from a certain matrix.¹⁶ For Haraway, such figures – apart from chips and databases – become also genetically modified seeds, bombs, fetuses, and furthermore products of the technoscience complex, and the effects of a subject and object implosion. Child-birth itself in Sajko’s text is not traditional, but mechanical and it is signified by the activation of the bomb.

The authors present, sometimes only likely, descriptions of the *altered state* of women and their *leaving the form*. They create modern descriptions of radical changes occurring in the body in relation to procreation. They tear down the curtain of silence from female physiology, and comment on recorded manifestations of the control of reproduction functions.

Body (ab)use

American professor of philosophy and gender studies Sandra Lee Bartky, conducting an analysis of women visual representations in culture, noticed that the “space of a woman is not a field where her body can express itself consciously and freely, but a limitation which immobilizes her.”¹⁷ Lee Bartky updates Foucault’s theories of biopower as they apply specifically to women. She analyses many ways in which many women’s bodies are shaped, sized, disciplined and managed.¹⁸ This issue frequently appears in the works of women playwrights coming from post-Yugoslav countries.

Social and cultural conditions of the Balkan reality make it equally easy to become both a victim (women) and perpetrator of rape (men). This corresponds with a bitter reflection of Dubravka Ugrešić, who predicted that “Yugo-men and Yugo-women will for a long time be stewing themselves in their cursed sadomasochistic crucible.”¹⁹ It is clear that the process of frighteningly consistent writing the pages of the

¹⁵ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 151.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 129.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁹ Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1998), 168.

Black Book of Women's Condition is particularly visible in the Balkans. Some kinds of abuses are particularly obvious because they concern the usage of physical power, including sexual violence towards the woman. The others are more sophisticated and connected with the status of *being-perceived*, the internalization of control and the contemporary regime of the body, but still they wreak similar havoc. It turns out that the female body is created within a unique *risk culture* and the women in this process must obey the norms and laws which they cannot co-author.²⁰

Anthony Giddens' statement that "being a woman is a risky matter"²¹ and that woman's body is exposed to invasive external influences and entangled in mechanisms of control and social obligations – is a center of multiple reflections manifested with similar power from texts of women playwrights from Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The women authors created characters whose bodies resist, with different results, against violence, rape, abuse, exploitation in sex business, and terror of beauty. The women artists do not avoid vivid and suggestive presentations of scenes depicting in particular woman's body determined and even *burdened* with gender.

The descriptions of violating the boundaries of the female body are more and more common in the dramas of the authors from the post-Yugoslav area: Biljana Srbljanović and Milena Marković from Serbia, Nataša Antulov and Lydia Scheuermann Hodak from Croatia, Jasna Šamić, Elma Tataragić and Nermina Kurspahić from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nataša Nelević from Montenegro. They expose methodical war rape linked with intentional fertilization of enemy women and forcing them to give birth against their will (the actions recognized as crimes against humanity).

Rape is presented in these texts as an extremely effective tool of corporeal control, which simultaneously prevents the detachment of woman's body from the procreative function. That tragic experience leaves physical, tangible traces on and in victims' bodies and transforms motherhood into a painful memento. Analyzing the issue of sexual assault and abuse against women, which occurred in the periods of destabilization, wars and riots, the American journalist and feminist Susan Brownmiller points to the fact that these acts were a method, sanctioned by tradition, of indirectly fighting the enemy. The effectiveness of these practices is unquestionable, they come down to havocking the woman's body interior, but first of all to the change of its form and content: the "enemy-rapist deprives the man of his exclusive right to 'his' woman and takes her into possession, [...] she becomes a living incubator. A child of the 'stranger' will also be marked by strangeness, it will become an enemy from the enemy's body, a painful proof of the nation's weakness and a symptom of its fall."²² This issue is thematized by a Croatian woman playwright, Lydia Scheuermann Hodak (1942) in her paradocumentary monodrama *Images of Maria* [*Slike Marijine*, 1995], Bosnian women playwrights Jasna Šamić (1949) in texts *Meeting* [*Susret*, 1998], *Phantom* [*Sablast*, 2000] and Elma Tataragić (1976) in drama *Fate or Eve is Waiting*

²⁰ Ophelia Benson, *Does God Hate Women?* (London, New York: Continuum, 2009), 112.

²¹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991), 27.

²² Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 15.

[*Kob ili Eva čeka*, 2000] and a Serbian author Mirjana Ojdanić (1951) in her play *The Trace of Human Teeth* [*Trag ljudskih zuba*, 2001].

