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## ‘One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre’

This new political comedy from Kosovo, set in the days before the declaration of independence, offers a subversive take on the theme of the Kosovo art world’s dependence on politics.

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Following a sudden visit from a state secretary, actors from the National Theatre of Kosovo, haunted by existential worries, stop their rehearsals of Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot” in order to work on a new national drama. The new piece, whose topic has been chosen by the Prime Minister of Kosovo himself, is to be given a central place at the independence celebration in Pristina. Moreover, the Prime Minister’s speech is to be included in the play as a monologue to be read on the stage by one of the actors. However, neither the date of the declaration of independence, nor the actual contents of the PM’s speech are known to the actors for the most of the play. This is how the playwright Jeton Neziraj and the director Blerta Neziraj have chosen to present Kosovo’s politically controlled cultural scene in their play, “One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre.”

From the opening scene this metaphor dominates the play: a man in an expensive suit conducting a composition played by a duo on harmonica and violin. Although the music is out of tune, and the artists look depressed, man in the suit looks satisfied and gains more and more energy. Such is the metaphorical environment in which four actors step onto the stage. A fifth, the conductor from the opening scene, appears later on as the secretary in charge of organizing the celebrations, dressed in the same shiny suit, contrasted to other actors’ poor wardrobe.

The play dances along to broken, out-of-tune music, symbolizing the artificial quality of art that is conquered and oppressed by “higher” interests. However, the creators of the play obviously weren’t satisfied to have only passive characters following directions; the artists tie their hopes and wishes to the government’s play, which forces them to act. The director hopes to grab some money, and get new attractive projects, while a young actress wishes to play on Broadway. Only the old drunken actor has small aspirations – a few tots of rakija brandy. The most comical figure in the grotesque scenes that follow is the young all-around scene worker, James, who aims to steal the engine from the rotating scene of the Kosovo Theatre and install it in a broken German airplane from the Second World War. With the plane, James aims to fly away and lobby the world for the recognition of the independence of Kosovo. He is a true representation of a patriotic idealist. Everything that the actors do in the play moves further away from culture and art. Forced from their original position either by politics or patriotism, they rush to fulfil their own lucrative interests, or higher ideals. This is the tragic component of the comedy that makes it both satirical and somewhat bitter.

The outcome of this hysterical situation is almost evident from the beginning - a total theatrical catastrophe that passes almost unnoticed, from whose consequences only artists suffer. The use of the theatrical device of “a play within a play” helps create a strong impression of a negligent politically driven reality, as well as of the state of the Kosovo culture scene, yet without leaving the world of comedy. The intertwining of real and fictional elements sheds new light on how ordinary people see the independence of Kosovo and the new false patriotism that stemmed from it as a cover for lucrative interests.

At the end of the play, the audience gets to open the envelopes provided earlier at the entrance and find out what happened to the characters after the play ended. In this way, failure is underlined, and the comedy completed. "One Flew over the Kosovo Theatre" premiered on December 5 in Pristina, since when it has travelled to Skopje, Tirana and Belgrade. Instead of tickets, the audience at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade were given a paper airplane with the message: "Please recognize the independence of Kosovo." The play is supported by organizations such as the Swiss Cultural Programme in the Western Balkans, the European Union, the Hartefakt Fund, the Goethe Institute and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights.