

## UKRAINIAN THEATRICAL PROJECTS AS AN EXAMPLE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEFENSE IN TERMS OF ANTHROPOLOGY AS CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL WARFARE

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*Anthropological aggression is a means of waging war using information gained from a nation and its culture, social norms and habits and geographic conditions, as well as its history, traditions, etc. This type of activity is currently observed in Ukraine in the context of the war in the eastern part of the country. Anthropological aggression, however, can be minimized by the use of the anthropological defence. An example of this is the theatrical projects initiated by various artistic troupes all over the country. This paper presents the methods which are employed by the Ukrainian theatre to counteract this anthropological aggression. One can identify four basic fields of activity directed at creating the tools of anthropological defence: 1) combating stereotypes; 2) facilitating the integration and assimilation of internally displaced people; 3) teatrotherapy; 4) initiation of the social and political debate.*

**Key words:** *anthropological aggression, anthropological defence, war, Ukraine, theatre*

Acts of violence, both individual and collective, have been the object of philosophical, psychological, and anthropological considerations. In the course of these discussions, both the causes and results of acts of violence have been identified<sup>1</sup>. Acts of collective violence, in a broader sense, are known as war; in a narrower sense, as armed conflict. War is understood here as a state of dispute or disagreement. This state possesses a gradual (i.e. one characterised by different degrees of intensity of operations, ranging from open to hidden) as well as a specialised (that is, one affecting various aspects of human life) character. Armed conflict, on the other hand, is always open, meaning that one can point out, without fear of contradiction, not only the parties to the dispute but also the aggressor. The fundamental difference between war and armed conflict is that, in the latter case, armed forces (regular or irregular) are involved [2]. However, this nomenclature, in the case of collective acts of violence in an anthropological context, requires clarification, because collective violence is not always equivalent to armed conflict, although the former may lead to the latter. Anthropology takes the position that a state of social conflict is a permanent state, whereas its intensity and the means employed are subject to change. In order to clarify this, the term anthropological war is used here. Most generally,

anthropological war may be: (1) internal – the dispute refers to various factors within the social structure; or (2) external – the dispute refers to various factors external to the social structure. In other words, an internal dispute concerns members of the same social group, whereas an external dispute is one between members of different social groups. We mentioned above that anthropology takes the position that states of social dispute are permanent states, differentiated by their intensity and means employed. Such a state is called anthropological aggression, by which we mean actions aimed at domination of the areas of economics, politics, education, academia, information, etc. This aim requires structural and strategic planning as well as the involvement of specialists in various fields of social sciences. In this sense, one can say that anthropological war makes use of anthropological aggression as a tool of domination. Any form of domination over specific social structures encounters resistance, called anthropological resistance, which may be organised or spontaneous. Among the forms of organised anthropological resistance, e.g. in Europe, are actions in the area of cultural activity. In this article, we would like to present actions within the scope of anthropological resistance which make use of theatre, using contemporary Ukrainian theatre as exemplary material and the hybrid war in Ukraine as an analytical context.

The Polish academic Jolanta Darczewska, describing the Russian activity against Ukraine after Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, highlights the unprecedented scale of the disinformation campaign which has been launched. It consists of multidirectional and mass actions such as: »ideological, political and sociocultural diversion as well as a provocation and diplomatic activity«. In another article, the author focuses on their character and quotes the statement of Sergey Rastorguyev from the Institute for Information Security of the M.W. Lomonosov University who »does not see any differences between the aims of informational warfare and the aims of other types of wars: all of them are for obtaining the resources of other countries (in the case of informational warfare – for the social resources)«.

The geopolitical situation and defensive capabilities are extremely unfavourable for Ukraine. While Russia is governed with an iron hand and can engage in powerful financial, military and organisation activities, Ukraine is struggling with a great economic crisis and many internal problems which are used against it in this unequal fight. Russian anthropological aggression – among many other goals, described in detail in Jolanta Darczewska's works – is aimed at widening the gap between Russian and Ukrainian speaking citizens from the western and eastern regions of Ukraine who “represent opposing geopolitical orientations”. Russian propaganda treats Ukraine as “an unstable, dysfunctional country” which has been taken over by Ukrainian nationalists, and the Russian activity in Ukraine as an operation to prevent them from achieving their bloody plans. It should be noted that Russia claims these preventive steps were taken only in Crimea. As far as the eastern

regions of Ukraine go, Russia consistently denies its participation in the conflict, claiming that on its side are only so-called “pro-Russian separatists”, that are not supported by Russia.

