

Magdalena Hasiuk about *And people live. Abdul* by
Ted'nádech a let Theatre (dir. David Zelinka)

Our guest is sacred (?)

The very title of the "Ted'nádech a let" theatre performance suggests a clear duality. And people live. Abdul consists of two stories, somehow independent and antagonised on many levels. The centre of them both are the fates of a pair of protagonists, both highly individualised, an example of a micro-history. David Zelinka - the director, for many months searched for the material in dozens of documentaries published in various countries and languages, as well as during many hours of conversations with the witnesses of events. All the stories in And people live. Abdul belong, what is essential, to women. Here and now, as one could paraphrase the title of a famous book, "the war [and all the violence] is a woman". At the same time, the narration in the performance is divided "equally" between the acting pair. The emblematic presence of two performers - Dominiika "Domela" Grenda and David Zelinka, makes the viewer see them both as protagonists and witnesses of history, as well as its mediators. This enables the transfer of events between the Polish reality of 2018 and the world of the distant Caucasus of the 90's. I think about that bridge with gratitude. There's universality in their message. Grenda and Zelinka, like storytellers from the old times, do not portray any specific character, but whole story that transcends them. Depending on the need, they stay inside or outside of the temporary scenography, they represent individual or collective voice, free from particular restrictions. And people live. Abdul in many moments resembles an epic, and in the finale reveals the myth with all its ruthlessness, power and cruelty.

The story that makes the first part of the performance is characterised by an expanded perspective in which the individual, social and political plan (astounding scenes of TV programmes) overlap. Intricately complex and elaborate, it resembles a patchwork of richly detailed intertwined situations in which the keynote is the Chechen war at the end of the 20th century. However, the creators are as interested in wartime destruction (presented with unbearable details) of the entire universe, as in all these decisions, deeds and specific stories in which thanks to the Chechen values, the individual choices resulting from them, the rituals of everyday life, creativity, interpersonal solidarity and compassion in

in an extreme situation it was possible to save human dignity and nobility. To be a human despite the war is the message of the first part of the performance. And people live. Abdul clearly shows that many Chechens – especially Chechen women succeeded.

The theme of the second story, time laconic and monothematic, entwined with the first, is honour killing. War is present in the story in the background. The main problem, however, concerns tradition, which imposes a very narrow range of choices in Muslim culture in situations of moral transgression. This range is „deadly” - death or disgrace. By showing the power of tradition, which allows people to face the war with dignity. Zelinka, from my point of view, simultaneously undermines its authority. The performance (possibly against the intention of the creators) becomes accusatory. Where could tradition lead us? To what a dead end, can such an absolute and thoughtless fulfilment of orders imposed long ago in completely different circumstances lead us? The rules that make such an abstract and individual concept like honour more valuable than the life of another human being, especially someone close to us, are absurd for the Europeans. The absurdity of these precepts is manifested in the fact that you pay for your honour with blood, but not your blood.

In the finale, a black sweatshirt of the murderer – Abdul – personification of his character, is thrown rapidly from the stage and lands in the audience with the commentary: „I cannot forgive such thing”. For some time he lies strangely „alone” among the spectators like an intruder or a condemned person. Now, Abdul is a guest, a guest in the audience. „Our guest is sacred”, Grenda says with the voice of Chechen women in the performance. Women who served bread and milk to their sons’ executors, not letting them die of hunger. In this way, they themselves have saved their humanity. The ambiguity of the finale, in which, along with the words of condemning the actions of the actors, let the audience ask the audience: Can Abdul be treated like a guest? The pause here is very meaningful.

The moment when the actors sit in the audience next to the black sweatshirt makes a very difficult answer... or maybe the only possible one... to save dignity (?)

The fractal structure of the performance, in which every part of the story is reflected in the world of the

small, familiar, defenceless and useful things, could be the theme of a detailed analysis that this performance certainly deserves. Using the language of the „everyday theatre” with the help of vegetable crates, bazaar props, jars with pickles, bottles in „communion socks” (the term by Agnieszka Mioduszevska-Kornilov), the team of Ted’nádech a let has created a world where people talk about crime and justice, injustice and compassion, about anger and forgiveness, about pity for the victims and their torturers, about mercy „for human in general” (the term by Jacqueline de Romilly) and this does not sound fake or pompous, not for a moment.