

Trading Patriotism

Adapted from Jeton Neziraj's text and directed by Blerta Neziraj, the play *One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre* provocatively poses questions concerning the relationship between art and politics, especially in sensitive socio-political moments. The plot of this metatheatrical piece takes place in a theatre and is a farce on the preparation of a play to be performed for the celebration of Kosovo's forthcoming declaration of independence. When it comes to the production of Neziraj's text on stage, minimalistic means are used, with only a few office chairs serving as infrequent, symbolically potent props. Actors Bajrush Mjaku, Adrian Morina, Anisa Ismaili, Adrian Aziri and Ernest Malazogu play their parts precisely and with physical emphasis, just as is required by the genre of farce. Furthermore, the inclusion of two musicians, Susanna Tognella (violin) and Gabriele Marangoni (accordion), is important with regard to stage dynamics and establishing the rhythm of the play.

The play demystifies the effects of politics on art in a clear-minded, ethical, and aesthetically valuable way and raises an awareness against extreme political ideas, impassioned options which are essentially humiliating and degrading. A subversively comic relationship towards politicians' demands for creating theatres which would glorify governments and so called national interests is established. The actors are exceptionally self-deprecating, constantly playing with the mythologised ideas of the Kosovo state and its politics which uses pretentious, mystifying and hollow slogans. These issues have been expressed in an especially funny and effective way in those segments of the play which show the rehearsals of "patriotic" scenes to the Secretary of State. The actors present it particularly skilfully, beyond all expectations, clearly expressing their critical attitude towards the manipulations of the ruling politics, the one-sidedness and their narrow-mindedness of the official discourse.

The fact that this play was performed in Belgrade is of exceptional importance due to establishing a healthy and open dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, especially after the National Theatre of Kosovo was prevented from performing in Belgrade last year. Performing *One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre* in Belgrade was not meant as a provocation to Serbia's authorities and citizens, aimed at stirring up a conflict around the politically sensitive question of Kosovo's independence, as was believed by some of the Serbian public. On the contrary, this visiting performance is means towards solving the existing conflict since it is an artistic piece which is dialectical and paranational. The sort of primitive reactions which could be heard in Serbia, a shallow deprecation of the visiting Prishtina play to Belgrade, with arguments for the protection of ostensible national interests, are part of a retrograde discourse of single-mindedness (or mindlessness).

As if to increase the absurdity of boasting with inflated tendencies to protect national interests and the so called patriotic preservation of the state, *One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre* has evoked the same sort of nonsensical comments from both sides, amongst Serbs and Albanians alike. A few days prior to its Belgrade premier, the play barely had its premier in Prishtina due to political censorship there, only managing so thanks to interventions, with one such in Kosovo being the carrying of the label "anti national plays". Similarly paradoxical were last year's reactions to the Albanian-Serbian documentary play *Patriotic Hypermarket*, which was regarded as "anti -Serbian" in Serbia and "anti-Albanian" in Kosovo.

Truth be told, these plays are not anti-patriotic, rather they are very much patriotic in the original sense of the word, presenting a love for one's homeland. They work to achieve essential welfare for people who live on both sides, by establishing a common language and working on overcoming

political conflicts. But, unfortunately, patriotism has today become a commodity, a lucrative object of political trade, a means to gaining power and holding on to it. In that respect, *One Flew Over the Kosovo Theatre* is marked in Belgrade as important, since it is a kind of protest against those narrow-minded political manipulations and backward conservatism which brutally massacres all human and civilised values.

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