Jolanta Darczewska is of the opinion that Ukraine has been under intensive Russian informational and psychological attack at least since the Orange revolution of 2003/2004, but one can note that this aggression has grown stronger since Euromaidan of 2013/2014. However, these actions have not remained unchallenged. Ukrainian society began to organise itself spontaneously, launching many non-governmental initiatives which have the character of more or less conscious anthropological defence. Ukrainian theatre was also included in this activity, starting many projects devoted to the victims of the war, internal refugees and other people involved in military actions in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine. These projects are spread all over Ukraine and focus on the following issues: (1) Combating stereotypes; (2) Facilitating the integration and assimilation of IDPs in their new homes; (3) Theatre as a place of therapy; (4) Theatre as an initiator of the social and political debate.

### **1. Combating stereotypes**

One of the main goals of the Ukrainian theatrical curators is to build a dialogue between inhabitants of the western and eastern regions of Ukraine by the use of art. Many of their activities are devoted to disarming stereotypes that have been developing for years. The projects take place in various Ukrainian centres. For example in Lviv actors of the Les Kurbas Theatre initiated a project entitled *Hra v nas*, later two of its participants set up the Domus Theatre, and in Kyiv, the Theatre of Displaced People (hereinafter referred to as TD P) was established.

All of these theatres focus on bringing together both internally displaced people (hereinafter referred to as ID Ps) and local inhabitants and help them to develop a common theatrical activity. “I am sure that we combat stereotypes in this way”, – Anastasiya Puhach, a press officer of the TDP and also an internally displaced person, says, – “First, people see that migrants are regular people”. Nataliya Vorozhbyt, a founder of the TDP – explains that this attitude towards IDPs is very important, because “a lot of pretensions, which Ukrainians have to the so-called separatists rebound on migrants”. In this case, the theatre is playing the role of mediator between two groups from the same country, which are artificially divided and presented as two hostile blocks.

Alim Aliyev from the Crimea-SOS foundation which supports the Lviv project *Hra v nas*, is of the opinion that: “There are myths and stereotypes which have developed over the years. We can only overcome them together, and only together can we save our country”.

There are a few theatrical projects which raise the problems of stereotypes, among these *Dity ta viyskovi* (Children and soldiers) and *Class Act* conducted by the TD P.

The project *Dity ta viyscovi* began in 2015 in Mykolayivka in the framework of the action *De Skhid? (Where is the East?)*. Then it was developed independently. The first performance was entitled *Na wsiu hromkost' (At Full Volume)* and took place in Popasna on Nov. 26th. Then the format was repeated in Sloviansk (Dec. 28th and 29th, 2016) and this was a show named after the city it occurred in, and also in Shchastia (Jan. 29th, 2017) as *Popytka shchastia (An Attempt at Happiness)*. The basic project's assumptions are to go to a city on the front line, to find the most damaged school and to prepare a performance with local students and soldiers who are stationed in the city. Theatrical curators work with them for seven days, and the final result in the form of their mutually produced documentary show is present to the local society. Themes of the performances are various and not necessarily connected directly to the war. There could be, for example, personal stories about love, like in *Shchastie*. This activity allows mutual distrust between these two groups to be overcome. The roots of this distrust are in the stereotypical thinking about the west and the east of Ukraine, which was mentioned previously. "In general, teenagers and soldiers do not have a positive attitude toward each other". – Nataliya Vorozhbyt writes in one of her articles for the Polish monthly "Teatr" – "Teenagers associate soldiers with the effects of the war, soldiers associate the local people with the cause of the war – and both are true, but only partially. We unite these two categories of citizens in one project to give them an opportunity to talk to each other". Lieutenant Volodymyr Pastushok from the National Guard of Ukraine, who is serving on the eastern front, emphasises the difficulties in communicating with the older generation: "I am tired of explaining that we are not Americans and this is not an American gun", which illustrates the level and effectiveness of the Russian propaganda in the eastern territory of the country. In his opinion, the youth is the only group which is worth working with.

