

WORLD WAR I'S BOARDS THAT MEANT LIFE: THE THEATRE OF SERBIAN SOLDIERS AND PRISONERS OF WAR

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Abstract. *The First World War was the first modern war which mobilized both military and civilians of all participating countries from different continents. Theatre was not only a form of entertainment, purposing to take the audience's minds away from fighting and death. It became an integral part of the war, a part of the war propaganda as well. Using examples from a Serbian war-time theatre this paper looked, in the context of the history of theatre of the First World War, at the functions of theatre. The primary focus is on the protagonists of this theatre of emotions, on actors and ensembles, its repertoire, as well as on the effect the theatre had. Writing about Serbian theatre in the First World War it was important at first to draw a distinction between four categories: soldier front theatre, exile theatre of refugees, convalescent camp theatre, and POW and internment camp theatre. After the occupation in 1915 the Serbian theatre life took place outside of Serbia – in places where Serbs lived in exile, such as Greece (Corfu, Thessaloniki) and Corsica, where they were situated in the convalescent camps in North Africa or captured in prisoner-of-war and internment camps of the Habsburg Monarchy. The paper also presents the everyday and cultural life in Serbia during the occupation, which was consequently determined by the War Press Office in Vienna. For the analysis were primarily used the ego documents of the contemporary witnesses, the newspaper reports as well as the documents from the Austrian and Serbian archive collections.*

Keywords: Serbian theatre, First World War, Prisoner of War theatre, Front theatre, theatre and propaganda

World War I began with a declaration of war by Austria-Hungary against the Kingdom of Serbia on 28 July 1914, where the first front of this war was opened.¹ Serbia's civilian populations, who were inhabitants of the Habsburg Monarchy,²

1 After bombing Belgrade for several days, beginning with the night of 28–29 July 1914, imperial and royal troops crossed the rivers Sava and Drina on 12 August and perpetrated a massacre against the civilians in just twelve days in northwest Serbia. See Anton Holzer, *Das Lächeln der Henker: Der unbekannteste Krieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung 1914–1918* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2008). Additional thousands of civilians and soldiers were deported to the internment or prisoner-of-war camps of the Monarchy.

2 According to the 1910 census, 1.9 million Serbs lived in the Monarchy. As an ethnic minority they constituted 23.8% of the entire population in actual Hungary, 25.6% in Croatia-Slavonia, 32.4% in the Mil-

were heavily affected. Continuous battles in Serbia's residential areas left no possibilities for a theatre life and no desire for one. At the beginning of December 1914, shortly after Serbia was liberated and the last imperial and royal soldier left Serbia, a typhoid fever epidemic spread and the struggle for survival began once again. In the fall of 1915 Serbia was occupied during a campaign involving an Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian, and German offensive. King Petar Karađorđević (1844–1921; r. 1903–18), the government, and the army went into exile on Corfu, along with innumerable Serbian refugees.³

When we talk about Serbian theatre during World War I, we are talking about a theatre which came into being either on the front or in the prisoner-of-war and internment camps in Germany, Bulgaria, and the Habsburg Monarchy, in the convalescent camps in North Africa or amongst the refugees in exile. In the occupied Kingdom of Serbia proper, the repertoire included guest performances for soldiers of the occupying army or the so-called *Zivilveranstaltungen* (civilian events), e.g. in the K.u.k. Kino und Theater (Imperial and Royal Cinema and Theatre) in Belgrade, which were only partially open to the Serbian audience. However, theatre life in Belgrade and other cities in the state during the occupation from 1915 to 1918 was anything but not organized and performed by the artists of Kingdom of Serbia.

Serbian theatrical life during World War I was maintained in places where Serbs lived in exile, such as Greece (Corfu, Thessaloniki) or in Tunisia (Bizerte). As noted, Serbian theatre performances also took place in the prisoner-of-war and internment camps of the Habsburg Monarchy, such as Mauthausen, Aschach an der Donau, Boldogasszony (Frauenkirchen), and Nézsider (Neusiedl am See).

On the front, in exile, and in captivity, the theatre was of great importance. In an existential crisis, when it seemed uncertain if or when one would ever return to Serbia, these were indeed “the boards that meant life”. Theatre meant an escape from death, a relief from the dark and dangerous everyday life in the time of war.

This article focuses primarily on the organization of performances, the repertoire, protagonists, actors, and ensembles, as well as on reception.

A distinction is to be drawn between four categories of Serbian theatre in World War I: soldier theatre at the front, the exile theatre of refugees, convalescent camp theatre, and prisoner-of-war and internment camp theatre. The soldier theatre at

itary Frontier, 17% in Dalmatia and 43.5% in Bosnia; Dimitrije Đorđević, “Die Serben”, in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 3: *Die Völker des Reiches*, eds. A. Wandruszka and P. Urbanitsch (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), 734–774. Hostage-taking and internment began even before the war, in the July Crisis, as a retaliation for the assassination in Sarajevo; see Vladimir Ćorović, *Patnje Srba Bosne i Hercegovine za vreme Svetskog rata 1914–1918* (Sarajevo: I. D. Đurđević, 1920).

3 For more about World War I in Serbia see Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War, 1914–1918* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007).

the front, as well as theatres in convalescent camps for Serbian soldiers and theatre groups in exile, were initiated and supported by the Serbian government. The theatres in prisoner-of-war camps were initiated and organized by the prisoners themselves and were later partially supported financially by humanitarian organizations. They were subject to censorship controlled by the camp commanders. What all these theatres had in common is that they were all active outside the Kingdom of Serbia.

The theatre groups were dilettante or semi-professional, but they were mainly conducted by professional actors and producers, since the general mobilization included all social classes. Artists who were not called up in 1914 due to their age were imprisoned as civilian internees. Some of them moved from occupied Serbia at the end of 1915 with the army and the government into the countries of the allies. They worked closely with amateurs and with professional and civilian musicians. There were plenty of soldiers or prisoners of war and refugees who had never seen a theatre performance before, and some of them even became members of ensembles. The audience was by no means just an observer. Shouting, cheering, and heckling was nothing unusual; it reflected their given state of mind, or it was a reaction and reference to the current political events. Only some front theatres, for example the Serbian front theatre "Toša Jovanović" in Thessaloniki, had exclusively professional actors and producers at work. Quite often it happened that the amateur actors would keep the names of their stage roles forever. Memoirs and notes tell us that they were addressed by these names after the war ended as well, regardless of whether they were named after a female or a male character. Their civilian names simply disappeared, which was to their liking, as proved by the memoirs. Due to the circumstances, it was common practice for men to play female roles:

The theatre in prisoner-of-war and internment camps of the World War could directly resort to the 'male diva,' fiercely honored by the male audience, even if under dramatically altered circumstances. They were 'emasculated male societies,' whose members perceived themselves as robbed of both their 'soldierly masculinity' and the exercise of their (heterosexual) sexuality.⁴

This was not new for the professional actors from Serbia, who had gained their experience during the pre-war period in traveling theatre groups which relied on

4 "Auf die vom Männerpublikum stürmisch verehrte 'männliche Diva' konnte sich das Theater in den Kriegsgefangenen- und Internierungslagern des Weltkrieges direkt berufen, wenn auch unter dramatisch veränderten Bedingungen. Es waren 'entmannte Männergesellschaften,' deren Mitglieder sich sowohl ihrer 'soldatischen Männlichkeit' als auch der Ausübung ihrer (heterosexuellen) Sexualität beraubt sahen"; Christoph Jahr: "Theater- und Geschlechtsrollen im Engländerlager 'Ruhleben' 1914–1918", in *Mein Kamerad – die Diva: Theater an der Front und in Gefangenenlagern des Ersten Weltkrieges*, eds. Julia Köhne, Brigitta Lange and Anke Vetter (Berlin: Schwules Museum, 2014), 93.

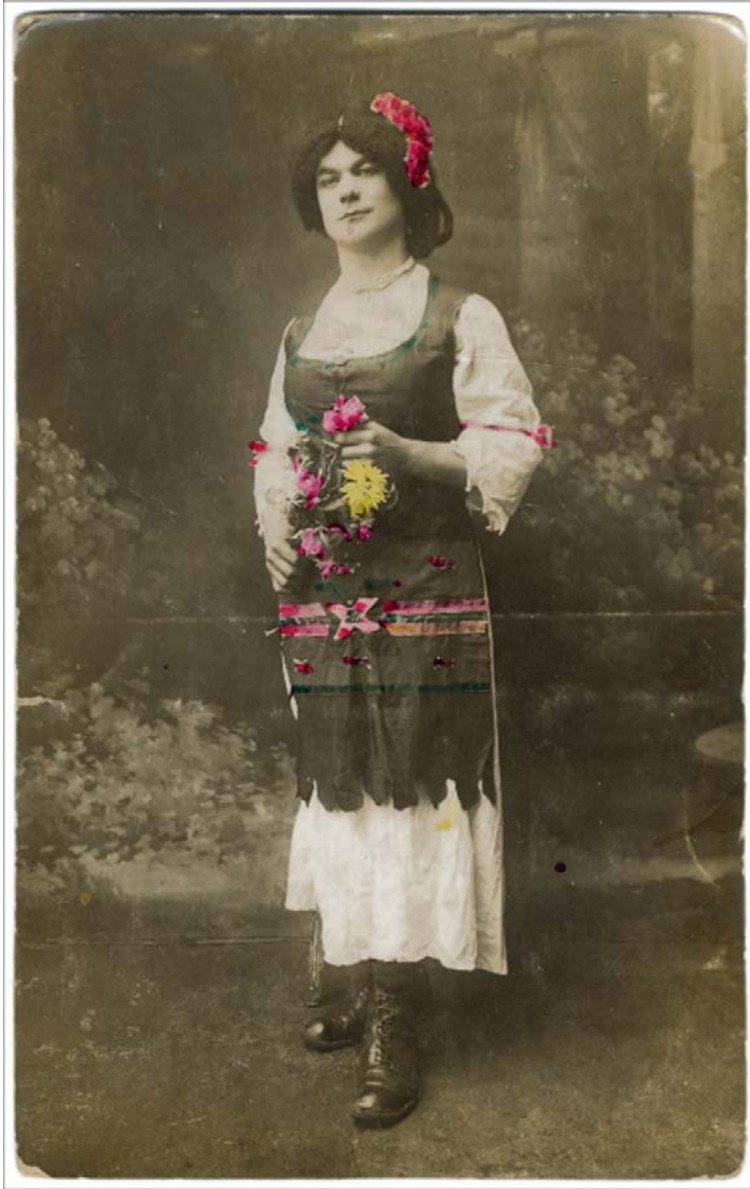


Fig. 1. Petar Terzić in the theatre play with music *Đido* (The Fearless Man) by Janko Veselinović, prisoner-of-war camp Boldogasszony. Source: Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti, Beograd

improvisation, nor for Serbian peasants who were used to men playing female roles in their customs (processions, annual fair comedies, etc.)

