

The Image and Legacy of the *Endlösung* in the Productions of Bratislava Theatres in the Last Decade

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Abstract: The polarization of society, open manifestations of antisemitism, and racism have repeatedly raised questions about the division of human beings into “Untermensch” and “Übermensch”, which in the past culminated in the “Final Solution” to the Jewish Question in Slovakia. Seventy-six years since the first transports of Jews from Slovakia, a question has arisen as to how much the theatre can impact young viewers and raise their interest in history (circumstances, storylines) through a theatrically mediated image of that period as seen through the eyes of the middle and younger generations of theatre makers. Is the aim of such projects to stimulate catharsis? Or are they rather intended to indirectly offer caution with a parallel to historical connections, where “Jude” is interchangeable for any other word to denote a race or colour of skin that is not white? At the present time, theatre is not expected to give a stereotyped view of pain, fear, or an enemy, but is rather expected to present a novel perception of connections and signs from the perspective of our times. It is important to know about the past, as it would be wrong to take facts out of European contexts.

Key words: the Slovak Republic 1939–1945, the Holocaust, Slovakia, contemporary Slovak theatre, theatrical productions *Tiso*, *Rabínka*, *Holokaust*.

Introduction

Over the past decade, we have been witnessing the polarization of society in connection with a massive migration wave to Europe from the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. The arrival of refugees from countries affected by war or other crises has raised controversial feelings and opinions. The arrival of a different culture which may change certain European values, such as democracy, equality, the status of women in society, the individual or collective ability to adapt to the majority, and religious tolerance are among the most negatively viewed phenomena. European theatre has responded in a variety of ways to the slowly changing picture of Europe. Among the best-known

projects have been those launched by the German theatre collective Rimini Protokoll.

In the middle of 2018, Czech society was divided by the production *Naše nasilje i vaše nasilje* [Our Violence and Your Violence], directed by Oliver Frljić and staged by Mladinsko Gledališče [Mladinsko Theatre], in Ljubljana, Slovenia. For several years now, this controversial yet acclaimed Croatian director has been addressing and adapting provocative themes (to give one example, Jesus rapes a Muslim woman in the above production) which divide both theatre critics and society at large. The production transgresses social stereotypes and indirectly transcends into politics. Also, the production *Klq̄twa* [The Curse], staged by Teatr Powszechny [Powszechny Theatre] in Warsaw highlighted the issue of a strong bond between the church and the state and the indirect influence of the church upon the political decision-making of legislators, which affected the arts (e.g., the issue of religious censorship and auto-censorship). *Naše nasilje i vaše nasilje* openly raises the issue of a notional and real violence between two (religious) cultures in European territory: the one coming onto the scene through Muslim immigration and the domestic culture, which is manifested through the closing of borders and immersion in a world of wealth which is immune to the violence outside Europe. Frljić's dramatically overexposed portrayal of the present day was rejected in critique, which does not mean that theatre is stripped of the right to present themes on the stage not particularly digestible for a certain segment of people or for the representatives of certain political parties. In this context, the declaration by the Czech Centre of the IACT/AICT contains the following statement:

“Art has the responsibility to reflect critically on society and on the world, and to do so from any political position, even in the form of demystification of religious and other icons.”¹

Individual national cultures cope with current socio-political topics in different ways. Quite often, they would take a position through documentary theatre. More often than ever, past events connected with well-known personalities have been dealt with and previously unknown facts and events have been brought to light which may be of significance to any culture and its national identity.

1 Cf. *Text protestu...* [online]. [cit. 8. 7. 2018]. Available at: <http://aict.idu.cz/text-protestu/>.

In Slovakia, theatre projects which focus on historical themes that even today prompt a review of the actions of individuals and become a significant part of national history have a much greater impact, starting with the followers of Ľudovít Štúr, who were mid-19th century national awakers² through to several 20th century politicians³ and the victims of political persecution of the 1950s and the normalization process⁴ (the early 1970s to November 1989). To a greater or lesser extent, production texts oscillate between documentary materials encompassing contemporary research via oral history and authorial fiction. The selection of events, their adaptation, and the transposition of archival period materials as theatrical devices directly or indirectly convey the political stances of theatre makers.