Sexual exploitation related to trafficking and procurement is the topic of merely a few drama works. The experiences of women treated like merchandise are described by Diana Meheik [*The Rose of Jericho; Jerihonska ruža*, 2007] and Lana Šarić [*The Flesh; Meso*, 2007] from Croatia. The stories of a Ukrainian immigrant, who changes her owners and brothels [*The Rose of Jericho*], and a girl raised to be a prostitute [*The Flesh*] are related because of objectification and loss of identity. Their bodies absorb negative feelings and the sex business takes its toll on them. A young Croatian playwright, Diana Meheik (1987) who observed a media frenzy, which was evoked by a tragic death of a Ukrainian prostitute, decided to bring into light the issues of human trafficking and pimping. Olena, who left her homeland due to poverty and lured by prospects of good earning abroad, experienced many forms of coercion. For many months she was resold and passed on to new owners. Finally, overexploited and ill, she died in a hospital in Mostar. Another woman author from Croatia, Lana Šarić (1983), described a tragic history of a young woman whose body is perceived by herself as *meat*, merchandise intended for consumption. That meat however, loses its freshness and produces more and more resentment. When the young prostitute decides to change her life, she is punished – her mother who is dependent on her throws acid on her face. Defacement turns out to be a liberation for her.

Internalization of control fuels in women a displeasure with their bodies, which is a risk factor responsible for the occurrence and permanent persistence of frustration and behaviors aiming to the obsessive control of body weight and appearance. Primacy of corporeality over identity, which is characteristic of modern culture, makes women rival for who of them embodies the most desired object of male perception, which requires both work and game. A woman, creating and modelling herself is, in her pursue, a performance, whereas man is a comfortably seated spectator.²³

The text *Orange Peel* [*Pomorandžina kora*, 2005] by Serbian author Maja Pelević (1981) makes one reflect on the terror of beauty. The female body today should be an obedient, flexible recipient of sensations which “chases the ever-changing, elusive ideal of femininity influenced by discipline and standards.”²⁴ In this drama the cosmetic-dietary-surgical industry is accused of creating and forcing the beauty myth into women’s minds in order to enslave them. The main female character – a post-modern Everywoman – tries to cause an inner crisis which is supposed to disturb the biological balance of the organism and lead to aware imperfection. Paradoxically, the symbol of victory over the control system is the orange peel from the title, i.e. cellulite.

American intellectual Naomi Wolf argues that the myth of beauty confines women in a specific area of images, and an attempt to escape from that vicious circle indeed proves to be a challenge and a problem.²⁵ The problem of the female body

²³ Zbyszko Melosik, *Kultura, tożsamość i edukacja migotanie znaczeń* (Kraków: Impuls, 1998), 78.

²⁴ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, 203.

²⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 10.

being involved in the mechanisms of obligation is also brought up by Marija Škrlec (1982) in her play *The Last Interview with the Vampire* [*Posljednji intervju s vampirom*, 2010]. She describes the extreme practices of a bulimic girl. The dislike of her own body escalates so much that it causes obsessive self-destructive actions. The woman is so convinced that the reason for her discomfort is faulty blood and the mirror reflection that she decides to turn into a vampire. The Croatian playwright used the phantasm which is encompassed into a zone of abjection. However, vampiric fluctuation at the border between life and death gives the main female character a comfortable place in a marginal zone free of the controlling gaze.

The theatrical study of almost twin diseases anorexia and bulimia, which affect more and more teenagers, is offered by Croatian playwright Jelena Kovačić (1979) and director Anica Tomić (1980). This original committed project is aimed at a young audience, and *Ana&Mia* (2010), which can be found in the title, are slang names for eating disorders.

These are examples of women's tragedies – victims forced to participate in all conventional and gender stereotypic acts of womanhood and closed in traditional patterns, based on subordination enabling (ab)use of their bodies. The women authors of that region present socially-engaged art, frequently of feminist nature.

The issue of body modification for the sake of progress is taken up by Croatian authors Ivana Sajko (the post-humanist terrorist in *Woman-bomb*), Sibila Petlevski (the prisoners locked up in cryogenic chambers in her play *Ice General – Ledeni general*, 2005), whereas Asja Srnc-Todorović describes horrible pseudo-medical experiments. One of the scenes in her text *The Countdown* [*Odbrojavanje*, 2002] presents the effect of genetic modification – a dehumanized mutant, which is supposed to be disposing of the camp's prisoners' bodies, but also of its own offspring.

A certain change of the artistic reflection formulating strategy may be noticed here. Women authors draw attention to the fact that new competencies contribute to blowing apart the homogenous concepts of femininity and are related to the potential of subversion.

(In)visibility of bodies

The politics of pleasure decides which bodily representations can be included in the official discourse and which should be excluded from visibility which affects mostly the elderly, but also the disabled and the ill. In these works, one can see motifs of a person losing their ability to achieve their own physical, mental and social potential fully, as well as reacting to environment's challenges. The authors emphasize that excluded people are required to somehow mask the problem, censor it, and most often be isolated on *the cultural rubbish dump*.²⁶

The demonstrative exposure of bodies which are sick, aging and moribund – thus, bodies on the brink of death – is an attempt to find place in cultural images for

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc w obliczu ponowoczesności* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1995), 95.

Otherness which does not fit imposed ideas. Deterioration of vigor is rarely shown as a separate and autonomous problem, but it is a part of a sequence in which the crucial, final destination is death.