The conclusion that children and teenagers are the only age groups which could create a new, postwar country, free from prejudices and stereotypes, encouraged the TD P to initiate the *Class Act* project. The venture, based on a Scottish format developed by the *Traverse Theatre* in Edinburgh, was created for high school students from the west and the east of Ukraine. Its first edition took place in June 2016 – the second, a year later, both in Kyiv. The *Ukrainian Class Act* is a drama workshop which gathers twenty teenagers – half of them from a western city and half from an eastern one. Its participants write their dramas under the watchful eyes of professional playwrights, then their texts are directed on stage by professional theatrical directors and performed by professional actors. Finally, the children have an opportunity to see the effects of their own work. The curators want teenagers to work in pairs – one from the east and one from the west, but this scheme is not obligatory, and the plays are written in configurations which are convenient for the participants. The texts are a response to the children's

experiences of the war in Ukraine, although not every drama is devoted to the war itself – very often they tell about the children’s fears, school problems and pressure from adults. For the young people from the east, the war is a visual and tactile phenomenon, for their friends from the west – the conflict is seen through the lens of the fates of their fathers, brothers and other members of their families who are serving in the army and have been sent to the front. The biggest asset of this project is the fact that children can meet and work together.» We brought selected children to Kyiv « – Nataliya Vorozhbyt says». They speak different languages, they have different life experiences, a different set of stereotypes have been put into their heads by parents and television – and we see how these stereotypes are crumbling in the appropriate conditions«.

The TDP also focused on another stereotype, not related to the conflict, but one that is deeply rooted in society. During a performance of *De Skhid?* a few women sing songs from places which do not exist anymore because they were destroyed during the war. The goal of the singers is to preserve their folklore. Thanks to them, Donbas, which most viewers think of as an industrial and neglected area, is presented as a poetic and spiritual place with its own, independent culture.

## **2. Facilitating the integration and assimilation of ID Ps in their new homes**

According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy, 1,590,056 internally displaced persons, or 1,278,204 displaced families had been registered in Ukraine till April 3rd, 2017 ([3]). These are official numbers – unofficially there could be as many as 2 million IDPs from Crimea and the Donbas area alone. As Anastasiya Puhach says that theatre’s most important goal it to deprive these statistics of their abstract dimension, that is – to replace the figures on paper with real human stories.

This concept of integration is at the core of two Lviv projects – *Hra v nas* as well as the *Domus Theatre*. *Hra v nas* was a project initiated by actors from the *Les Kurbas Theatre* in Lviv – Oleh Stefan, Natalka Rybka-Parkhomenko and Andriy Vodychev. Its first edition took place in 2015 and ended with a show called *Labyrinth*. The second one began in 2016 and ended with the performance *21 Naked Voices*. Although a characteristic feature of the *Hra v nas* project was that the process of rehearsal was more important than the final performance, which at first had not been planned by a theatrical team at all. Its main focus was to put together both original residents of Lviv and new-comers and open up for them an appropriate space for mutual understanding. The rehearsal consisted of the professional stage training that is usually conducted in the *Les Kurbas Theatre*, but of course, the training was not intended to make professional actors out of the amateurs. It was designed to open up the participants and help them to adapt in a strange city. Such elements, for example, work on body awareness, which does not include many words, worked extremely well in bilingual an environment, especially

in the current Ukrainian situation, where this bilingualism is often used as a pretext for anthropological aggression. Expression of feelings was facilitated by body language, while the linguistic issues – so conflictual in Ukraine – became of secondary importance.

Later, two of the Hra w nas project participants, Natalya Menshykova, who is a professional theatrical director from Crimea, and Den Fedieshov – also a professional theatrical director, founded their own theatre in Lviv – the Domus Theatre, which is also focused on the IDPs' problems. The idea of the theatre is to involve both professional actors and amateurs, new-comers and Lviv residents, children and adults and to create a common space for all of these people.

A broad range of proposals was offered by the TD P, which created a series of performances that were designed to help ID Ps in their difficult assimilation process. For this purpose, TDP used the technique of documentary theatre, which included not only true stories but also the people who experienced them, meaning that real people (not actors) told their own stories. Such an approach opens up two very important processes – one of them is that of therapeutic benefits, which will be described more thoroughly later in this article. The second one – involvement of IDPs in concrete activity and allowing them to create their social circles in a new place.

When the TDP started working with IDPs, it quickly turned out that not only did adults have assimilation problems, but also children. This is why the project Displaced Kids was initiated. One of its founders Oleksandr Fomenko explains it in this way: “Parents have everyday problems, they do not have time for children (...). And also – there are problems with acceptance of these children by society”. The idea was to emancipate positive emotions in them and reduce the feeling of being disadvantaged. In Fomenko's opinion, children should have the chance to enjoy their lives without being burdened by the past.