The identification with a role and happy memories of theatre performances in these difficult times had such an effect that even former prisoners of war, when coming across the subject of theatre, had only positive thoughts, as confirmed by the inscription of Petar Terzić on a photo dated 2 February 1918 which shows him in his theatrical costume, with the following dedication written in rhyme to his friend. They were both captives in camp Boldogasszony/Frauenkirchen in Burgenland:

In these difficult times that test us, instead of concerning myself with nothing but survival, I've battled with my own self and ultimately decided to remove my moustache. This I have only done to show all my friends that I, Terzić Pera, for the benefit of the society and the play *Dido* (The Fearless Man), am prepared to sacrifice my moustache as well. And now I stand before you in this costume as a true, even though not particularly pretty, woman. I wish to you with all my heart, my Toskić, that this photograph forever remains a memory of yours.⁵

SERBIAN THEATRE BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR I

The first professional theatre group, under the name of the *Leteće diletantsko pozorište* (Travelling Amateur Theatre), began its work amongst the Serbs in 1838 in the free royal city of Novi Sad (Újvidék) in South Hungary. This theatre group also gave performances in other cities of the Habsburg Monarchy from 1840, which resulted in the founding of more theatre groups. The fact that all the Serbian actors of this generation acquired their skills in traveling theatre groups, which often entailed improvisation in terms of staging, costume, and props, proved beneficial when it came to the organization of theatre performances in the war. Thanks to the commitment and guest performances of this group, mid-nineteenth-century professional theatres were established in Novi Sad, Agram (Zagreb), and Belgrade. This is how in 1842 the professional theatre in Belgrade, *Teatar na Đumruku* (Đumruk Theatre), came into being. At the end of the nineteenth century, the repertoire was dominated by German theatre, which served as a model, as did the Comédie-Française (French comedy) and Parisian boulevard theatre. Naturalism, symbolism, and expressionism played an important part in the early twentieth

5 “Petar Terzić, 2. II 1918. U danima ovim borbe iskušenja mesto za svoj život da se samo brinem, mislijo sam dugo; borijo se sobom i najzad reših da brkove skinem. To učinih samo da pokažem svima neka prijatelji i drugovi vide da za dobro društva a u korist *Didie* Terzić Pera eto i brkove skide. I sad u kostimu ja stojim pred vami ka neka prava – ne baš lepa žena. Iz sveg srca želim da ti Toskiću ova slika bude trajna uspomena”. Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti Srbije (Archive of Serbian Museum of Theatre Arts), Belgrade.

century. But the form favored up to this time, *komad s pevanjem* (the theatre play with music), did not completely disappear from the stage. The intertwining of Romanticism and Realism gave it a new poetic note. This is for example evident in *Koštana* (1900) by Bora Stanković, which remains a very popular theatre play in Serbia up to the present day.

This was the basis upon which Serbian theatre life during World War I developed itself. The men were at the front,⁶ and the female population prevailed in the occupied Kingdom of Serbia. What followed is that men at the front and in the camps played female parts as well, while women, in Belgrade for example, took over the conductorship of choral societies, or continued it, as did Sofija Predić for example. During the occupation, however, the choral societies continued only with church services in Serbian Orthodox churches. Serbian schools were closed, and the teachers dismissed. The occupiers opened new schools whose teachers came from the Habsburg Monarchy. This also affected music schools. After their unsuccessful plea for the reopening of music schools during Serbia's occupation, the dismissed teachers who had decided to stay in the country organized private lessons. These were only female professors, amongst others Miroslava (Frieda) Binički, the wife of the composer⁷ and conductor of the *Orkestar kraljeve garde* (King's Guard Orchestra), Stanislav Binički, who composed the well known *Marš na Drinu* (March on the Drina), popular among soldiers. He was located at the front, as were many other musicians and composers from Serbia. After the occupation of Serbia in 1915, many musicians and composers were also deported to the camps of the Habsburg Monarchy, with a few exceptions: for example, the composer Josif Marinković, who remained in occupied Serbia due to his advanced age. When he returned from imprisonment to Belgrade in 1916, he found his house devastated by the Austro-Hungarian soldiers who lived there; some of the manuscripts of his compositions had been burned, his bust was slashed, and many of his personal belongings had been carried off. In order to survive, he had to sell all that was left, including his piano.⁸

Already in 1914 the number of military bands which went to war with their respective units increased. They originated to some extent from the two preceding Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913. Numerous musicians died during the battles of 1914 and 1915, so that it took time before the bands could begin reorganizing in 1916 after the Army's retreat to the island of Corfu. Given the endless battles which

6 Even though, unlike in many other countries at the time, there were female soldiers and non-commissioned officers in the army of the Kingdom of Serbia, these were individual cases and one cannot speak of a large number of women in the armed forces.

7 Composer of the first performed Serbian opera *Na uranku* (At Dawn), among other works.

8 Vlastimir Peričić, *Josif Marinković. Život i dela* (Belgrade: SANU, 1967), 58.

took place on the soil of the Kingdom of Serbia from August until December 1914, affecting not only soldiers but the entire civilian population, along with the typhoid fever epidemic which broke out at the end of 1914 and claimed many lives in – by this time – liberated Serbia, theatre life did not matter.

One of the most important Serbian cultural centers, with a rich theatre life before the war was, as stated, Novi Sad. There were also other Serbian theatre groups and actors from Serbia who worked in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Hercegovina) or in Zagreb (Croatia). Some of these actresses and actors, along with other Serbs who were citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, were arrested even before the war broke out, following the assassination in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, and some were taken hostage and later on deported to internment camps in Hungary and Austria. We find proof of this in the memoirs of the well-known Serbian scientist Milutin Milanković,⁹ who was arrested in his birthplace Dalj in Croatia.

In August 1914, as the 2nd Hungarian hussar regiment left the barracks of Neusiedl (Nézsider), in order to fight on the battlefields of Galicia, these barracks became the prisoner camp for Serbian citizens who were found at the beginning of the war in the Hungarian half of the Monarchy and for other Serbian civilians who were taken prisoner during the war. [...] The ground floor had stables in which the imprisoned peasants were placed, and the “coat carriers”, as they were called by the military, were placed on the first floor. They were divided into various categories – the highest was the one of the so-called intellectuals. I came into this group and was brought into an elongated room with twelve straw mattresses [...]. The thirteenth mattress was given to me. My new companions in the room were: three actors from Zagreb Theatre, four lawyers of Zagreb University, a typographer, a merchant assistant, a waiter, and a formerly convicted murderer, who wasn't there for his rank, but as a servant. Amongst these actors was also the famous actor of the Zagreb Theatre, Bora Rašković, whom I have known since childhood. There I also met my acquaintance from Belgrade, Aleksandar Binički, the brother of the conductor of the [Serbian] King's guard (Stanislav). Soon I made friends with the rest of the group as well and therefore found myself in pleasant company. [...] The Austro-Hungarian army invaded Serbia, and new prisoners filled our camp.

9 A Professor at Belgrade University, Milutin Milanković had studied in Vienna and completed his Ph.D. at the *Technische Universität Wien* (The Vienna University of Technology). When the war broke out, Milanković was in his birthplace Dalj in Croatia. He was immediately arrested, brought to the prison in Osijek, later placed under house arrest, and subsequently brought to the prison in Karlovac, from where he was deported to the internment camp Nézsider (Neusiedl am See). He was released as early as 24 December 1914 on account of the intervention of his former Vienna colleagues and placed under house arrest in Budapest, where he was also allowed to do research work, until the war ended.

These were peasants from Mačva and from the surroundings of Šabac. Washed out by wartime events and exhausted from transport, they looked like ghosts. They were thrown into the ground floor, in the horse stables. Weary, they lay down on the leftovers of decayed straw. [...] An unknown disease with no name and no cure broke out among them. They began to go down like flies – at first one or two a day and then more and more as time passed. Their stories killed all hope in us. [...] Day after day, our guards told us about new victories of the Austrian army. [...] We wanted to know at all costs as much as possible about the events on the front. But collecting any news of it and the reading of papers was strictly forbidden and harshly punished. Nonetheless, we found a solution – one of the prisoners worked at the train station during the day. In exchange for some serious money which I gave him, he would get the Vienna newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* from a railway man and brought it to me always early in the morning. I would then retreat to our room and read the paper near the fire. Meanwhile my friends kept guard in front of the room. If in danger I could throw the newspaper into the fire. This way I read the papers every morning, memorized every place where the Austrian army made its progress, burned the paper and gathered friends afterwards to inform them. They held their breaths while they listened. We didn't possess any military maps in order to follow the army's movement. But Bora Rašković, the actor, met this need. He comes from Šabac and as a young actor he was in all of these regions of Serbia, where the war operations were happening. He was our live military map, so to speak. He knew even the smallest village of the region, the smallest river or brooklet. But his map had no proper scale. In those days he passed through this entire region on foot, walking beside a car which carried the entire inventory of the theatre troupe. Consequently, these distances seemed a lot bigger to him than they really were. When I mentioned the names of the places Tekeriš and Osečina in my report, he grabbed his head and began screaming. And so it went on day after day. [...] And one day when I told my comrade that the Austrians had reached Kolubara, Ljig, and Suvobor, our Bora jumped from his seat and roared with his theatrical voice: "This is the end! Serbia is doomed!"¹⁰

- 10 "Kada, avgusta 1914, taj puk [puk broj dva mađarskih husara, Nojsidel] odjaha na bojna polja Galicije, a njegova kasarna ostade prazna, pretvoriše je u zatočenički logor državljana Srbije koji se pri početku rata zatekoše u ugarskoj polovini monarhije i onih neboraca Srbije koji u toku rata padoše u ropstvo. [...] U prizemlju zgrade nalazile su se konjušnice u koje su, kad stigoh onamo, bili smešteni zarobljenici seljaci, dok su na gornjem spratu smeštene kaputlije, civili, kako su ih nazivale vojne vlasti. I tu je bilo rastavljanja u razne kategorije. Najviša od njih bili su takozvani intelektualci. Onamo uvrstiše i mene i odvedoše me na gornji sprat u prostranu duguljastu sobu. U njoj je po patosu bilo raspoređeno dvanaest slamnjača, ležišta zarobljenika, [...]. Donesoše i trinaestu za mene. U toj sobi zatekoh svoje novo društvo: tri glumca zagrebačkog Kazališta, četiri pravnika zagrebačkog sveučilišta, jednog farmaceuta, jednog tipografa, jednog trgovačkog po-

As it is the case with other diary entries or memoirs, one comes across the names of famous artists here as well. Bora Rašković was one of the well-known actors of the pre-war period, the doyen of the Zagreb theatre *Kraljevsko zemaljsko hrvatsko kazalište* (Royal National Croatian Theatre). Rašković was born in 1870 in Šabac, in Serbia, where he also attended high school. From 1887 to 1894 he traveled through Southern Slavic cities as a member of several companies of actors. From 1894 until the end of his life, he was a member of this Zagreb Theatre, where he played forty different roles already in his first theatrical season. He was so popular before World War I that he even had picture postcards made.¹¹ After the assassination in Sarajevo, the arresting of Serbs living in Zagreb began. Rašković was detained and spent a year in the prisoner-of-war camp Nézsider (Neusiedl

moćnika, jednog kelnera I jednog bivšeg robijaša koji je uvršćen u to društvo ne po svome rang, već kao poslužitelj. Među glumcima nalazio se prvak zagrebačke drame Bora Rašković, kojeg sam, kao što sam pričao, znao već iz detinjstva, i Aleksandar Binički, brat kapelnika muzike kraljeve garde, moj poznanik iz Beograda. Ubrzo se sprijateljili i sa ostalim članovima toga kruga. [...] Tako se našođ u prijatnom društvu. [...] Austrougarska vojska prodrła je ponovo u Srbiju, a novi zarobljenici počeoše pristizati u naš logor. To su bili srpski seljaci iz Mačve i okoline Šapca. Izmučeni ratnim događajima, iscrpeni mukama transporta u zabavljenim furgonima, izgledali su kao aveti. Strpaše ih u prizemlje kasarne gde su se pre toga nalazile konjske štale. Legoše umorni na zaostalu zagašenu trulu slamu [...] Među njima pojavi se neka nepoznata bolest kojoj niko nije znao ni imena ni leka. Počeoše umirati kao mušice, početka po jedan dva dnevno, a kasnije sve više I više. Njihova pričanja ubiše u nama svaku nadu [...]. I naši stražari pričahu nam iz dana u dan o novim poredama austriske vojske. [...] Htedosmo, pošto-poto, da doznamo šta se to zbiva na bojnóm polju. Prikupljanje vesti o tome i čitanje novina bilo je zabranjeno I najstrože kažnjavano. Ipak našosmo načina da do njih dođemo. Jedan od zarobljenika bio je preko dana zaposlen na železničkoj stanici. Onde bi mu jedan skretničar, za dobre pare koje sam mu davao, nabavljao bečki list "Neue freie Presse", a on ga izjutra krišom doturio meni. Tada bih se povukao u naše sopče, seo onde pored peći u kojoj bih pripalio laku vatru. Moje društvo šeckalo bi se za to vreme na doksatu I čuvalo stražu da bi mi u slučaju opasnosti dalo ugovoreni signal da novine bacim u vatru. Tako sam svaki dan pročitao novine, zapamtio svako mestance do kojeg je austriska vojska doprla, spalio novine I onda dozvaó svoje društvo na izveštaj. Slušalo bi me bez predaha. Nismo imali generalštabskih karata pomoću kojih bismo kretanje austriske vojske mogli pratiti korak po korak. No Bora Rašković, nadoknadio nam je taj nedostatak. On je kao mlad glumac, a rodóm iz Šapćanin, prekrstarío ceo kraj Srbije u kojem se odigravahu bojne operacije, znao svako, pa i najmanje mestance, svaku rećicu i potoćić. Bio je, dakle, živa generalštabaska karta. No ta njegova karta nije imala pravog I taćnog merila. On je taj kraj prokrstarío peške, koraćajuć uz volujska kola natovarena celokupnim inventaróm njegove pozorišne družine. Tako su mu sva prevaljena otstojanja izgledala znatno veća no što behu ustvari. Nije čudo što mu je nadiranje austriske vojske izgledalo munjevito. Kada u svome izveštaju spomenuh Tekeriš I Osećina, uhvati se za glavu i zajauka: 'Uh, uh!' Tako je išlo iz dana u dan [...]. A kada svojim dnevnim izveštajem saopštih svojoj družini da su Austrijanci stigli do Kolubare, Ljiga I Suvobora, naš Bora otkoći sa sedišta i zagrme svojim tragićarskim glasom: 'Svršeno je! Srbija je propala'. Milutin Milanković, *Uspomene, doživljaji i saznanja iz godina od 1909. do 1944* (Belgrade: SANU, 1952), 77–82.