The theme of the Second World War's Holocaust is still interesting and current, especially within the context of the events that are currently taking place in different parts of the world, where the systematic killing of populations is taking place on the grounds of religious and other conflicts. This does not only apply to Slovakia, as researchers publishing new data from generally known and private archives and the notetaking of reminiscences based on oral histories have been on the rise. Often these sources shed light on the different conduct of fellow citizens. Modern political theatre could be instrumental in coming to terms with the trauma of Europe that allowed the Holocaust to happen, and not just the Holocaust inflicted on the Jewish people.

Tiso: about Slovaks in Slovakia

Every European country where Hitler's troops set foot, or who had a collaboration pact concluded with him, has a "story" of its own. Slovakia has

2 In the first half of the 19th century, the representatives of Slovak National Enlightenment took the name of their most prominent personality, Ľudovít Štúr, who was the codifier of the Slovak literary language.

3 For example, the ex-president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Secretary General of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Gustáv Husák, other politicians, and writers in diverse positions and offices.

4 Normalization refers to a period from 21 August 1968, when the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of five countries of the Warsaw Pact took place. Under pressure from Moscow pressure, the leading role of the Communist Party in society was gradually restored, democratization processes were brought to a halt, the representatives of the pro-reformist programme were removed from their positions, and the alliance with the Soviet Union was solidified. Normalization and its ramifications affected the socio-economic life of a great number of citizens in the country.

a personality with whom the complex historical events of the wartime period are associated, including assistance (although initially out of ignorance) in the deportation of Jewish fellow citizens from Slovakia to the territory of the General Government. This personality's name is Jozef Tiso, president of the wartime Slovak Republic (1939–1945), who was tried and executed in Bratislava in 1947.

A theatre production⁵ portraying this controversial personality is a solo play: a fictitious dialogue between a Catholic priest, the would-be president, and the nation. The script, bearing the simple name *Tiso*, is based on exclusively contemporary material which has been published in several book volumes (Tiso's sermons at his parish church, speeches given while holding the position of president, various letters without concrete dates, his defence testimony in court, and other material). It is divided into five parts (Life, Oath, Petition for Clemency, Trial, and Death), whereby the first three parts are the most dramatic. The selection of material alludes to the producers' intent of bringing to light and clarifying certain stages of the actions and thinking of a man whose decisions and inaction had a profound effect upon the solution to the Jewish Question in Slovakia rather than just condemning him.

In 2005 a dramatic image of the individual and of his mindset and actions was presented by Rastislav Ballek, the author of the source text and the play's director, on the stage of Divadlo Aréna [Aréna Theatre] in Bratislava. It portrayed the transformation of an initially indulgent person aspiring to improve the social conditions of his people, who step by step changes into an authoritarian leader. It is the portrayal of a politician and Catholic priest who in the difficult months after the signing of the Munich Agreement (1938)⁶ led an autonomous Slovakia⁷ and was convinced of the need to found

5 Rastislav Ballek: *Tiso*. Divadlo Aréna Bratislava, premiered 14 April 2005. Direction: Rastislav Ballek, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran, stage design: Jozef Ciller, costumes: Anna Cigánová, music: Peter Groll, musical production and correpetition: Branislav Kostka.

6 In late September 1938, the representatives of four powers (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy) took a decision on the cession of Sudetenland, which used to be an integral part of the territory of Czechoslovakia, to Germany. Eduard Beneš, the president of Czechoslovakia, then stepped down in early October. In early November, Germany and Italy pressurized Czechoslovakia to cede a large territory in southern Slovakia and in Subcarpathian Ruthenia to Hungary. This act is known as the First Vienna Arbitrage.

7 On 6 October 1938, the heads of the most influential political parties in Slovakia signed an agreement on the autonomy of Slovakia. Once the law on the autonomy of Slovakia had been promulgated, the state's name changed to Czecho-Slovakia in November 1938. Jozef Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest, member of the National Assembly in Prague, and

an independent Slovak Republic, which was orchestrated by Hitler in March 1939.⁸ At that time, the greater part of the government of the “Slovak Land” (which was the country’s official name at the time of autonomy) as well as its population favoured a declaration of independence. However, some people had anticipated the country’s future subjugation to Hitler.

Tiso was not a radical proponent of the country’s independence under Germany’s surveillance. He believed in an evolutionary progress, but the political context pushed him into becoming the head of state, which for several years was a satellite or puppet state of the Greater German Reich. Being a patriot, he was upset by the annexation of territories together with their inhabitants. His sermons given during the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) and his presidential speeches in support of his own Christian citizens can be viewed in this light, which also applies to his presidential pledge, in which he stated, among other things, that:

“I shall always bear in mind the moral and substantive elevation of the people, I shall lead the state in the spirit of Christian love and justice. May God help me!”

