

PSYCHOLOGY OF PLAYS ABOUT EXTREME LIFE SITUATIONS IN GERMAN-LANGUAGE EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

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German and Austrian playwrights employ artistic material to tackle the pressing issues of modernity. Their aim is not only to conduct a profound analysis of the psychology of mass murders but also to provide their audience with the opportunity to experience these situations.

The drama "Nordost" (2005) by Torstein Buchsteiner is based on the October 23, 2002, terrorist attack in Moscow at the Dubrovka Theater Center. The play "komA" (2007) by Volker Schmidt and Georg Staudacher analyzes the mass shooting of schoolchildren by a classmate at the Gutenberg Gymnasium in Erfurt in 2002. However, the authors also perceive this event as a typical international phenomenon, citing examples such as Columbine High School in Littleton, Montréal, Jokela, Heidelberg, Emsdetten, Winnenden, and others.

In "Nordost," Buchsteiner offers an alternative version and interpretation of the events, diverging from the Russian official account. He portrays the events through the perspectives of three different heroines who were affected by the Chechen war. Zura, a Chechen woman, lost her husband Aslan during the military clashes in Grozny. Olga, a Russian woman, whose husband Oleg played an active role in the Russian-Chechen military campaign, struggled to adapt to peacetime and became suicidal. Lastly, there is Olga, a Latvian woman, whose husband perished due to lethal gas during a poorly planned anti-terrorist operation aimed at freeing hostages at Dubrovka. These women's destinies are tightly intertwined, and they all tragically become widows.

Buchsteiner's psychological analysis delves into the background of each heroine, the preparation of the terrorist attack, and its execution. Zura's monologues reveal that her world was shattered; she was ejected from her family and familiar environment. Neither her Chechen relatives nor the Red Cross offered her any assistance. Her only source of solace was found within the terrorist center of Chechen field commander Movsan Barayev, where she was coerced into becoming a suicide bomber. The author portrays how the terrorists psychologically manipulate a woman who has lost her sense of purpose. Movsan Barayev preaches religious fanaticism and instills the idea of

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the necessity of seeking blood revenge for a relative, promoting the concept of fighting for Chechnya's independence through violent means. Additionally, there are sexual motives at play. Uncertain of whether Zura can carry out her assigned task, the charismatic field commander displays personal sympathy for her, pays compliments, and likens her to his niece, another suicide bomber, to motivate her to take decisive action. The playwright does not romanticize the terrorists in the play. At a crucial juncture, Movsan abandons the "black widows", changes into women's clothing, and attempts to flee. This revelation prompts Zura to realize that she was merely a pawn in the hands of her compatriots.

Following Oleg's death, the Russian heroine, Olga, harbors intense hatred for the Chechens, and even for their children. Nonetheless, she frequently attempts to empathize with the shahiddiks, which leads her to understand their psychology. She realizes that if she had lost everything as they did, she might have taken the same path. Among the characters, only Tamara, a Latvian woman, voices her protest against the government and Putin. She mentions that Latvia has been independent for 11 years, and her aunt participated in drafting the Latvian Constitution, which served as a model for the Chechen Basic Law, although it was never officially adopted.

The author essentially portrays only victims of a violent state policy. One of the central ideas in "Nordost," consistently emphasized throughout the play, is that human life in the Russian Federation holds little value, and rights and freedoms are empty words. Official negotiations with the Chechens were merely a distraction, with no genuine attempts to resolve the hostage crisis peacefully. The rescue operation for the gas-poisoned theatergoers was unprofessional. Putin himself issued criminal orders and held foreign terrorist organizations responsible for the hostage-taking.

The play "komA" by Schmidt and Staudacher delves into the motivations behind the actions of Stefan Prokopec, who chose to shoot his classmates, devised a terrorist attack plan, and engaged in anonymous discussions about the list of prospective victims with his classmates on social networks. Importantly, the teenager is not mentally ill. The driving forces behind his actions stem from his parents' misunderstanding, his sense of isolation within his family, his loneliness among peers, his disinterest in academics, and his disdain for his teachers. In a pivotal dialogue, Stefan attributes all of modern society's issues to capitalism and the psychology of consumerism, which, in his view, has dehumanized his peers, reducing them to machines traded for material goods.