11 Slavko Batušić, "Trojica umjetnika Šapćana na hrvatskoj pozornici: Mihajlo Miša Dimitrijević, Borivoj Rašković, Ljubiša Jovanović", in *Teatron*, nos. 72/73/74 (1990): 115–126.

am See). He was then released from the camp, but remained confined.¹² With his arrival in Zagreb afterwards, he began performing in theatre again – for the first time on 5 October 1915 in the play *Hasanaginica* by Milutin Ogrizović.¹³

Aleksandar Aca Binički, an opera singer and stage and movie actor born in Belgrade, who studied acting and singing in Munich, was the brother of the composer Stanislav Binički. Aleksandar Binički also did not stay in the camp until the end of war. He was released to Zagreb under the same conditions as Rašković, or Milanković to Budapest. During the war he performed in the same Zagreb theatre as Rašković, directed the second Croatian film *Matija Gubec* in 1917, and acted in 1918 in the movie *Mokra pustolovina* (Wet Adventure) by Arnošt Grund.

FROM SUMMER 1914 UNTIL AUTUMN 1915

The *Srpsko narodno pozorište* in Belgrade (Serbian National Theatre) was closed in July 1914 and, like all other theatres in Serbia, was not reopened until January 1919.

Since Serbia was a war zone from the first day of the war it is impossible to speak about cultural life at that time. In these first months of the war (from August until the beginning of December) there was no boundary in Serbia between the front and the hinterland, and women, children, and elderly men found themselves amidst the war events. After the first months had passed, certain Serbian cities had lost most of their populations. The city of Šabac in northwest Serbia – a town of culture with a flourishing theatre and music life – can serve as an example here: before the war the town counted about 17,000 citizens, and by December 1914 only a couple hundred were left. When John Reed came to Šabac, he wrote about more than two hundred souls who were living in misery. The rest had been killed in the brutal street fights, sent to internment camps in Hungary, or had taken refuge with the army.

Shabatz had been a rich and important town, metropolis of the wealthiest department in Serbia, Machva, and the centre of a great fruit, wine, wool, and silk trade. It contained twenty-five hundred houses. Some had been destroyed

12 Confined civilians were allowed to move within the limits of a determined time and place; they lived in private accommodations and were obliged to report regularly to a supervisor.

13 A Croatian author, one of the editors of the occupation paper *Belgrader Nachrichten/Beogradske novine* during the war and also enlisted in the service of theatre life in Serbia by the occupiers. For more about this newspaper and Ogrizović, see Gordana Ilić Marković, “Okupacioni list *Beogradske novine/Belgrader Nachrichten*, 1915–1918”, in *Naučni sastanak slavista u Vukove dana*, Međunarodni slavistički centar, 1/44 (Belgrade: Filološki fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2014), 143–156. During his time in the camp he developed a heart disease from which he did not recover until near the end of his life. He died in 1925.

by the guns; twice as many more were wantonly burned, and all of them had been broken into and looted. One walked along miles and miles of streets – every house was gutted. The invaders had taken linen, pictures, children's playthings, furniture – and what was too heavy or cumbersome to move they had wrecked with axes. They had stabled their horses in the bedrooms of fine houses. In private libraries all the books lay scattered in filth on the floor, carefully ripped from their covers. Not simply a few houses had been so treated – every house. It was a terrible thing to see. [...] We saw the gutted Hôtel d'Europe, and the blackened and mutilated church where three thousand men, women, and children were penned up together without food or water for four days, and then divided into two groups – one sent back to Austria as prisoners of war, the other driven ahead of the army square where once the great market of all north-west Serbia had been held, and the peasants had gathered in their bright dress from hundreds of kilometers of rich mountain valleys and fertile plains. It was market-day. A few miserable women in rags stood mournfully by their baskets of sickly vegetables. And on the steps of the gutted Prefecture sat a young man whose eyes had been stabbed out by Hungarian bayonets. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with ruddy cheeks – dressed in the dazzling homespun linen of the peasant's summer costume, and in his hat, he wore yellow dandelions. He played a melancholy tune upon a horse-headed Serbian fiddle and sang.¹⁴

A need for art emerges also, or rather precisely in such situations. Serbia was liberated at the beginning of December 1914. Immediately afterwards the typhoid fever epidemic broke out, which made the country completely preoccupied with caring for the sick, so the theatre was yet again put aside. Female painters, singers, and actresses, who were still alive and in town, took up jobs as nurses in hospitals. In addition to this, even during the brief time span of the first occupation period (thirteen days at the end of November 1914), one finds numerous educated and notable people, and thus also creative artists, among the first internees of 1914.

SERBIA UNDER OCCUPATION 1915–1918

In autumn 1915 Serbia was conquered in a German-Austro-Hungarian-Bulgarian offensive, occupied and divided into Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian administrative areas. A great part of Serbia, including the capital Belgrade, fell under Austro-Hungarian administrative governance. Before the war had started, Belgrade had about 100,000 citizens. In June 1916, some 17,600 men and 30,330 women lived

14 John Reed, *The War in Eastern Europe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 81–86.

there,¹⁵ many of whom were foreigners: along with the military and administrative staff and their families, teachers and artists came to Belgrade as well.

Changes came into effect immediately: the Cyrillic script was forbidden, the school system and printing were adjusted to the Latin script, and the Croatian and Serbian languages were renamed Serbo-Croatian. The Cyrillic script vanished from the entire townscape. Books in Cyrillic were removed from all bookstores and it was no longer allowed to use schoolbooks written in Cyrillic script. New Croatian books were introduced. This was a tremendous change for the inhabitants of Serbia, since the Cyrillic script was the only one in use up until then, and only those who had mastered a western foreign language, and with it the Latin script, were able to get hold of the written word as well. This was, above all, perceived as an attack on the cultural heritage. Meanwhile, in the prisoner-of-war camps such as Boldogasszony/Frauenkirchen, Mauthausen, and Aschach an der Donau, libraries with Serbian books were organized for the prisoners. As stated in a report, these Serbian Cyrillic books arrived in the camp Aschach an der Donau from Zagreb, Novi Sad, and Mostar, the towns where all Serbian institutions were destroyed and the Cyrillic script was forbidden.

Everyday life in Serbia was organized by the occupiers, and consequently, cultural life was determined by the War Press Office (*Kriegspressesquartier*)¹⁶ in Vienna. All Serbian teachers were dismissed and replaced with teachers, at first only officers, from the Habsburg Monarchy: from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia, the Duchy of Carniola, the Duchy of Styria, and the Duchy of Carinthia. The same fate befell actors, musicians, and other artists. Theatre performances and concerts were organized in Serbia during the occupation, but without the participation of Serbian artists or any involvement of the Serbian language. The *Belgrader Nachrichten/Beogradske novine* (Belgrade Newspaper), the German and “Ser-

15 Tamara Scheer, “O Švabama i komitačijama: društvena struktura i život u okupiranom Beogradu 1915–1918”, in *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 2 (2009):30–54.

16 A draft for the establishment of a press office in the case of a war was prepared in 1909: *Mobilisierungsinstruktion für das k.u.k. Heer* (Mobilization Instructions for the Imperial and Royal Army), Kriegsarchiv (War Archives), Armeoberkommando, Kriegspressesquartier, Fascicle 8, 53. See Ilse Stiassny-Baumgartner, *Roda Rodas Tätigkeit im Kriegspressesquartier* (Ph.D. diss., Vienna University, 1982), 7. Its work began on the first day of the war, 28 July 1914. Initially, the *Kriegspressesquartier* coordinated only print media, engaging numerous journalists and notable writers (Alexander Roda Roda, Stefan Zweig, Reiner Maria Rilke, etc.). During the war, it kept expanding its scope of responsibility. The newspapers remained the central propaganda medium until the end of the war, to which photography, film, painting, music, and theatre were added. It also exercised censorship. The *Kriegspressesquartier* was directly subordinated to the Field Army Command. It employed journalists, painters, composers, musicians, filmmakers, and photographers. See Gordana Ilić Marković, *Roda Roda: Srpski dnevnik izveštaca iz Prvog svetskog rata. Ratni presbiro Austrougarske monarhije* (Novi Sad: Prometej, Beograd: RTS, 2017), 13–56.

bo-Croatian” editions of the new daily newspaper of the occupying power,¹⁷ provides a sufficient amount of information about the theatre and concert program in the capital. It is announced that “in the future, the Imperial and Royal Cinema and Theatre will have two events for civilians, on Tuesdays and Fridays”.¹⁸ Two months later it reported on the commencement of work on a new movie theatre for civilians in the Belgrade park of Kalemegdan, where two shows would be organized on workdays and three on Sundays.¹⁹ The German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers held a fund-raising event for the needy citizens of Belgrade.²⁰ A variety performance of Martin Schenk’s *Zum Totlachen* (To Die Laughing) performed by the Etablissement Gartenbau Theater from Vienna was announced in the Belgrade theatre “Orfeum”.²¹ Hildegard Sugár from the Viennese Apollotheater made a guest appearance with the play *Deutsch-ungarische Stimmungskanone* (The Great German-Hungarian Joker).²² Jure Tkalčić, a Croatian cellist, performed a concert in Belgrade.²³ Concert performances by the Croatian violinist Zlatko Baloković were announced on various days at the beginning of 1917, as was the Viennese opera singer, Vilma de Thierry, “who will sing Croatian, Hungarian and German songs with piano accompaniment by Margit Rosenberg”. In February 1917 the Raimund Theater from Vienna held several events in Belgrade,²⁴ and again in May and June.²⁵ In June, a guest performance of the *K.u.k. Hof-Operntheater* (Imperial and Royal Opera Theatre) in Belgrade was announced,²⁶ and the Vienna *K.u.K. Hofburgtheater* (Vienna Court Theatre) in July.²⁷ A Hungarian Military Theatre gave a performance in Belgrade;²⁸ the Croatian opera singer Maja de Strozzi made an appearance in Belgrade,²⁹ and the Hungarian

17 After the Kingdom of Serbia was occupied in 1915, the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script were banned, along with all Serbian newspapers. The language was renamed Serbo-Croatian and Latin replaced the Cyrillic script. Instead of the Serbian press the occupiers introduced the official *Belgrade Newspaper* in three languages: *Belgrader Nachrichten* in German, *Beogradske novine* in Serbo-Croatian, and from 1 June 1916 *Belgradi hírek* in Hungarian. The first numbers of German and Serbo-Croatian editions, which were of importance for propaganda, appeared on 15 December 1915; the last ones were printed on 27 October 1918. These newspapers were under the censorship of the Austro-Hungarian War Press Office, and they mirrored the policy of Austria-Hungary.