He was frequently confronted with the manifestations of antisemitism which, presumably, stemmed from the different social class and economic backgrounds of inhabitants – for the greater part, shops had been owned

chairman of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, was appointed prime minister of the autonomous Slovak region by the president of the common state. This triggered the difficult evolution of this part of the common state, during which the Slovaks were forced to cede to Poland yet more territories in the border regions. The Germans made it no secret that on strategic grounds Bohemia and Moravia were to be annexed to Germany. Hungary had also long declared its interest in other parts of Slovak territory.

8 Adolf Hitler summoned Tiso to Berlin, tabling two alternatives to him: either an immediate declaration of independence guaranteed by Germany or an unprotected Slovakia, which implied the further fragmentation of its territory by neighbouring countries. Having prior experience with the enforcement of the Munich Agreement and the Vienna Arbitrage, the Slovak National Assembly (parliament) unanimously voted on the founding of the Slovak Republic on 14 March 1939. As early as 21 July 1939, the national assembly adopted a constitution for the newly named Slovak Republic. The following day, a new government was set up. Tiso was appointed prime minister and from October 1939 he became the president of the republic. On 15 March 1939, German troops had occupied Bohemia and Moravia, and a day later Hitler had signed a decree on the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, which was then incorporated into the German Reich.

and run by the Jewish people – and from religious differences (the majority of the Slovak population were Roman Catholic). Being president of the republic, he was held liable for all of the state's actions gradually taken against the Jews. The initial measures were the following: in 1939 a government decree was adopted on the definition of a "Jew" and instructions were issued on the number of Jews in certain liberal professions followed by the exclusion of the Jews from military service; in 1940, the promulgation of the first so-called Aryanization law led to the partial exclusion of the Jewish people from Slovakia's economic life (the transfer of Jewish property to non-Jews by applying a "mild form" of Aryanization by qualified citizens or the retention of a smaller share of property by the Jews). Three months later, the national assembly passed another law which stipulated the exclusion of Jews from socio-economic life altogether. When having their property confiscated, the Jews were forced to pay an amount equivalent to the share in the remaining assets that were confiscated from them. In September 1941, a government ordinance entitled "On the Legal Status of the Jews" (the so-called "Jewish Code")⁹ entered into effect; President Tiso was not bound to sign it, but as he did not publicly contest it he in fact approved of its wording.

With respect to theatre projects covering the theme of the Holocaust, which began with the confiscation of property and continued with the transportation of Jews to concentration camps, knowledge of historical connections is essential as through them individual stories and narrations based on oral history and their artistic adaptations will be followed and understood. Knowing these connections is important as they are a memento of atrocities and a safeguard from the potential repetition of the attitudes of a certain group of the population (for instance, with respect to the Roma and migrants). Had Tiso as a priest and president signed anti-Jewish laws in "good faith" and in the interests of the preservation of an independent state, his social and religious antisemitism could not have fully surfaced in 1942. This was at a time when the Jewish people had their businesses removed from their ownership and placed under the control of "Aryanizers", who failed to improve them, meaning that the state was short of income from taxes. There emerged a social stratum of impoverished Jewish people who had nothing to live on. It was then that Tiso declared in a public speech:

9 This ordinance detailed a race-based concept of Jews, and a special legal status was laid down for them which deprived them of civil rights and property. They had to wear the six-pointed yellow star and were banned from attending schools and the like.

“People ask if what is happening now is Christian. Is it humane? Is it not just looting? But I ask: ‘Is it Christian if the Slovak nation wants to rid itself of its eternal enemies, the Jews?’ (...) Loving thyself is God’s command, and this love commands me to remove anything that harms me, that threatens my life.”¹⁰