Following the typical logic of school shooters, Stefan believes that the entire world is sick, and he sees himself as the one who must "cure" it through his actions, with pain being the only remedy. He holds his classmates, teachers, and politicians responsible for their roles in his humiliation and psychological

torment. For the teenager, a terrorist act also serves as a means to gain recognition in the world, to make headlines, and leave a lasting imprint in people's memories. This is driven by his inability to find self-realization through any other means due to his passivity, accumulated internal aggression, and deep-seated hatred towards the world and those around him.

In the play, the authors raise the question of the responsibility of schoolchildren for their fate and for everything that happens at school. Stefan, as an anonymous person, repeatedly discussed the plan for his terrorist attack in chats with classmates, asked them for advice on who to kill first, the schoolchildren perceived these conversations as a game, submitted their candidacies for consideration of a potential killer [5, p. 21, 25, 30]. Bullying flourished in the class, brutal reprisals by aggressive schoolchildren against "losers" and physically weak classmates [5, p. 17, 32]. One of the schoolgirls, Natalya, subtly feels the oppressive atmosphere of the upcoming tragedy, which thickens every day, she verbalizes her experiences and suspicions, but also remains a passive victim of the terrorist [5, p. 7, 13, 19]. Unfortunately, schoolchildren are selfish, their thoughts are closed to their often exaggerated problems, they do not try to take active steps to prevent an extreme situation, and do not turn to parents, teachers, or the management of the educational institution for help. This is largely due to the lack of respect teenagers have for adults and the loss of their authority by teachers.

The drama not only has the potential to depict terrorist attacks and school shootings but also provides an opportunity to immerse the audience in the conventional theatrical reality crafted by the playwright and director. This allows them to "feel" the psychological motives of both the perpetrators and their victims. Simultaneously, the audience, as observers and participants in these events, experiences catharsis and releases negative emotions, gaining a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of life's tragedies and empathetically engaging in the theatrical performance. German-speaking playwrights who tackle acute and profound problems related to terrorism and school shootings employ unconventional approaches. They walk a fine line between documentary drama and performance, utilizing methods from experimental theater, drawing from the traditions of Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Jacques Copeau, multimedia theater, and "station" theater [1, p. 1; 3, p. 18–24].

Working in the genre of documentary drama, playwrights act as political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and journalists. They carry out their independent investigations, reach autonomous conclusions, and delve deeply into the social and psychological motives driving terrorists and murderers. They also offer psychological interpretations of the reactions of the victims of aggression involved in these tragic events. During stage productions, German-speaking playwrights perform a type of psychological experiment, actively

engaging the audience and breaking down the conventional boundaries of the stage.

In "Nordost," spectators watch documentary footage of the terrorist act on a screen, and everyone sits on the floor with cushions instead of chairs. This discomfort allows them to imagine themselves in the role of real participants in the events. The main characters of the play, including both "shahidki" (suicide bombers) and hostages, approach each spectator to share their stories filled with pain and suffering [1, p. 1; 4, p. 1]. In the staging of "komA," the situation closely mirrors reality. The play is performed in schools, gymnasiums, and colleges, typically in the morning or afternoon when regular educational activities occur in these institutions. The audience collectively watches only the prologue and epilogue. Afterward, they are divided into four teams and participate in four rounds of dramatization in various sequences. Each round is performed four times for each team of spectators, offering them the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological reasons behind the events. This approach allows them to get as close as possible to the characters in the story and observe their behavior, enabling spontaneous reactions to the unfolding drama. During the rounds in the school corridors, the spectators encounter students, and depending on the situation, improvisations are allowed [2, p. 1; 3, p. 44–57].

In this way, German-speaking playwrights and directors, on the platform of experimental theater, realize the psychotherapeutic potential of dramaturgy. The plots of the plays we analyzed can be used as dramatic improvisation in psychodrama to expand the capabilities of a participant in group psychotherapy for adequate behavior and interaction with people.

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