First, the weekend workshops were organised, including painting, work with paper, dancing and singing. In 2016 in the framework of the famous Ukrainian theatrical festival GogolFest the project of a children's theatrical studio called Halabuda began. The studio existed for one year, but the TD P was not able to continue this endeavour. Halabuda involved children, both of Kyiv residents and IDPs' at the rate of 50/50. They prepared documentary performances, among them, one about children's fears entitled *Po inshu storonu kovdry. Temnoy-temnoy nochii* (On the other side of the blanket. In the dark-dark night).

The Theatre of Displaced People also initiated non-theatrical or paratheatrical actions devoted to IDPs children; e.g., it organised free meetings entitled *De zhyve svyaty Mykolay?* (Where does Saint Nicholas live?) two consecutive years (2015, 2016). The first edition attracted 600 children and the second – 200, because of space limitation. It was an interactive room with many points where children could demonstrate their

skills in various activities: painting, singing and playing in the shadow theatre.» It was important for us« – Fomenko says – »to give children a sense of Christmas and freedom, to allow them to be independent, that is, to be in particular space and create their adventure«.

In February 2016, children from Halabuda participated in making an animated movie in a stop-motion technology. They wrote a screenplay by themselves, and the puppets used in the movie were their favourite toys, which children had taken with them from their homes when they had been forced to escape from the war.

This issue opens up the discussion which returns in the performances of the TD P more than once, and which was most accurately captured in Pyotr Armianovskyy's question: "What is it home? What makes a place home?". It is raised, for example, in his Rozariy (Rose garden) as well as in the previously mentioned De Skhid? The same question is asked by Sevil Kanieyeva from Crimea, who took part in the Lviv project Hra v nas and who chose a poem by Vasyl Stus, referring to the human needs of having one's place. Also, the Domus Theatre tries to define a place which can be called "home". This idea is even reflected in its name – "Domus" in Latin means "home".

There is another important value of these initiatives. It lies in fact, that part of them are also directed at the presentation of positive stories, which can be motivating for the ID Ps. People who are involved in these projects do not limit their stage activity to the traumas of war only, but they try to illustrate the positive aspects of the ID Ps' plight. This is a way of thinking presented, for example, by the Theatre of Displaced People (Kyiv) and the Domus Theatre (Lviv). Anastasiya Puhach from the TD P admits: "I don't want people to think that we only have 'Everything is bad' stories. We have people who say: 'Yes, we started everything from the beginning, and we liked this, we succeeded'. So, we also have inspirational examples". Natalya Menshykova has similar plans in the Domus Theatre, where she wants to create a project based on "stories of successful displaced people".

The wave of nearly 1.5 million people who were forced to change their place of residence from the eastern Ukraine to the West, in the opinion of a Theatre of Displaced People team, created a unique situation, which was very important in the context of combating the above-mentioned stereotypes. It is the first time in the history of independent Ukraine, where people from the West and East can have an opportunity to meet directly enmasse and to learn about each other, and they are not manipulated by both official and non-official messages appearing in the information spaces. The potential to be liberated by this phenomenon can be used as a nation-building tool and bring beneficial changes to the country in the future.

### **3. Theatre as a place of therapy**

The therapeutic aspects of the theatrical activities are of such importance that a psychologist and psychotherapist became a manager of TD

P. His name is Oleksiy Karachynskyy and he was, for example, one of the most significant participants in the performance *De Skhid?* In his opinion, one of the tasks of theatre is the synthesis of art and therapy. “In our values, in the values of people who work in our theatre and of its founders – the German director Georg Genoux and the Ukrainian playwright Nataliya Vorozhbyt – there is the conviction that art should help people and treat the traumas which currently exist in society. Recently, Georg wrote us that he dreamed about the situation where refugees wouldn’t be a burden, but on the contrary – they would become an opportunity for a new impetus, for development”.

In the case of the TD P, heroes tell their own stories, which by the act of speaking become a narration which is separated from the feelings and experiences of the war victim. “It becomes a history, not a part of your life” – Anastasya Puhach says, who lost a fiancée during the war and was forced to leave her home town. Another participant in the *De Skhid?* project emphasises that the performance allows them to forget about all the traumatic events and forces them to meet new people.

Georg Genoux, who is one of the founders of the TD P, treats the project *Dity ta viyskovi* like therapy also, arguing that “people who are involved in it know that they are not alone both in their misery and in their joy”.