The director and script-writer, countering Tiso’s defence of these ideas for the nation’s good, had people form a chorus (recitatives and singing). The singing people, who are dressed in national costumes (which was a characteristic feature of the Slovak nation in the past), silently consent to the acts accompanying the anti-Jewish laws and harsh reprisals. A lot of individuals, shielded by the ruling political party, benefitted from all of this and literally yearned for Jewish property, which was officially available in accordance with the law. In parallel, via the chorus, voices pleading for mercy for the eighty thousand victims are heard (in a memorandum from the rabbi of the Jewish religious communities in March 1942). However, Tiso did nothing to prevent the deportations of Jewish people. After three months, the first Jewish transports left the country. An anti-emotional confession by Tiso, performed by the brilliant actor Marián Labuda without employing any theatrical effects, sounded so convincing that the viewer may well have yielded to Tiso’s arguments. (In 2017, the production was reintroduced onto the stage with Marián Labuda Jr cast in the leading role, and it has been in the repertoire ever since.) Tiso feels no regret; he gives arguments, but he gives them from his perspective.¹¹ His retrospective inner dialogue with himself while in prison sheds light on a body of facts and connections, which is especially useful for younger audiences. It explains the founding of the independent Slovak Republic¹² and the relationship between its government and the Roman Catholic Church¹³ (enhanced by stage design, an altar, and a confession

10 BALLEK, R. *Tiso* [Unpublished drama script]. Bratislava : Divadlo Aréna Bratislava, 2005, p. 20.

11 It is a well-known fact that the more radical wing of the government and Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (abbreviation HSĽS, from 1938 with the addition of “Party of Slovak National Unity”) was represented by Alexander Mach, the Minister of the Interior who initiated anti-Jewish acts, as well as Vojtech Tuka, who was one of the organizers of Jewish deportations.

12 In numerous works, the name “Slovak State” is used to refer to the entire period of the existence of the independent state.

13 The Catholic church was very closely connected with the state authorities. Throughout his term in office, Jozef Tiso continued to be active as a priest. There were priests installed in various government bodies, and they accounted for almost a fifth of the members of

booth). In the scenes of the deportations of the Jewish people, the “pests” of the nation, the director projects filmed shots of a concentration camp onto the backdrop which are enhanced by archival radio speeches and contemporary songs, accentuating the aloofness of the members of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party over ordinary citizens (an indirect parallel to the images of the Oscar-winning film *Obchod na korze* [The Shop on Main Street]). Incorporating the scene of Bethlehem messengers, annunciators of the coming of Jesus the Saviour, creates a powerful metaphor to the character of Tiso, who Jews and non-Jews used to turn to with appeals for Jews to be granted economic exemptions and especially with pleas to stop the transports.

The production of *Tiso* by the Aréna Theatre opened the theme of the Holocaust to the public. Although the fates of Jews and non-Jewish citizens have been exposed to a more detailed review in Slovakia since the 1990s, it was not until the launching of this project that the Holocaust was given more extensive publicity.¹⁴ Ethnologists, sociologists, and historians have been researching the diverse aspects of human behaviour under extreme conditions, and undoubtedly this applies to the period when these citizens of non-Aryan origin were ruthlessly exterminated. There are plenty of interesting books containing the oral testimonies of witnesses to events and of members of Jewish and non-Jewish families, historical elucidations, and sociological papers dedicated to research on antisemitism after 1989.

The Holocaust in the theatrical mirroring of Slovak authors

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the *Endlösung der Judenfrage* in 2012, two Bratislava theatres (Slovenské národné divadlo [Slovak Nation-

the Slovak Assembly. Several of them began to openly criticize anti-Jewish reprisals and deportations, and many of them helped Jews get baptised.

14 In 1987 the Declaration of Twenty-Four Slovak Signatories, who were members of the intellectual community and included six academic painters and sculptors, three music composers, and two signatories to Charter 77, was published. They publicly “distanced themselves from the anti-Jewish policy of the Slovak State fascist regime between 1939 and 1945 and pointed out the share of Slovakia in the Jewish tragedy,” as stated by the political scientist Juraj Marušiak of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Cf. JANCURA, V. Vyhlásenie dvadsiatich štyroch zmenilo pohľad na Slovensko. In *Pravda*, (19. 10. 2017). [online]. [cit. 20. 7. 2018]. Available at: <https://zurnal.pravda.sk/neznama-historia/clanok/445197-vyhlasenie-dvadsiatich-styroch-zmenilo-pohlad-na-slovensko/>. The text of the declaration is available at: [https://sk.wikisource.org/wiki/Vyh1%C3%A1senie_k_deport%C3%A1ci%C3%A1m_%C5%BEidov_zo_Slovenska_\(okt%C3%B3ber_1987\)](https://sk.wikisource.org/wiki/Vyh1%C3%A1senie_k_deport%C3%A1ci%C3%A1m_%C5%BEidov_zo_Slovenska_(okt%C3%B3ber_1987)).