18 *Beogradske novine*, 10 February 1916, 4.

19 *Beogradske novine*, 28 April 1916, 2.

20 *Beogradske novine*, 2 March 1916, 4.

21 *Belgrader Nachrichten*, 14 April 1917, 2.

22 *Belgrader Nachrichten*, 1 April 1917, 4.

23 *Beogradske novine*, 8 November 1916, 2.

24 *Beogradske novine*, 17 and 18 February 1917, 2, 1–2.

25 *Beogradske novine*, 19 May, 4 and 5 June 1917, 2, 1–2.

26 *Beogradske novine*, 1 June 1917, 2.

27 *Beogradske novine*, 7 July 1917, 3.

28 *Beogradske novine*, 19 September 1917, 3.

29 *Beogradske novine*, 5 October 1917, 3.

singer Steffi Högyesi in Smederevo.³⁰ A German-Hungarian Cultural Association performed on several occasions in Serbia.³¹ In December 1917 the Vienna Volksoper presented its performances. Theatre plays by the Croatian writer and one of the editors of the *Beogradske novine* (Belgrade Newspaper), Milan Ogrizović, were occasionally performed in Belgrade.³² In this newspaper Milan Ogrizović also wrote about theatrical and literary life in Serbia at this time. His theatre reviews, essays, and stories were also printed in this newspaper, in German or Croatian in *Belgrader Nachrichten*, in *Beogradske novine*, and in the Montenegrin occupation newspaper³³ *Cetinje Zeitung* and *Cetinjske novine* (Cetinje Newspaper).³⁴ The symphonic poem *Soča/Isonzo*, composed by the Croatian Major Ludwig (Luj) Šafranek, who was stationed in Belgrade, was first performed in March 1918 in occupied Belgrade and once again in Vienna on 21 April in the big hall of the Vienna Musikverein (Music Society) by the Wiener Philharmoniker (Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra).³⁵ The sheet music of this symphony was published in Belgrade by the *K.u.k. Gouvernement Druckerei* (Imperial and Royal Government Printing Office). The theatre program of occupied Belgrade also offered a theatre performance by Italian prisoners of war. It is noted in the report that the hall was full and that many officers sat in the audience, but so did civilians.³⁶ On very rare occasions, and none before the war had ended, theatre plays by Serbian authors were performed, like the play *Koštana* by Borisav Stanković.³⁷ Only seldom did theatre groups and orchestras give guest performances in other cities of Serbia.

30 *Beogradske novine*, 11 October 1917, 2.

31 *Beogradske novine*, 29 November 1917, 3.

32 Among them were *Hasanaginica* (Hasan-Aga Wife) and *Proljetno jutro* (A Spring Morning).

33 After the Kingdom of Montenegro was occupied in January 1916, the Serbian language and the Cyrillic script were banned, together with all Montenegrin newspapers in the Serbian language. The name of the language was renamed Croatian or Montenegrin, and Latin replaced Cyrillic script. Instead of a Montenegrin press the occupiers introduced the official newspaper in two languages: *Cetinje Zeitung* and *Cetinjske novine*.

34 Milan Ogrizović, “O Bori Stankoviću”, *Beogradske novine*, 25 November 1917, 1–3; idem: “Kroatische Literatur und Kunst während des Krieges”, *Cetinje Zeitung*, 15 April 1917, 1–2; idem: “Unsere kleine Ljerka”, *Belgrader Nachrichten*, 8 April 1917, 1–4, Osterbeilage.

35 Stefan Schmidl, “Interpretierte Welt: Aspekte einer Musikgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs”, in *Musicological Annual* 43/1 (2013): 74.

36 *Beogradske novine*, 12 March 1918, 2.

37 Borisav Stanković returned to Belgrade in 1916 after his release from the internment camp in Derventa (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and became an employee at the *Beogradske novine*. He described this time in his posthumously published work *Pod okupacijom* (Beograd: Štamparija Davidovića, 1929). His theatre play with music *Koštana* had its premiere on 22 April 1900 in the *Narodno pozorište* (National Theatre) in Belgrade and achieved great popularity. It was also performed in the Serbian front theatres and in Serbian theatre groups in the prisoner-of-war camps during World War I, for example in Nézsider, *Beogradske novine*, 30 March 1918, 2.

As the cinemas and theatres began to work, movies were dispatched from Vienna and actors and musicians from the Monarchy. The repertoire offered guest performances for the occupation soldiers, which were not primarily meant for the Serbian population (and performances for officers differed from those for simple soldiers and officials), and also so-called civilian events in the Imperial and Royal Cinema and Theatre.³⁸ The occupation newspaper *Belgrader Nachrichten / Beogradske novine*, gives sufficient information about the theatre and concert program in the capital.

THE SOLDIERS' THEATRE AT THE FRONT

Those actors who had survived the first year of war on the front in the Serbian army, and had succeeded in not being taken as prisoners of war, came in the winter of 1915/16 over the Albanian and Montenegrin mountains to Corfu, in a three-month march with the army, civilians, the King and the Serbian government. Corfu became a three-year seat of the Serbian government, and from this place military operations and support for refugee civilians were put into effect.

Ironically enough, one must notice that a shortage of experts was evident neither in the Serbian army nor in the prisoner-of-war and internment camps. The mobilization in 1914 included all social classes, namely from the I to the III draft. Already in the first months of 1916 on the island of Corfu, a film and a theatre group, an orchestra, and a printing office (for newspapers and books) were established. When the first theatre was founded on the island there were enough actors, but it was not easy to obtain their release from duty at the front, since the army was in need of every man. One actor, Dušan Životić, recalls how the officer Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis was in charge of taking care of the theatre group and constantly pleaded that the artists be exempted from front duty. As Apis issued Životić a permit to stay in the theatre on Corfu instead of marching to the front in Thessaloniki, he told him: "There are not enough men for the battle. Were it not so, you artists should have been relieved of military duty on the front. We will need you in the time of peace. Be greeted, boy!"³⁹ and gave him the signed paper.

Soon enough Thessaloniki became one of the most important Serbian cultural centers of the time, but also a place where wounded soldiers were brought to recover and those who were seriously injured (the blind, invalids who had lost legs and arms, etc.) found a permanent shelter for the duration of the war. There were convalescent camps in North Africa, in Tunisia and the French colony Algeria,

38 Before the occupation this cinema was called *Koloseum*.

39 Dušan Životić, *Moje uspomene*, ed. Siniša Janić (Belgrade: Muzej pozorišne umetnosti Srbije and Pozorišni muzej Vojvodine, 1992), 47.

such as Bizerte and Lazuaz. There were Serbian refugees in Ajaccio, Corsica, but these were not under the command and organization of the Serbian army.

When Serbian soldiers were relocated from Corfu to Chalkidiki (on the Thessaloniki front) after a short recovery break, the organization of smaller events began. The first Serbian soldier theatre group was founded here in spring 1916. The front theatre of the 21st Vardar Division developed itself from this group and was named the Yugoslav Division by the end of the war. The infrequent lulls in the trench warfare were mostly used to organize solo performances by professional actors in which poems were recited and excerpts or songs from plays were declaimed or sung.

Actors could be found amongst the soldiers who were shipped from Corfu to the mainland at Thessaloniki. The famous Belgrade actor, satirist, and painter Branislav Brana Cvetković was one of them. Cvetković obtained a degree in fine arts in Munich, but at the same time he also attended acting classes. After his return to Belgrade he performed in various theatre groups, and in 1900 he founded the satirical theatre “Orfeum”, which soon became known as a temple of humor, and Brana Cvetković was its “king”. Stanislav Vinaver, the Serbian writer, has recorded how Belgrade honored Cvetković and how people from all over Serbia trekked in order to see him on stage. *Artilleria Rusticana*, a parody of the Italian opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*, was performed almost five hundred times just in the span of a few years before the war. It was sharply critical of society, as were all the other plays by Brana Cvetković, in which he addressed current political events. He acted, accompanied by the famous orchestra Cicvarići from Šabac, directed, prepared the scenography, and wrote all the texts. He was mobilized when the war broke out, and when he arrived in Corfu with the army it was certain that no other person in this situation was more suited to take on a job of organizing the theatre to provide entertainment for the exhausted and demoralized soldiers. Humor was the thing that mattered most in his artistic work. Cicvarići was well known and well liked. He kept the position of commanding officer of the theatre group until the war ended and managed the theatre in Thessaloniki on his own.

The stage of the Vardar Division theatre group, set in the open air, was made up of simple ammunition boxes. Historical costumes were sewn from sacks, which were colored and then painted with traditional costume motifs. When it came to props, a knight’s armor was made from oil canisters and tin cans, swords were carved out of wooden boards, etc. “All the four regiments of the Vardar Division had professional actors”.⁴⁰ The theatre director was Sima Stanojević Šućur, who also acted. Other ensemble members included Antonije Pelagić, the former thea-

40 Dragoslav Antonijević, “Theatrical Life on the Salonika Front”, in *5th Greek-Serbian Symposium: Serbia and Greece During World War I* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1991), 70.

tre director of the traveling theatre *Sloga* (Unity), Nikola Dinić, Radovan Raja Bojanić, Rudolf Srboljub Het, Miloš Zotović, Aca Rašković, Đura Marinković, Antonije Gavrilović, Dušan Zarić, and Pera Mišić, commander of the regiment Milan Pribičević.

Well-known Serbian theatre plays were staged – *Đido* (The Fearless Man) and *Haiduk Stanko* by Janko Veselinović, *Koštana* by Bora Stanković, *Devojačka kletva* (The Girl's Curse) by Ljubomir Popović, *Zulumčar* (The Oppressor) by Svetozar Ćorović, *Voivode Brana* by Sima Bunić, *Običan čovek* (A Common Man), and *Danak u krvi* (Blood tax) by Branislav Nušić. The subject matter of these plays (Romantic village life, love affairs, heroic stories) was without doubt a crucial factor in the process of their selection. Furthermore, the advantage of these well-known plays was that the experienced actors already knew them by heart and were thus able to write them down for their younger colleagues and amateurs. This was necessary due to the initial lack of scripts. Those taken along from occupied Serbia had been used as fuel to keep warm during the three-month march or were simply left behind in the mountains as a cumbersome burden. The situation did not improve until the Serbian printing houses in exile began functioning in Bizerte in North Africa, and in Corfu and Thessaloniki in Greece. Some new plays programmatically proclaiming South Slavic unity emerged towards the end of the war, such as *Hej, Sloveni!* (Hey, Slavs!).

This was the first encounter with the theatre for some soldiers who came from the villages of Serbia. In order to make the contents of some of the more complex plays more comprehensible to them, they were explained before the performance began.⁴¹ Painters were responsible for the stage scenery, and engineers were in charge of the stage construction, since it became possible in late 1917 to build an amphitheatre, as on the location of *Donji Požar*. This amphitheatre could accommodate 600 audience members, with the expansion capacity for another 200 places.

The IX Regiment of the first army also had a theatre group stationed in the village of Budimirci (in the south of Macedonia⁴² on the border with Greece). It was active from 20 October 1917 until 27 August 1918 and gave a total of 191 performances. This theatre group was founded by a grammar-school teacher, Radivoje Karadžić, who became a dramaturg after the war. An experienced actor from the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad, Lazar Lazarević, was the theatre director. The rest of the group consisted of only one more actor who was an amateur.

41 Dragoslav Antonijević, "Komadi s pevanjem na Solunskom frontu", in *Srpska muzička scena: Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa*, eds. Ana Matović et al. (Belgrade: Muzikološki institut, SANU, 1993), 110.