The works look into the issue of body disappearance from public view. The woman playwrights directly refer to customs and forms of visualization in the contemporary world and the fact that each body gains, through social interpretation, a cultural variable and reliant visuality. Extensive efforts undertaken to maintain the instrument of individual expression in a state corresponding to common expectations, standards, requirements and stereotypes are effectively prevented and invalidated by disease or old age. The works present conditions related to extreme stages of human body degradation whose incompleteness and defectiveness cause its withdrawal from the world, deprive it of full participation. It is worth paying attention also to the thus far rare examples of artistic comments on women refugeeism and cultural and physical isolation arising from mere fact of having feminine physical attributes.

The author who decided to use the antiaesthetic code and the description of medicalization is Last Kaštelan (1961). She analyses the female body as a cell of social interaction, but also confronts it with *clichés* of femininity, which is embedded in the context of *the grand story*. The heroines' space is a hospital or therapeutic room. In one scene of the previously-mentioned drama *The Last Link* we see the juxtaposition of the mother who is dying of cancer and the daughter, i.e. SHE, who is going to give birth to a child out of wedlock. The zone of life fading away and yielding place to the new generation is created by the hospital bed.

The author uses medical metaphors also in the drama *Before Sleep* [*Prije sna*, 2005], which is set in a gynecological ward, so in a typically feminine, and at the same time medicalized space. Micro performances take place in this setting, which include six female patients who represent different diseases and disorders, such as: endangered pregnancy, miscarriage, ovarian resection, abortion performed due to the husband's pressure, cancer of reproductive organs, infertility.

Diseases become specific emblems. Focusing on naturalized and raw image of genital features, or rather their imperfections, clearly harmonizes with the mental state of sick women.²⁷ A sterile hospital room, physically and symbolically confining the characters, becomes a shade for them under which various withering or emerging facets of interpersonal relationships were closed. An autobiographical play *The Second Time* [*drugič*, 2014] as a second part of a *Victim Trilogy* [*Trilogija žrtve*] written by Slovenian author Simona Semenič (1975), that deals with taboo diseases such as epilepsy, genital herpes, bed wetting and similar is also of particular importance.

Relatively few female playwrights reflect thoroughly on transience and the vanity of human life. The reason for this is probably the fact that the authors are usually young and experience this phenomenon from the perspective of external observers. The matters of old age and infirmity (also male) are brought up by Biljana Srbljanović,

²⁷ Leo Rafolt, *Priučeni na tumačenje - deset čitanja* (Zagreb: Zagrebačka slavistička škola, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2011), 191.

Milena Marković and Branislava Ilić from Serbia and Nina Mitrović from Croatia.

Specific, intensified exclusion and alienation connected with blocking energy is also an important issue. This concerns e.g. female migrants, whose new world is built on the foundation of invisibility. Authors such as Jasna Šamić from Bosnia, Biljana Srbljanović from Serbia and Tena Štivičić, Lydia Scheuermann Hodak from Croatia reacted to the events related to the exodus of people during the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, but also to a further wave of immigrants from other geo-cultural areas.

In her duodrama *The Finger* [*Gishti*, 2011], the Kosovan author Doruntina Basha (1981) emphasizes the image of the subordinate role of a woman and the fact of imprisonment in the patriarchal system regulated by the set of traditional laws of Kanun. The heroines, who passively await the return of the lost men, are the embodiment of lonely mothers and wives whose possibilities of taking up work, moving independently, changing their status or building a future are forbidden by the community. They are suspended between the living and the dead.

The women authors foreground the issue that in the immensity of sensations people excluded due to body imperfections and lack of consumer involvement in the world are unnoticed. Looking into that problem, they depict the embarrassing reality of physical disorders, examples of violation of life harmony, embodiment of fear of withering and the ambiguity of the notion of the end of health, youth or life, and the symbolic absence of bodies with unclear status.

Conclusions

The above-mentioned examples do not reflect a wide range of artistic,²⁸ transcultural productions. However, they are highly representative and helpful in presenting bodily codes and gender perspectives in contemporary drama. Theatrical plays which are greatly valued by critics were created based on many of them. Female narrations in plays and performances complement the official discourse, challenge the common truths, enrich views over control and freedom (it turns out that mechanisms of control and setting free are not obvious). This is due to the fact that women authors from the region take up themes which are ignored, shameful, inconvenient, often tabooed. These artistic proposals, the majority of which are characterized by diverse and nuanced approach to the triad femininity-corporeality-performativity present multidimensionality of identification and point out the necessity to negotiate it.

The role of these plays seems to be not only to rearrange the already-known elements and themes constrained in culture, but primarily to diagnose current issues and deepen reflections as well as foster and point new perspectives. The body bears the plot of the metamorphosis being experienced. It is the place of both individual and group inscriptions, but also a dynamic space, where we witness the drama of

²⁸ Artivism operates from the intersection of the “expanded fields” of art and activism to create scenarios that advance social criticism.

constant confrontations. The contemporary playwrights from post-Yugoslav countries prove through their works that the biological dimension of existence may be an instrument of (auto)analysis and be the remedy for the inability of expressing oneself more comprehensively.

The conclusions on corporality and identity reconstruction in the drama works of female authors in the post-Yugoslav area which can be drawn so far encourage further research in this field.

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Article received: December 13, 2018

Article accepted: January 23, 2019

Original scholarly paper