al Theatre] and the Aréna Theatre) staged a cycle of productions dedicated to the deportation of the Jews from Slovakia. The first transports of prisoners from Slovakia to Nazi extermination camps were dispatched in March 1942 and the last ones went on October 1942. Initially, the Slovak government paid Germany 500 Reichmarks for each deported person, assuming they were being sent to work camps. It is important to shed some light on this baffling matter. A serious issue was the acquisition of the property of deported Jews by cunning members of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSL'S) and their relatives, who voluntarily took part in the practices of Tiso's state against their fellow citizens. Another reason was the social situation facing the Jews in Slovakia. They were not allowed to work, there were restrictions imposed on a broad range of professions, and they were deemed an economic and social burden on the state. The Germans came up with a "solution" for the Slovak government: the deportation of Jews to the Reich to work in the territory of the General Government on the condition that Slovakia would pay 500 Reichmarks to cover settlement costs for each deported person.¹⁵ Although government officials were subsequently informed that the Jews were deported to concentration camps, the necessity to get rid of the Jews prevailed over their morality. One part of the citizenry was stripped of its rights and ended up as victims, while another part ended up as wrongdoers (politicians and individuals who executed their orders), and the majority remained silent out of fear. However, let us not forget that a lot of citizens selflessly helped to save (hide) Jews; this is a well-established fact, and the testimonies of rescued survivors support this. It may have been the case that one person went through all these phases, as was pointed out by the ethnologist Monika Vrzgulová. This phenomenon is something intriguing for Slovak researchers who have examined attitudes towards the Holocaust in Slovakia. In the 21st century, the primary focus of the authors of dramatic works has been on the direct victims of the Holocaust and the deportations of Jews to concentration camps as well as Aryanization.

15 The consent of the Germans with the deportations of Jews was conditioned by them being stripped of their citizenship and the payment of the requested amount for each of them. It should be underlined that with the deportation of Jews, Slovakia was complying with an agreement on providing manpower to Germany. As early as 1941, the Slovak government concluded that the country had a lack of manpower to send abroad, which prompted the idea of the deportation of Slovak Jews. See FATRANOVÁ, G. *Bojo prežitie*. Translation Arieh Fatran. Bratislava : Slovenské národné múzeum ; Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007, pp. 127–131.

Theatre makers have divergent views on the events and personalities of the period which are reflected in their creations. The younger generation has a critical understanding of the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1939 and of its position concerning the deportations of Jews. Knowledgeable of historical (and European) connections, the older generation is more cautious and approaches the issue from different angles, largely because in drama adaptation, unlike the literary nature of films and series, the interpretation of reality may be simplified or may be incorrect due to the time constraints of actual performance. A question crops up regarding the role of the theatre in bringing history to light of whether a theatre production should solely draw on the archival period and credible material (i.e., an inclination towards documentary theatre), or whether the drama adaptation of this material ought to employ as many theatrical elements as possible, especially metaphoric ones (the production of *Tiso* is a good example). To what extent should the author of the text employ fiction in situations and dialogues when he or she simultaneously draws from source materials or from interviews with survivors? Would the form of a play which is loosely based on a book of memoirs written after a longer period of time be more accommodating to the viewer (the interpretation of one's own or mediated memory which is affected by the narrator's selective perception and by the author of an artistic text who transposes selected facts of cultural and political memory in his or her work)?

Is it the aim of authors and theatrical producers to merely expand the information on (our) past or to bring to memory atrocious events and draw a lesson from them? Is the aim a catharsis through ridding oneself of burdening reminiscences or the sins of the past? For example, does *Tiso* prove to be a powerful testimony of the era, of the man, and of society, as it only employs period materials in a minimalist but more powerful dramatic image which combines words, signs, metaphors, choir singing, and shots of concentration camps?

Let us have a closer look at two theatre projects marking the anniversary of the *Endlösung* which are based on the texts of Slovak authors. The first one is a play by Anna Grusková called *Rabínka* [The Female Rabbi], the female counterpart to the male Jewish priest, which is to be understood metaphorically), which was performed by the drama ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre in March 2012.¹⁶ *Rabínka* is a narration about Gisele (Gisi) Fleis-

16 Anna Grusková: *Rabínka*. Činohra Slovenského národného divadla Bratislava, premiered

chmann, a Jewish woman who lived in Bratislava and an acclaimed Zionist and representative of Slovak Jewry during the Second World War.