42 In 1913, after the Balkan wars, Vardar Macedonia became part of the Kingdom of Serbia along with Kosovo and Metohija and Sandžak (so-called Old Serbia).

This theatre was housed in a wooden building; it had a relatively big stage and an auditorium with 400 seats. What is interesting about this building is that it was located incredibly close to the enemy camp and only 1500 meters from the trenches of the Serbian soldiers. Two orchestras played in this theatre: the orchestras of the Danube and the Morava divisions. Rodolphe Archibald Reiss, a Swiss professor who survived the hardest battles with the Serbian army since 1914, wrote an article about the theatre group for the *Gazette de Lausanne*:

*From the Serbian front line 24 April 1917. [...] Thus, there we were, standing before the long building, built out of pine logs just like in the Wild West in America. Today, the 100th performance of the IX Regiment's theatre will take place. [...] Many officers and soldiers are in the audience. Everybody is fully equipped and wearing gas masks in small bags hung around their necks. These are the soldiers who are part of the reserve, but some of them also came directly from the front and undertook a long march in order to be here in the theatre and will then return immediately to their trenches after the performance ends. [...] The orchestra begins with a pastiche of Serbian traditional folk songs; what follows, on the occasion of the 100th performance, is a speech by the commander about the history of this theatre. He rightly points out the moral role of the theatre in which the exiled peasants – Serbian soldiers – find, at least for a few hours, the fiction of their distant country. Then music again, and after that the first play: *Prince Ivo of Semberia*, a historical patriotic play by Nušić⁴³ [...]. Everybody is acting really well, one sees that they've made a great effort. The soldiers playing female parts do it so well that it doesn't have a comic effect, as it is often the case with amateur theatre. I inquired after the civilian professions of the soldiers who stood on stage – they were farmers, butchers, shoemakers. It is a tragic play. Secretly I observed the faces of these men, how evidently touched, excited, and upset the scenes of Serbia's history made them feel, a history which is unfortunately repeating itself today. Loud applause. The actors step before the curtains several times. The officers are going outside to have a smoke. Music is playing. At the same time the sound of cannons is coming from the nearby front. What follows is a comedy about village life. The faces of the soldiers become radiant. The scenes carry them off into their white villages, richly surrounded by greenery, on a sunny Sunday. For this one moment, they forget the exile and death that is constantly lurking. It is noon. The performance ends. Slowly and in silence, the soldiers*

43 Branislav Nušić, the most important Serbian comedigrapher, arrived in Corfu following the occupation of Serbia in late 1915 after a three-month march with the army and many refugees, and went from there to France. He dedicated his book *Devetstoptnaesta: Tragedija jednog naroda* (Vienna: Edition Slave, 1921), to his only son, who was killed in action in 1915.

leave the theatre which is located barely 1000 meters from enemy positions [...]. Four soldiers are introduced to me. They've shown themselves good in the battle against the Bulgarians. As an honor and a reward for their fighting, they got leave to go to the theatre today.⁴⁴

CONVALESCENT CAMPS IN NORTH AFRICA: BIZERTE AND LAZUAZ

A considerable number of wounded soldiers, and those weakened by the three-month march, were shipped off to Bizerte (Tunisia). The camp was located near the desert. This was a completely unfamiliar region for the Serbs, and they had difficulties in becoming acclimatized. But they were struggling above all with their disabilities. Often this led to alcoholism, depression, and even suicide. The commanders of the camp found a solution in entertainment programs: music evenings or workshops. A printing office was established, and soldiers who had been blinded were retrained for their new jobs there.⁴⁵ At that time the actor Dušan

44 "Evo nas pred dugom zgradom, sagrađenom od sirovih jelovih debala, kao na divljem zapadu u Americi, to je pozorište IX srpskog puka, koje danas daje svoju stotu predstavu. [...] Pozorište je puno oficira i vojnika u plavim rovovskim, šinjelima, svi sa maskama protiv zagušljivih gasova gotovim u torbicama oko vrata. To su vojnici iz rezerve, kao i vojnici iz drugih pukova, vojnici koji često marširaju po nekoliko teških časova da bi mogli doći na predstavu – i koji se vraćaju iste noći u svoje zemunice i rovove. [...] Tu je i muzika koju daje divizija. Kao uvod svira potpuri srpskih pesama. Zavesa se diže, i pred dekorom šume koju su izgradili vojnici, jedan potporučnik iz puka drži, povodom stote predstave, predavanje o istoriji ovog pozorišta. S pravom ističe moralnu ulogu pozorišta u kome izgnani seljaci – srpski vojnici – nalaze bar za nekoliko časova fikcije svoje daleke zemlje. Još jednom muzika svira i počinje prvi komad, *Knez Ivo od Semberije*. To je patriotski komad Nušića [...]. Svi se glumci staraju da odigraju svoje uloge što bolje. Igraju vrlo dobro, i sa mnogo osećanja. Ženske uloge igraju glumci vrlo prikladno, tako da to prerusavanje u žene nije ni u koliko smešno, kao što to tako često biva po amaterskim pozorištima. Hteo sam da saznam profesije glumaca u građanstvu: seljaci, kasapski momci, obučari. Tema komada je žalosna: gledao sam krišom, muška lica gledalaca i na svima je bilo ispisano uzbuđenje koje kod njih izaziva ovo predstavljanje starih i prošlih vremena, koja se nažalost ponavljaju i danas. Zavesa pada. Burno pljeskanje nagrađuje glumce, od kojih se izazivaju glavni po nekoliko puta. Odmor je, i vojnici i oficiri izlaze na čist vazduh da popuše koju cigaretu. Muzika unutra svira još jedan komad, praćen topovima čija zrna preleću preko pozorišta. Po drugi put se diže zavesa: jedna vesela scena iz života seoske mladeži srpske. Sva lica gledalaca su se razvedrila. Svi vole lepe nedelje po svojim belim selima, okruženim bogatim zelenilom. I na momente, zaboravljaju i izgnanstvo i smrt koja ih vreba stalno. [...] Ponoć je, predstava je svršena, pozorište se lagano prazni; vojnici u tišini napuštaju ovo mesto koje je jedva jedan kilometar daleko od neprijateljskih rovova, [...]. Komandant puka mi predstavlja četiri vojnika, u rovovskom odelu, koji su prošlog jutra bili u izviđačkoj patroli u bugarskim rovovima. Komandant je vojnike pozvao na večerašnju predstavu da ih time odlikuje i nagradi". Jelica Reljić, "Pozorište na frontu", in *Teatron: Časopis za pozorišnu istoriju i teatrologiju* 26/114 (2001): 61–63.

45 See Nedeljko Gizdavić, *Srpska Afrikijada: Naši u Africi* (Belgrade: Budućnost, 1922).

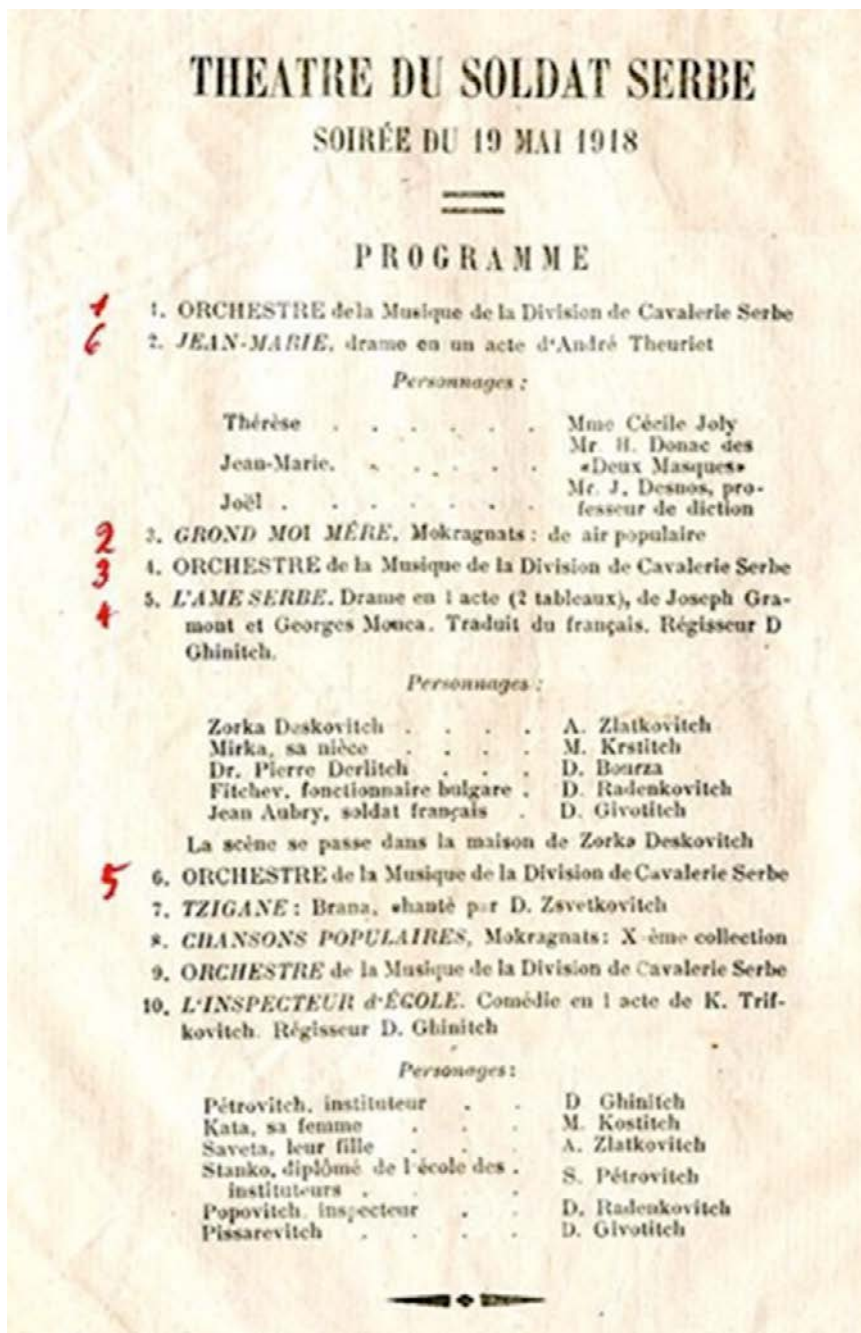


Fig. 2. Serbian soldier's theatre, Bizerte, the program for 19 May 1918, from Dimitrije Ginić, *Dnevnik predstava Srp. Voj. Log. Pozorišta u Nadoru*, manuscript. Source: Narodna biblioteka Srbije (National Library of Serbia), Belgrade, P274, 32.

Životić came to Bizerte, and so did the actor and director Dimitrije Ginić. They organized the theatre life, created settings from the remains of tents, sewed costumes from old uniforms, and gathered around them all the available singers and instrumentalists. They wrote down texts as they remembered them and rehearsed with the young soldiers. The barracks meant for the shows could hold an audience of 300. The first performance by the group was given already in November 1916. The director got the assignment to prepare it in four weeks. He put together an evening consisting of songs, poems, and a comedy of village life, *Devojačka kletva* (The Girl's Curse) by Ljubinko Petrović, which he wrote down as he recalled it. Many of the soldiers were seriously injured and depression was widespread, but according to the memories of the actor Životić, as the first sentences came from the stage one could hear "a very loud happy hearty laughter and there was genuine contempt on the faces of these men".⁴⁶ The audience was a part of the play. Comments and shouts could be heard, and – first and foremost – they all sang along. The pent-up emotions of the years that had passed burst out.

But not all wounds could be healed by the theatre, and the state in which these men found themselves is shown in a record announcing the cancellation of the comedy *A falu rossza* (A Village Carouser) by Ede Tóth, translated and nationalized as *Seoska lola* by Stevan Deskašev, which was scheduled for 25 July 1918, because one member of the ensemble, Milorad Nušić, had committed suicide. Suicides were not uncommon. Three days later, on 28 July, the play *Patrie* (Fatherland) by Victorien Sardou was presented.