While the TD P works with documentary materials, the participants of the *Hra v nas* project used Ukrainian poems, articulating their traumas through someone else’s texts. A refugee from Lugansk recalls the therapeutic dimension of rehearsals: “I move slowly [during the workshop – AK-B] and in my eyes, I have a picture of how I ran with my child to the train – the last train to Lviv”. The curators of the *Domus Theatre* also use ready dramatic texts, or combined material from various literary sources, as a tool of expressing topics which are important for their actors as members of the society who are experiencing war, but also for the current Ukrainian discourse. One example is the play ‘night, Mother by Marsha

Norman, which in a specific way refers to the social reality in Ukraine. For Nataliya Menshykova, a director of the performance, the play about a complicated relationship between a mother and a daughter became a pretext for reflection on whether the inhabitants of the country can communicate with each other if the closest people – a mother and a daughter – cannot do this.

#### **4. Theatre as an initiator of the social and political debate**

Ukrainian independent theatrical groups, which are not indifferent to the war victims, also remain very critical of the official discourse about the armed conflict in the Donbas region of Ukraine. They very often emphasise that war is not a reason to glory, but only a source of suffering. In an advertisement of the play entitled *Tovar (Product)*, performed in the TDP, the organizers write: “People get killed in combat not to the accompaniment of touching music with the heroic cry *Glory to Ukraine*, and they do not return home in beautiful



uniforms with a bunch of medals to cozy shelters, as is commercialized in movies and social media videos. The reality is different”.

Tovar, made by Alik Sardarian, a former military paramedic, induces the public to reflect on the essence of humanity and the true dimensions of heroism. The performance, among other things, tells the story of a wounded separatist who was rescued by a Ukrainian medical team. “Everybody was happy that the wounded separatist survived, even the one who had shot him», – the performer says, broadening the meaning of such terms as insider-outsider, as well as friend-enemy. The drama opens up a discussion on the so-called «pornography of violence», when “people look at the violence not as at something which should release catharsis, but as pornography”.

Another Kyiv theatre – PostPlayTeatr – produced the loud and scandalous performance Opolchenci (Militiamen), where its creators made an effort to understand the motivation of the separatists, that is Ukrainian citizens who choose to support Russia. However, in this case, “to understand” does not mean “to accept”. The actress and the director of the performance explain in the preface of the show: “This militiaman is a person who killed Ukrainian army soldiers... I think that he even tortured civilians (...) I do not like him, but this is a person who has a right to express his opinions. We think that it is very important to receive the viewers’ feedback”. She does not absolve Russian mercenaries of responsibility but lets the public explore a problem that is much more complex than politicians on both sides of the conflict would like to admit. The show caused very strong reactions – among these was that Den Gumennyi, a founder and a manager of the PostPlayTeatr, was threatened that the theatre would be set on fire. On the other hand, the performance, like litmus paper, presents the public mood in Ukraine, which the theatre pays close attention to.

### **Conclusions**

Contemporary Ukrainian theatre has developed a multi-dimensional anthropological defence against the Russian informational aggression. Many theatrical groups all over the country have initiated projects which are devoted to the integration of refugees, combating stereotypes and conducting therapeutic activities. However, theatrical curators have to deal with financial and organisation limitations, since they represent bottom-up initiatives which are insufficiently supported by government institutions.

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## УКРАЇНСЬКІ ТЕАТРАЛЬНІ ПРОЕКТИ ЯК ПРИКЛАД АНТРОПОЛОГІЧНОЇ ОБОРОНИ КРИЗЬ ПРИЗМУ АНТРОПОЛОГІЇ ЯК ПРОЯВУ СУЧАСНОЇ СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ ВІЙНИ

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*Антропологічна агресія є засобом ведення війни за допомогою інформації, отриманої від нації та її культури, соціальних норм і звичок та географічних умов, а також її історії, традиції тощо. Цей вид діяльності в даний час спостерігається в Україні в контексті війни у східній частині країни. Антропологічна агресія, однак, може бути зведена до мінімуму за допомогою антропологічного захисту. Прикладом цього є театральні проекти, ініційовані різними художніми трупамі по всій країні. У цій статті представлені методи, які використовуються українським театром для протидії цій антропологічній агресії. Можна виділити чотири основні напрямки діяльності, спрямовані на створення інструментів антропологічного захисту: 1) боротьба зі стереотипами; 2) сприяння інтеграції та освоєнню внутрішньо переміщених осіб; 3) театротерапія; 4) ініціювання суспільно-політичних дебатів.*

**Ключові слова:** антропологічна агресія, антропологічна оборона, війна, Україна, театр.