The theatrical text bears the features of a radio documentary play. Grusková wrote a radio play and worked on a film dedicated to this extraordinary woman. She based her work on various documents (especially letters), conversations with her family members in Israel, the contemporary press, and authorial fiction. At the time when the script and the screenplay were being written, there were diverse materials on the activity of Fleischmann¹⁷, who had worked with the Slovak Judenrat (the Jewish Council, established in 1940 after the dissolution of the Central Chancellery of Jews). Initially, their activity was focused on paperwork related to the travel of Jews to Palestine. Later on, the Council was involved in the mitigation of the effects of government ordinances on the lives of Jewish citizens, especially the ending or discontinuation of the deportations of Jews from Slovakia. To that effect, a working group was set up and Fleischmann became a member of it. Among other things, the group developed a plan (the so-called Europa Plan) aimed at rescuing the Jews in Europe. In the Bratislava office of the Judenrat, it was strongly believed that all Germans were corruptible; therefore, they also tried to raise funds abroad. They relied on the German adviser to the solution of the Jewish Question in Slovakia, Dieter Wisliceny (the main female hero calls him “Willy” in the play). Fleischmann most frequently negotiated with him. Grusková’s play focuses on this particular area of Fleischmann’s activity. She highlights “Gisi” Fleischmann’s unlimited trust in Wisliceny’s promises. The text of the play reflects Grusková’s admiration for a woman who elevated her mission to help others over the care of her own family. This is best seen from the unemotional dialogues of the main heroine with her mother and the selected citations of letters which are incorporated into the play (Gisi begs the Jews abroad for money). Gisi’s femininity is not expressed by the author through her feelings for her husband¹⁸ but rather

on 3 and 4 March 2012. Direction: Viktorie Čermáková, dramaturgy: Matej Samec and Rastislav Ballek, stage design and costumes: Jana Preková.

17 The historian Katarína Hradská researched the fate of Gisela (Gisi) Fleischmann in Slovakia. She published a book entitled *Gizi Fleischmannová: Návrat nežiaduci* [Gizi Fleischmann: return undesirable], (2012). Five years earlier, the translation of the book by Gila Fatran *Boj o prežitie* [The Struggle for Survival] had been published. In it, Fatran sheds light on previously unknown relationships between individuals and organizations, and she reveals intriguing connections using historical materials, such as letters (for instance, on the activity of the Slovak Judenrat) located in Jerusalem.

18 Josef Fleischmann passed away in 1942.

through a bizarre and unidentifiable relationship (is it love or friendship?) with the Austrian journalist Benn Weiser. The play's composition is fragmentary: the cuts and cross-fading of citations, the utterances of the members of the Slovak government deliberating the inevitability of the deportation of the Jews, terse conversations with her mother (who puts her daughter's actions into doubt), discussions about Bratislava and Willy, the interjecting utterances of historians in film, and so on. Gisi slowly distanced herself from her children, mother, and other people around her to help rescue others, and she declined to emigrate with her daughters, who were left abandoned.¹⁹ Her own life was terminated in Auschwitz.

Four actresses perform several characters (on both the German and Slovak sides). In the opening lines, and especially in film injections, the text takes on a scornful overtone with respect to the hostility of the Slovaks towards the Jews and Bratislava²⁰ and a hint of ridicule is expressed through individuals' manners. In the production, anti-illusive elements in places blend with artificial caricatures in the scenes parodying political addresses or bribery. The stage design employed signs: in the middle of a dark space, there is an elevated pedestal with white tiles holding a tiled chair with a blackboard at the rear. The soberness of Gisi's costume (clad in a black costume, a white blouse, and quality white lingerie) deliberately stands in marked contrast to the artificial red fur coat and pair of high-heeled shoes of an identical colour, navy blue top, and turban of the spouse of a high-ranking Slovak official. Gisi helped her, just like she had many times before. She wrote a letter of comfort to her friends in Switzerland, which was seized from Mrs Kosová and triggered a series of arrests.

The insertion of the Old Testament story about the Jewish woman Esther from *The Book of Esther* is metaphorically intriguing; she saved her people from the king, and in the production a parallel seems to be drawn between her and the actions of the main heroine. Gisi's daughter, who gives an account of her own tragedy and her journey to becoming a cabaret singer, is transfigured onto her. However, this does not contribute to the clarity of the scene and the overall portrayal of Gisi Fleischmann on the stage.