Over time, a group of actors gathered in Bizerte who had been transferred there from other camp infirmaries in Africa. Soon enough, the barracks became too small, and so a "summer stage" was set up, an amphitheatre under mount Nador, three kilometers from Bizerte. The headquarters of the Serbian convalescent camps in North Africa were based in Lazvaz. From late 1915 until the end of 1918 around 60,000 Serbs were housed there. The biggest Serbian exile theatre was situated there as well. It was founded in late 1916 by the actor and director Dimitrije Ginić, Belgrade university professor Veselin Čajkanović, and the former editor of the newspaper *Politika*, Jovan Tanović. A very large amphitheatre (with 5,000 seats and a gallery for 1,000 people) was built here out of stone. The stage was roofed over and the actors had two changing rooms at their disposal. Work began in March 1917 and lasted until October 1918. 186 performances were held. The audience numbers for this entire period are also impressive: 800,000. The last stage performance was organized on 23 October 1918.⁴⁷

46 Životić, *Moje uspomene*, 51.

47 Ibid., 31, 169.



Fig. 3. Theatre at Bizerte. Source: Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti, Beograd

For the time being, the previously mentioned Ginić, Dušan Životić, and Dušan Radenković worked as professional actors. Shortly afterwards, all the actors who were in other North African infirmaries (Algerian and Tunisian) joined them: Aleksandar Zlatković, Dušan Cvetković, Kosta Jovanešković and others. The rest of the troupe was made up of students and pupils of the seminary. The dramatic art of Miroslav Krstić Stiha, Momir Nikolić, Sava Petrović, and Nikola Spasić stood out in particular. Since there were only a couple of women, they also played these parts. The repertoire was composed of historical and humoristic folk plays: *Boj na Kosovu* (Battle of Kosovo) by Jovan Subotić, *Hajduk Veljko* (Haiduk Veljko) and *Đido* (The Fearless Man) by Janko Veselinović, *Knez Ivo od Semberije* (Prince Ivo of Semberia), *Jazovac pred sudom* (Badger in Court) by Petar Kočić, *Devojačka kletva* (The Girl's Curse) by Ljubinko Petrović, *Ivkova slava* (Ivko's Feast) by Stevan Sremac, and the comedies of Branislav Nušić. In addition, a few French plays (e.g. by Molière) were translated and performed. A play by the French authors Joseph de Gramont and George Monca, *L'âme serbe/Srpska duša* (The Serbian Soul), about events in one Serbian village under the Bulgarian occupation, was performed in French and Serbian, depending on the roles in the play.⁴⁸

48 Životić, *Moje uspomene*.

One of the plays, which was written during the war⁴⁹ and addressed the topic of war was *Hej, Sloveni! Dramska epizoda iz srpsko-austrijskog rata* (Hey, Slavs! An episode from the Serbo-Austrian war) by Risto Odavić. This play was staged in the soldier's theatre on the front and in the convalescent camp theatre in North Africa. It portrayed the unified battle of Southern Slavs. The story takes place on 2 December 1914, the day of Serbia's liberation.

Much of this valuable information about the repertoire, the course of the performances, the numbers of people in the audiences, and sometimes even about the events that preceded or followed, was taken from the notes of a short but very informative diary⁵⁰ about the plays acted on the stage in Tunisia. It is often noted that actors were ready to perform after having rehearsed only two, three, or four times. Admission was free of charge for the soldiers and amounted to one franc for officers. Both on the front and in the prisoner-of-war camps, the preparation of costumes and props and the procurement of original texts represented the biggest problems, even though this theatre was situated on the territory of the allies and not on the front, and was not under the command of a prisoner-of-war camp. Uniforms, tent materials, and donated civilian clothes were used. When necessary, things would be dyed or tailored. The actors, teachers, and actors amongst them took care of the texts. They would be put down in writing as they were remembered and reproduced in the Serbian printing office founded in Bizerte. Oil cans, canisters, and tins were a material source for the props.⁵¹

Who was in the audience? Mainly soldiers, some officers, but also guests from Bizerte, French soldiers, and among them – as most welcome and frequently seen guests – the commander and admiral of the French army, Émile Guépratte, then the envoy of the French government in Tunisia, the Tunisians themselves, and the English and French nurses. There are numerous memories of General Guépratte: “After the performance, the general approached the actors and greeted them with a typical soldier's salute in Serbian”.⁵²

This French general was very popular among the Serbs because he opposed the decision of the French army to place the wounded Serbs in Central Africa, in the desert, so they were taken to the coast of North Africa. For this reason he often heard his own army say “Ah, Guépratte and his Serbs!” Another anecdote⁵³ referring to the theatre is associated with this general. During an interval of a play, he

49 Already published at the beginning of 1915.

50 Unpublished journal of performances of the Serbian Military Camp Theatre in Nador, Tunisia. Narodna biblioteka Srbije, Belgrade, Manuscript collection.

51 Ginić, *Moj život*, 37–43.

52 *Pomoz, Bog, junaci!* (God Help You, Heroes!)

53 Životić, *Moje uspomene*.



Fig. 4. The performance of the theatre play *Knez Ivo od Semberije* (Prince Ivo of Semberia) by Branislav Nušić in Lazuaaz 1917. In the middle of the audience: General Guépratte. Source: Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti, Beograd



Fig. 5. Jovan Subotić, *Boj na Kosovu* (Battle of Kosovo), Lazuaaz, 1917. Source: Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti, Beograd



Fig. 6. Aleksandar Saša Zlatković in his female part Angélique in the comedy play *George Dandin ou le Mari confondu* by Molière. Source: Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti, Beograd

went backstage and expressed his special interest in an “actress” whose hand he kissed multiple times with the remark that he hoped to see her after the performance. The lady was actually the famous Belgrade actor Zlatković, who obviously had a good costume and played his female part so convincingly that he had the appeal of an attractive woman.

At the end of the show, whilst bowing to the audience, Zlatković took off his wig and looked in the direction of Admiral Guépratte. This story can be found in various diaries as a popular anecdote.⁵⁴ Even if it was freely adapted (Guépratte

54 Ibid., 39.

was called “a Serbian mother”), it is one of many nice stories about the memories of the theatre during the war.

The orchestra of the Cavalry Division conducted by Dragutin Pokorni was also in Bizerte. This orchestra was active from 1916 until the end of the war. They held concerts in the camp infirmaries and French garrisons in North Africa and France, and they were also responsible for the music schools organized there.⁵⁵ The King’s Guard Orchestra however, conducted by Stanislav Binički, was active in Thessaloniki. Both orchestras accompanied theatre performances and went on tours in France and England.

THEATERS THAT WERE NOT UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE SERBIAN ARMY REFUGEES IN AJACCIO, CORSICA

There were many refugees in Corsica, transported there on the ships of the allies during the war. The English mission stationed in Ajaccio financed the Serbian theatre, which was established in 1916 and managed by the actors Vladeta Dragutinović, Miloje Dostanić, Josif Srdanović, and others. Performances were given in the *Théâtre Saint Gabriel* located on the Cours Napoléon. The play *Dido* was staged under the auspices of the prefect of Corsica and English and French ladies. It is known as the first Serbian theatre play to be performed in Western Europe (although before the war there were performances of Serbian plays in Prague and Sofia). The earnings from ticket sales went to French soldiers and the wounded.

IN THE PRISONER-OF-WAR AND INTERNMENT CAMPS

In the course of World War I millions of soldiers from all the countries involved were taken prisoner. Many civilians from occupied countries were interned, and from countries in which there was no boundary between the front and the hinterlands, as in the first year of the war in Serbia. One particular characteristic of the Serbs was the internment of their own citizens, in this case the Serbian people of the Habsburg Monarchy, as a consequence of holding the entire nation, in a generalized manner, responsible for the fact that a Bosnian Serb had assassinated the heir to the Habsburg throne. After the war broke out, Serbs from the Kingdom of Serbia were also interned.

Many never returned from captivity. They died in the camps from diseases, malnutrition, lack of hygiene, cold, or exhausting work. Portrayal of the life in these camps is found primarily in diaries and letters, a few rare memoirs, military

55 See Predrag Pejčić, *Srpska vojska u Bizerti* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2008), 122–139.

reports, photos, and newspapers. Handwritten newspapers by Serbian inmates from some prisoner-of-war camps have been preserved.

Serbs found themselves in the following prisoner-of-war camps⁵⁶ (for soldiers and officers): Boldogasszony/Frauenkirchen (Hungary, today Burgenland in Austria),⁵⁷ Nagymegyér/Velký Meder (Hungary, today Slovakia), Heinrichsgrün/Jindřichovice⁵⁸ (Bohemia: Czech Republic), Braunau/Broumov: Martínkovice/Märzdorf (Bohemia: Czech Republic),⁵⁹ Braunau am Inn (Upper Austria), Grödig bei Salzburg, Aschach an der Donau (Upper Austria), Mauthausen (Upper Austria),⁶⁰ Neckenmarkt (Burgenland), Forchtenstein (Burgenland) and in the prisoner-of-war work camps in Brünn am Gebirge (Vienna, Lower Austria) and Czinkota (Hungary). Apart from the prisoner-of-war camps for soldiers and officers, there were a large number of internment camps for civilians on the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, including Tahlerhof bei Graz (Styria, Austria), Nézsider/Neusiedl am See (Burgenland, Austria), and Arad (Banat, Romania). The relocation of captive groups, as well as their utilization as agricultural workers, as labor in factories and on the front, makes creating a definitive list of the places where Serbian people were located quite impossible.⁶¹

Reports in the Austro-Hungarian press about everyday life in the camps, which also included theatre, schools, and libraries, served the purposes of propaganda. In reality, theatres, schools, and libraries existed in only a few camps. Performances took place only for Christmas or Easter for the most part. Classes for interned children were not held on a regular basis, and most libraries were not organized until the last months of the war, and then, if at all, only in some camps.

They wanted to show off: how they introduced schools into the camps, theatres and libraries, and founded whatever in order to present themselves as a civilized cultural nation to the whole of Europe. That is an incredible cynicism. Schools? I tremble with rage when I think about the barracks that they call a school. In the middle there is a brick furnace which is never fired up, and our children are freezing while not

56 Only several camps within the imperial and royal Monarchy are listed.

57 This prisoner-of-war camp was built in 1914 and held some 15,000 prisoners at that time (mainly Serbs, then Italians and Russians). Stone crosses and a memorial for the deceased from Serbia stand scattered on an enclosed meadow.

58 Built in 1915 near Heinrichsgrün. Prisoners were made to work in the railroad and mining operations in the surrounding area (Rothau and Chodau). Many died of hunger, exhaustion, and epidemics (typhus and tuberculosis).

59 With up to 40.000 imprisoned Serbs and Russians.

60 The Ministry of War in Vienna documented in the winter 1914/15 about 12.000 victims of a typhus epidemic in the camp Mauthausen which mostly had Serbs in it. Jochen Oltmer, *Kriegsgefangene im Europa des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006), 19.

61 Gordana Ilić Marković, *Der Große Krieg. Der Erste Weltkrieg in der serbischen Literatur und Presse* (Vienna: Promedia Verlag, 2014), 217–227.

having enough food to eat, hungry in their poor clothes. [...] It is the same with the theatre. You shiver and watch. Can a hungry man watch anything with enjoyment?⁶²

Nevertheless, judged by many individual testimonies, the offer was still gladly taken, so that at least for a little while one could forget about the harsh everyday life, and about death. Theatre groups were formed in Aschach an der Donau, Mauthausen, Nézsider am See (Neusiedl, an allen Stellen im Text), Boldogasszony (Frauenkirchen), Jindřichovice (Heinrichsgrün), and Veľký Meder (Nadymedyer). The biggest Serbian prisoners' theatre was active in Boldogasszony/Frauenkirchen. First they founded a choir there, led by the Serbian composer Ljubomir Bošnjaković. Later on, an orchestra was organized. As time went by, this camp became filled with important creative artists and distinguished intellectuals from Serbia, like for instance the writers Sima Pandurović and Trifun Đukić; and actors such as Milorad Mile Milutinović were interned there. The theatre was located in a barracks where 69 plays were staged from November 1916 until shortly before the end of 1918.