19 Their fate was very sad. There was no mother or anyone else to look after them.

20 The author of the play confessed in public that although she had moved to Bratislava twenty years previously, she had failed to form a relationship with the city. See GRUSKOVÁ, A. List pre Gisi Fleischmannovú, písaný 22. 1. 2012 v deň jej 120. narodenín. [A letter to Gisi Fleischmann written on 22 January 2012 on her 120th birthday]. In *Anna Grusková : Rabínka* [programme booklet]. Bratislava : Slovenské národné divadlo, 2012, p. 36.

Diverse caricature elements (a national costume worn by a member of the assembly, mock-ups of sheep, and rakes) metaphorically enhance the crudeness of a nation of a German satellite state at a time of war and they also distract from the thinking and ideas of the main heroine. Gisi's glamour stands in contrast to these attributes; however, in a documentary play with a female authorial fiction, the main heroine does not appear to be a foresighted and experienced social and political worker (in the modern understanding of her task or goal) but rather a naive woman. The play has no conflicts: neither an outer conflict with society nor an inner conflict that would relate to the character of Gisi. Neither the theatrical text nor the production touched upon the "collaboration" between the Jewish community and Hitler's adviser on the Jewish Question to the Slovak government who was supposedly handing Jewish money over to Germany and arranging for the deportations to be stopped. It seems ironic that in Berlin Dieter Wisliceny, who was directly answerable to Adolf Eichmann, would be able to arrange for the extermination of the Jews, which was among the goals of Hitler's programme. The stopping of transports from Slovakia in October 1942 was due to the pragmatic reason of the trains not being used to their full capacity. Almost fifty-seven thousand Jews were deported, while a number of them were granted presidential and other exemptions which were also applicable to their family members. The Slovak Judenrat must have been informed of these facts.²¹ It is understandable that the representatives of the Slovak Judenrat tried to grab every chance for help they got. However, the current artistic adaptation ought to be based on the most recent knowledge of historians²² and on research into newspaper articles in *Slovák*, *Gardista*, and other publications. Was this bribery or a noble deed in the hope that the German adviser's authority would supersede all laws? Or was it the credulity of the Slovak Judenrat members? Neither the source text nor the production asked these questions; all they offer is a little story in the carousel of grand history.²³

21 It is likely that the headquarters in Switzerland had been informed, as funds were not sent to Slovakia in the amounts Gisi Fleischmann had requested. The stance of American Jewish organizations is also questionable, as they did not grant a visa to every applicant when the pogroms against Jewish people first took place.

22 A technical advisor to the producers, Professor Eduard Nižňanský elucidates various political connections in a study published in the production programme booklet which could have served as a source of inspiration for the author when writing the text.

23 *Rabínka* was in the repertoire for only fifteen months; its dernière took place on 13 June 2013.

Another contribution to the *Endlösung* theme was a production by Aréna Theatre in the same calendar year with the simple name *Holokaust* and the subtitle *Príbeh, na ktorý by Slovensko najradšej zabudlo* [The Holocaust: A Story Slovakia Would Be Most Happy to Forget].²⁴ Viliam Klimáček wrote it as a play tailor-made for the theatre. The point of departure for the play were the memoirs of Hilda Hrabovecká, nee Friedmannová²⁵, which were published in a book. The text goes outside the framework of the story of a young girl deported to a concentration camp. Klimáček's intention was to provide a broader picture of Slovak society prior to the war and in wartime rather than just portray the persecution of the Jews. Through individual characters, the rise of Slovak nationalism was captured and manifested in the superiority of the Catholic faith, the division of society into the superior class (Hlinka guard members), the silent and the obedient class (other citizens), and the inferior class (the Jews) through formal propaganda. Klimáček starts in the year 1929 and continues to 1939 (the establishment of the independent republic), which is followed by the period of the promulgation of anti-Jewish laws before working his way up to 1942, when the Jews were deported to concentration camps. Out of the characters' little stories (the coffeeshop owner; her daughter; her female friend; Ambróz Králik, who Aryanised the coffeeshop; the maid; the would-be wife; and others), Klimáček wove a story of the change of sociocultural relationships affecting a rather small group of the town's population against the backdrop of an increasingly anti-humane society. The plot opens with the return to Slovakia in 1991 of a daughter of emigrants, which reanimates an old story of a coffeeshop that was once Aryanized. The story continues with an immoral request by the Aryanizer's daughter for the restitution of their (Aryanized) property which had been seized by the state after the family had fled to South America once the war was over. One strand of the text portrays the transformation of once simple people into rapacious individuals who are greedy for other people's property and do not hesitate to terrorize their fellow citizens stig-

24 Viliam Klimáček. *Holokaust. Príbeh, na ktorý by Slovensko najradšej zabudlo*. Divadlo Aréna Bratislava, premiered on 12 December 2012. Direction: Rastislav Ballek, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran and Zuzana Šajgaliková, stage design and costumes: Katarína Holková.