Afterwards, the activity of the camp theatre was financially supported by the mission Y.M.C.A. (The Young Men's Christian Association).⁶³ This organization was active in Grödig, Aschach an der Donau, Mauthausen, and Boldogasszony. In addition to the aid, which at first focused on supplying food and clothes, they extended their scope of activities to the cultural field: they provided the camp prisoners with musical instruments and helped equip the theatre shows. The biggest charity events always took place at Christmas. Jean Schoop reported to the central office of the Young Men's Christian Association⁶⁴ on his activities during the Christmas celebrations:

62 "A oni su hteli da paradiraju: kako su po lagerima uveli škole, osnovali pozorišta, čitaonice, i šta ti ja znam, da se pred Evropom predstavili kao kulturni. A to je nečuven cinizam, koji se ne da izreći. Škole? Drščem od gnjeva kad pomislim na onu daščaru, koju su oni nazvali školom. Na sredini cigljana peć, koja se nikada ne da zagrejati, i naša deca mrznu i to još bez dovoljno hrane, gladna, u žalosnom odelu. [...] Pozorište isto tako. Drščeeš i gledaš. I zar može gladan čovek da gleda i uživa u čemu?" Milan Nikolić-Rasinski, *Nežiderska epopeja, ili Krvavi listovi iz života Srba u lageru* (Novi Sad: Knjižarnica Sv. F. Ognjanovića, 1919), 79.

63 The idea of a worldwide movement with international administration belonged to the then secretary of the YMCA (established in Geneva in 1852), Henry Dunant, who later also founded the international committee of the Red Cross and was awarded the first Nobel Peace Prize. The first YMCA world conference was held on 20 August 1855 with ninety-nine delegates from nine countries. They wrote a declaration, the so-called Paris Basis: "The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Savior, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men". Its Central International Committee was also a result of this conference. At first it had no seat, until it was organized and structured with a seat in Geneva in 1878. The Central International Committee eventually became known as the World Alliance of the YMCA.

64 World Alliance of YMCA Archives, Geneva.

For the Christmas gift-giving we received a box of bonbons and twenty boxes of candy and peppermints. The school-children made around 1,200 small packages out of these, which we then distributed among twenty-eight barracks for the sick and two barracks for the disabled on Christmas Eve, i.e., 6 January. This brought great joy everywhere, especially in the bigger hospital barracks, where our boys sang a Serbian Christmas carol conducted by their teacher. In all places we wished the sick a blessed Christmas, to which they responded with “zivo”⁶⁵ as an expression of their gratitude. Lastly, the boys also received their presents; we gave each a small package of sweets, a roll of peppermints and a small bag of cocoa. On Christmas day a big gala performance took place in the newly opened theatre, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The first rows were filled by officers and invited guests, followed by the audience, closely packed all the way to the exit. And each and every one held their breath while listening carefully to the beautiful performances of the male choir and the orchestra. A fine enactment from the life of the Serbian people was saved for the end; the costumes for which we've provided the material were made exclusively in the camp and they looked good. The actors were loudly applauded, and one could see that all of those present were very pleased. On Boxing Day there was another performance for those who weren't able to attend it yesterday. The prisoners were thus able, in accordance with the circumstances, to celebrate Christmas in a very nice and happy manner, for which they feel truly grateful to us. Prisoner aid, Jean Schoop. Secretary.⁶⁶

That without this help, the founding of the orchestra for instance would not have been possible is also shown in the contents of a letter which fell victim to the censors.⁶⁷

Miroslav D., Mauthausen, 16/29 August 1915

to: Jovan D. A. Šabac, Šanin šor [written in rhyme].

I ask my brothers in arms to help me gather the means, as much as they can spare, to buy a violin, so that I can play and sing free of charge – old songs, new songs, all sorts of things. The music, here, with the Schwabos, is a remedy for all of us. I thank you all.⁶⁸

65 Živio! (May you live long!).

66 Herbert Brettl, *Das Kriegsgefangenen- und Internierungslager Boldogasszony/Frauenkirchen* (Halbturn: Herbert Brettl, 2014), 103.

67 Written contact of the prisoners was under surveillance and barely any letters that contained anything more than the mere information about the location and the health condition of the inmate reached their recipient.

68 “Molim ratne drugove da me sad pomognu; Da sredstvima vašim, – koliko koji mognu – dobrovoljnim prilogom, novaca da prikupim; razbibrigu violinu dobru da vam kupim: sviraću vam, i pevati, bez nagrade kakve; Pesme, pesme, nove, lepe, pa i svakojake; Svirka, pesma, lek je nama; Ovde sad kod Švabe – Hvala svakom drugu koji kakav prilog dade”. Vladislav Pandurović, *Srpska pisma iz svetskog rata 1914–1918* (Osijek: Srpska štamparija, 1923), 56.



Fig. 7. Milutin Milutinović in the play *Riđokosa* (The Redhead) by Stevan Deskašev, based on *A vöröshaju* by Sándor Lukácsy, Boldogasszony. Source: Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti, Beograd

The repertoire of the prisoner-of-war and internment camp theatres differed, naturally, from the repertoire of the soldier's or convalescent camp theatre which was under the command of the Serbian army and active on the territory of the

allies. The theatres in prisoner-of-war camps were subject to the censorship of the camp commanders. Accordingly, in camp Frauenkirchen the following plays were performed: *Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle and William Gillette, *Elga* by Gerhard Hauptmann, *Don César de Bazan* by Jules Massenet, *A vöröshaju* (The Red-head) by Sándor Lukácsy with music by Erkel Elek – translated and nationalized as *Ridokosa* by Stevan Deskašev and composed by Davorin Jenko – but also Serbian theatre plays with music, like the Romantic comedy *Đido* (The Fearless Man) by Janko Veselinović or the tragedy *Knez Ivo od Semberije* (Prince Ivo of Semberia) by Branislav Nušić.⁶⁹

The program in Aschach an der Donau even included Shakespeare's *Othello*. Various accounts of the activities of the theatre group can be found in the handwritten newspaper PULS,⁷⁰ which was produced in the camp. On 16 February 1916 it was reported that the establishment of a Serbian camp theatre had been requested at the initiative of the editor of this newspaper, to be based on the model of the Mauthausen camp theatre or those in Germany. The theatre was approved, and the issue from 5 May 1916 read as follows:

Hard work is being put into the erecting of the stage. Art students are drawing up the theatre program: a Serbian girl is symbolically represented in a pretty national costume. Pensive, she is looking into the distance, in the direction of Belgrade, which is shown at dusk (because it is indeed so today, or perhaps for another reason?). Everything was in the national colors of Serbia. Some of those who participated told us what was performed: *Medved'* (The Bear) by *Anton Pavlovitch Chekhov*, *Le Médecin malgré lui* (The Doctor in Spite of Himself) by Molière, *Šopenhauer* (Schopenhauer) by Branislav Nušić, *Golgota* (Golgotha) by Milivoje Predić, *Naši sinovi* (Our Sons) by Vojislav Jovanović Marambo, *Vlast' t'my* (The Power of Darkness) by Leo Tolstoy (rearranged), *Die Räuber* (The Robbers) by Friedrich Schiller (rearranged), *Diletanti* (Dilettantes) by Stjepan Miletić, *Hamlet u neprilici* (Hamlet in Trouble) by an anonymous writer, etc.⁷¹

69 All these plays had been performed in Serbian theatres before the War, and the texts in the Serbian language were well known to the professional actors who were in prisoner-of-war camps.

70 Narodna biblioteka Srbije, Belgrade. Manuscript collection.

71 "Pozornica se podiže u veliko. Dekoracije počinju da se sprovede. Kadet, đak narednik g. Nikola Džanga, student slikarstva, radi pozorišnu zavesu. Ona ima lep motiv za malanje: simbolično predstavljena srpska devojka u lepoj narodnoj nošnji, koja drži gusle i gleda zamišljeno, tiho i mirno put Beograda, koji nedaleko leži u sumraku (što za danas ima svog naročitog značenja). Kulise takođe biće uskoro dekorisane. Sufernici i ceo spoljni izgled, g. Džanga mala bojama, koje označavaju šare i kompozicije srpskih nacionalnih boja, umetnički tumačenih. – O programu, koji će gledati posle završenja ovog podizanja pozornice, jedan nam je član dao sledeće informacije: Igraće se ovi komadi: *Medved* od Čehova; *Silom lekar* od Molijera; *Šopenhauer* od B. Nušića; *Golgota* od M. Predića; *Naši sinovi* od Voj. Jovanovića; *Carstvo mraka* od L. Tolstoja (u preradi); *Razbojnici*



Fig. 8. Serbian theatre in the prisoner-of-war camp Aschach an der Donau – *Othello*, in Adolf Golker. Source: Johann Eggerstorfer and Sabine Birngruber, *Bilder einer vergessenen Stadt: Das k.u.k. Kriegsgefangenenlager Aschach / Hartkirchen 1915–1918* (Aschach and Hartkirchen: Marktgemeinde Aschach und Gemeinde Hartkirchen, 2015), 57.

A report after the event emphasized that even the camp commander, Zimmermann, was present, as well as other officers. “The program was interesting. The soldier Mihajlo Kovačević played Sgambati’s *Serenata, Aires gitanos* by Pablo de Sarasate, Ludwig van Beethoven’s Romanze in G major, *Lyriske stykker* (Lyric Pieces) by Grieg, and *Ständchen* (Evening Serenade) by Franz Schubert. [...] The room was decorated with the Serbian tricolor, made of paper”. The Serbian play *Artilleria Rusticana* was announced for the following occasion.⁷²

The occupation newspaper in Belgrade also reported on the theatre of the Serbian prisoners:

od Šilera (u preradi); *Diletanti* od St. Miletića; *Hamlet u neprilici* od anonimnog pisca – i, tako dalje”.
 72 “Kadet g. Mihajlo Kovačević svirao je od Sgambattia Serenade, od P. de Sarasate-a *Zigeuenerweisen*, od Beethoven-a Romance G-dur, od Griega *Lirische Stüke* i od Schuberta *Ständhen*. [...] Svuda su bile lente srpske trobojke načinjene od papira”. In *PULS*, 9. May 1916, 2, handwritten Serbian newspaper in the prisoner-of-war camp Aschach an der Donau (Narodna biblioteka Srbije, Belgrade, Manuscript collection). The following page of this number reported on the return of the Serbian prisoners from Italy where they had been set to work on the Isonzo front. The translation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* into Serbian also ends in this number, in the feuilleton section, which was for the occasion of Shakespeare’s anniversary in 1916.



Fig. 9. Members of the Serbian theatre and orchestra in the prisoner-of-war camp Aschach an der Donau. Arhiv Muzeja pozorišne umetnosti Srbije, Belgrade.

A group of interned Belgrade citizens writes to us from the camp Aschach an der Donau: in the camp in Aschach an der Donau, the interned Belgrade citizens established a theatre in which they found a pleasant form of entertainment. The famous actors Spasić and Bekić are acting and, as comedians, are looking after the amusement of our Belgraders with their humor and their artistic efforts. Zloković, Milošević, Stojanović, etc. are also taking part and are all praiseworthy. This week (at the end of November, according to the date on the postcard) they are preparing a performance to aid the poor in Belgrade. The proceeds will be sent to Belgrade through the imperial and royal camp commanders.⁷³

From 1914 until 1918 a theatre under the name of the *Srpsko narodno pozorište* (Serbian National Theatre) was active in the Nézsider (Neusiedl am See) internment

73 “Jedna grupa interniranih Beogradjana piše nam iz logora u Aschachu na Dunavu: U logoru u Aschachu na Dunavu internirani Beograđani osnovali su pozorište, u kome nalaze prijatne zabave. Igraju poznati naši glumci g. g. Spasić, Belkić, koji kao komičari razgaljuju naše Beograđane svojim humorom i umjetničkom igrom, zatim g. Zlatković, Milošević, Stojanović itd., svi zaslužni pohvale. Ove nedjelje (t.j. prema datumu karte, krajem novembra) priredjuje se predstava u korist Beogradske sirotinje, prihod će preko c. i kr. zapovjedništva logora biti poslat beogradskoj opštini”, in *Beogradske novine*, 7 December 1916, 3.

camp. Many Serbian actors, singers, and musicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Vojvodina and the Kingdom of Serbia were interned here, among them Aleksandar Binički, Blagoje Biro, and Vukosava Spasić. The director was Mihajlo Spasić. They staged theatre performances and held poetry and music evenings. The well-liked play *The Fearless Man* was performed here as well. Unlike in the prisoner-of-war camps of the Monarchy, mainly professional actors and singers performed here, due to their large numbers in this internment camp. Not until the end of the war did the imprisoned students and other camp inmates also take part in theatrical plays. Very rarely were prisoners released into the confinement in their villages. Vukosava Spasić died in June 1918 in the camp. "I remember the deceased Vukosava, most of all for her leading part in the play *Golgotha*, in which she demonstrated both her talent and tactfulness, and we all wished to see her in this part anew, and so did she. Her death also pains me very much because she carried the leading parts on her shoulders".⁷⁴ Her husband, Mihajlo Spasić, who had fallen seriously ill, was released home shortly after. In the Belgrade occupation newspaper *Beogradske novine* he wrote an obituary for his wife in which the last attempts of the Austro-Hungarian propaganda are notable:

I am informing all comrades and friends that my spouse, Vukosava M. Spasić, the actress, has died on 16 June 1918, in Nézsider and was laid to rest with the sincere sympathies of the entire camp. I thank the commando doctor, who put great effort into curing my dear departed, and even took care of the choir and all those who laid wreaths on the grave. Belgrade, July 1918. The mourning husband, Mihailo D. Spasić, director of the *Srpsko narodno pozorište* (Serbian National Theatre).⁷⁵

In the last year of the war it also happened that a theatre group in one camp gave a guest performance in another. Thus, in October 1918 the Serbian theatre from camp Boldogasszony/Frauenkirchen gave a guest performance with the play *Ženske suze* (Tears of Women) and a concert in the nearby internment camp Nézsider (Neusiedl am See). This was the last theatre event in Nézsider.⁷⁶

74 "Sećam se pok. Vukosave – Vuke Spasićke, poglavito iz glavne role u 'Golgoti', gde je pokazala dosta i smisla i takta, bili smo svi osobito zadovoljni, želeći da je uvek u toj roli i ponova vidimo. I u toliko mi teže pada njena smrt, jer je ona glavne uloge repertoara nosila na svojim plaćima". Nikolić-Rasinski, *Nežiderska epopeja*, 82.

75 "Izveštavam drugove i prijatelje, da je moja supruga, Vukosava M. Spasić, glumica, preminula 16. juna 1918, u Nužideru i tamo ukopana, uz veliko saučešće cijelog lagera. Blagodaram gospodinu liječniku zapovjedniku, koji se zauzimao oko liječenja drage mi pokojnice, pjevačkom društvu i svima, koji položise vijence na grob pokojnice. Beograd, jula 1918. Ožalošćen suprug Mihailo D. Spasić, direktor srpskog Narod. Pozorišta", in *Beogradske novine*, 25 July 1918, 3.

76 Dušan Krivokapić, *Sećanja iz Nežiderskog lagera* (Mataruška Banja: Dušan Krivokapić, 1976), 46.

REPERTOIRE

Popular folk plays were frequently staged; theatre plays with music, in which spoken dialogues alternated with instrumental music and songs, had been very popular in the nineteenth century. Stories were told of village life and significant historical events, and music from the homeland was played and sung. The audience joined in. Plays with music were very popular both with the soldiers on the front and with the wounded in the convalescent camps and prisoners in prisoner-of-war camps. They awakened feelings of nostalgia and memories of times of happiness. Their subjects were close to every man. Nothing more was necessary. "It's about a magical world of music and acting and the peculiar stage power which brilliantly transforms the usual into the unusual, proving the ontological remark that the theatre is an interpreter of dreams".⁷⁷

The following historical plays are among those most frequently staged in the Serbian Theatre during the First World War: *Boj na Kosovu* (The Battle of Kosovo), *Knez Ivo od Semberije* (Prince Ivo of Semberia), *Hajduk Veljko* (Haiduk Veljko), and the following humorous stories of people's everyday lives: *Đido* (The Fearless Man), *Riđokosa* (The Redhead), *Devojačka kletva* (The Girl's Curse), and *Ivkova slava* (Ivko's Feast). "A special place was assigned to the jokes and sketches written by Brana Cvetković, the most popular among them being: *Artilleria Rusticana*, also *Rista rezervista* (Rista, the Reservist), *Lepa Jelena* (Helen, the Fair), *Stan za samca* (A Flat for a Single Man), and many others".⁷⁸ The musical play *Đido* (The Fearless Man) was considered one of the most frequently performed musical pieces of the Serbian National Theatre of Novi Sad, a play with which they went on tours before the war and which filled auditoriums throughout Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. It was written by Janko Veselinović, an author from Šabac, whose novel *Hajduk Stanko* (Haiduk Stanko) was also adapted into a well-received stage play. It was often performed in the soldier's theatres at the front, albeit not in prisoner-of-war camps. *Đido* (The Fearless Man) was composed by the Slovenian composer Davorin Jenko who lived and worked in Pančevo and Belgrade. The premiere took place in Belgrad in 1892. The songs from this folk play could be heard in all the Serbian coffee houses and were familiar to audiences. The play *Đido* took the audience to a village in Mačva (Northern Serbia), recounting a story of a romantic love in the moonlight. The poetry of the Serbian peasants spoke through these songs, the idealization of life in the country, in the villages

77 "Dakle, reč je o jednom magičnom svetu muzike i glume i čudne moći koja briljantno transformiše obično i neobično, potvrđujući ontološku opasku da je pozorište tumač snova". Antonijević, "Komadi s pevanjem na Solunskom frontu", 112.

78 Antonijević, "Theatrical life on the Salonika front", 70.

of Mačva in particular, a region from which many prisoners came. This play was often seen on stage in the interwar period and under the occupation of Serbia in World War II. Only after the war did it cease to be as popular as before; it was premiered anew only in 1968.

Comedies and plays with singing were the most popular in all these theatres. Serbian historical plays were seldom performed in prisoner-of-war and internment camps. The repertoire of all the Serbian war theatres did not include only plays written by Serbian authors. Examining the wide spectrum of repertoires, it can be said that in general the programs of pre-war Serbian theatre were reflected. And when the circumstances did not allow for a play, there were poetry evenings or concerts, or, simply and spontaneously, occasions for singing, dancing, and storytelling. The daily grind was relieved thanks to the commitment of many professional artists and amateurs. “On a certain road, I can no longer where exactly it was, I encountered the gusle player Perunović. A truly unbelievable image, an ancient Greek drama: he sat next to a dead Serbian soldier and, while playing the gusle, sang epic heroic songs. He gave the soldiers and refugees the courage to persevere on this heavy road”.⁷⁹ As Dr. Isabelle E. Hatton, a doctor who accompanied the Serbian soldiers on the front in 1915, noted: “As soon as a Serb lands on his feet, he sings and dances. It is in his nature, a part of his life [...] and whenever it was possible, the whole regiment joined in this *kolo*”.⁸⁰



World War I interrupted the creative work of many Serbian artists or steered it into a different art style. For some it served as a stimulus that helped them create their best work, while others wrote texts that had almost nothing in common with their usual works, as is evident from the aforementioned example. It was not a rare occurrence that they had only begun to write, paint, make music, take photographs, or to assert themselves as actors. Serbia lost a third of its inhabitants in the war, including countless authors, painters, actors, and scientists. They fell in battle, or died of hunger, from exhaustion, epidemics, or during attacks, whether in occupied Serbia, or as refugees, or in internment camps, or they committed suicide, like the author Milutin Uskoković. For those who survived, the Great War was the original event that shaped their minds and defined their lives and creative work to the end of their existence. One thing is clear: those who stayed with the

79 Jasen Krstanović, *Kroz Albaniju 1915–1916* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1968, first edition 1919), 92.

80 Kosta Todorović, Milutin Velimirović, eds., *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije 1916–1918* (Belgrade: Beogradski izdavačko-grafički zavod, 1971), 303ff. “Kolo” is the term for the Serbian traditional round dance.

army or were in exile during the war continued their activities after the war to a great extent. Amongst those who were in prisoner-of-war or internment camps, especially writers, it is very rare to find someone who returned to his former work after the war.⁸¹

The actors who came from internment or prisoner-of-war camps continued their acting careers. Some who had their first experience with theatre during the war realized their profession in theatre after the war. There are very few notes about negative memories of the theatre in war. And if there are any such, they are only thoughts about the hard feelings and melancholy that were evoked. The coming together of different cultures and the theatre experience gained in war gave wings to the theatre of the interwar period and influenced it positively throughout.

The theatre archives of the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad and Belgrade were destroyed during the occupation time, which is why in the first years after the war the plays mentioned, performed both before and after the war, increased in the number of their performances due to being learned. Most of the Serbian actors, opera singers, composers, and instrumentalists (almost without exception former German and Austrian students) did not survive the war. The Serbs of the Habsburg Monarchy shared the same fate. Serbian inhabitants in the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes had to cope with a great shortage of educated people in all fields. Not only did they die in war, but they were also the first to be systematically interned, and if they survived at all, they were not always able to process the horrors of the internment camp mentally. What also stands out is that hardly any biographies mention the length of the time spent in prisoner-of-war camps. This makes the research that much more difficult, but also raises the question of why these dates are missing, even in the most detailed biographies of these artists. Brana Cvetković re-opened his satirical theatre *Orfeum* in Belgrade after the war and worked in his recognizable style as a sharp social critic who simultaneously entertained and criticized Serbia by means of laughter. In 1929 he retired from public life and continued writing in his Belgrade apartment, increasingly children's literature, and he is remembered to this day as one of the best children's authors in Serbia – the famous Uncle Brana. Branislav Nušić, the other comedigrapher who defined the theatre life of the pre-war period, returned from exile severely marked by a private fate. His only son died in 1915, and his nephew committed suicide in 1918 in the convalescent camp in Bizerte in Tunisia. Ten more years had to pass, before he could write his first comedies after the war.

Profoundly influenced by the war events, numerous authors in Serbia wrote plays about this period of time during World War I and shortly afterwards. Their

81 Ilić Marković, *Der Große Krieg*, 9–46.

greatest concern was not to produce dramatic works of art. Branislav Nušić summed this up in a newspaper interview on the occasion of the Belgrade premiere (on 26 October 1929) of his piece *Velika nedelja* (The Great Sunday), written in 1917 in exile in France: “The play developed under the very personal influence of our great tragedy. [...] It wasn’t my intention to write a play but to place a big historical document on stage. [...] I did not expect the audience to applaud nor the praise of critics”.⁸²

In contrast, in the war theatre, the applause and the praise of the audience were the driving force which pushed the artists forward, and vice versa, the artists provided a short-lived illusion of normality. The soldiers at the front line as well as the prisoners and convalescents in the camps liked national comedies, but serious historical and life drama too. They enjoyed watching and recognizing their national customs, their national legends, dance and music, and hearing their own language. In the case of Serbian theatre in World War I there was no borderline between the artist and the audience; they were all simply soldiers on the front or in the convalescent camps or prisoners in the camps.

82 “Pisana je, dakle, pod najdubljim uticajem naše velike tragedije [...] nisam imao nameru da pišem pozorišni komad, nego sam hteo da iznesem na scenu jedan historijski dokument. [...] Ja od ovog komada niti očekujem aplauze od publike, niti pohvale od kritike”.