25 The author of the book *Ruka s vytetovaným číslom* (Arm with a Tattooed Number, 2008) was in the first transport of young girls from Poprad to Auschwitz–Birkenau, where she stayed for four years. After the war was over, she returned to Slovakia. The book portrays life in a concentration camp. The book includes articles from the contemporary press and laws related to limiting the freedom of Jews.

matized by the yellow star by gradually depriving them of little joys (such as going to the cinema and listening to the radio). The other strand features fictitious contemplations over the fates of those who perished and those who survived.

Both the play and the production by Rastislav Ballek employ several characteristic period signs, the most important being the radio, which epitomizes real communication with the outer world and broadcasting as a mirror of a society under transformation. Another sign is the cinema showing Chaplin's films as a place of forgetting. A third sign is the fiction project of the first Slovak film, *Svätopluk*.²⁶ The play profusely employs authentic songs and citations from the contemporary press. To accentuate the diverse human characters, the director thoughtfully employed every costume detail and the stage, including the props, film image, and sound (radio broadcasting). The first part (strand) of the play is presented as theatre, and the second part (utterances, reminiscences) is staged as a documentary drama where some actors are seated in the auditorium and narrate their stories under the surveillance of trained German shepherds, while the audiences, watching from the stage (of history), remain silent.

All three of these productions by Slovak authors (*Tiso*, *Rabínka*, and *Holo-kaust*) are interconnected with the dramaturge Martin Kubran and the director Rastislav Ballek (twice in the director's role and once as a dramaturge). Their work on the production communicates their civic attitude. All three plays and their theatre adaptations are different, ranging from a documentary drama that employs theatrical devices to a seemingly fictitious dramatic story that employs extensive documentary material.

On a final note

In order to make this overview of productions staged within the Endlösung cycle complete, two more projects by the Drama Company of the Slovak National Theatre deserve a mention. The first of these is *Matkina guráž* [A Mother's Courage, film name: My Mother's Courage] by George Tabori, and the second one is *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy* [Der Würgeengel] by Elfriede Jelinek.

²⁶ An important ruler of the kingdom of Great Moravia in the latter half of the ninth century. The film theme may be understood as parodying the national sentiment of Slovaks, much like Králik's poetry.

Matkina guráž is an intimate autobiographical confession of a son, well-known playwright, director, and actor. It relates to the Holocaust in Hungary, where there were seven times more reported Jewish victims than in Slovakia. Tabori's play has been staged by several European theatres and has also been made into a film and published as a story. The Slovak production by director Martin Čičvák (2012)²⁷ is notable for giving the viewer two great experiences: the first one concerns the stage design of alternative theatre space, which is evocative of the Mother's household, of a transit camp, a trip by tram or train, and of a sister's flat. The central part of the stage is dominated by a swastika cross placed in a white circle in the middle which is created by two actors using tiny coloured pebbles during the opening lines. The stove standing on the right side of the stage into which the Mother puts cakes is a metaphor of the transports' terminus. The Mother's narration, interrupted by the Son's comments, is evocative of Brecht's theatre model and is a monodrama rather than a dialogue-based play. The son performs several characters, including a German official who spares her life. During her wanderings, the Mother gradually destroys the symbol of Nazism, literally smashing it into pieces. This dominant sign embodies the rise and fall of Hitler's Germany. The second staggering experience is the acting of the Mother and the Son.

In the production based on *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy* by the Austrian author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (2013)²⁸, director David Jařab staged a theatrically full-blooded portrayal of a sick Austrian-German society which decides to shoot almost two hundred Jews on an estate on the Austrian-Hungarian border for the sheer fun of it. There are several images in parallel tying into one another that take place behind glass, which even today enhances the untouchability of the characters who cannot be heard, but one perceives the monstrosity of their act in the context of their amusement.

27 George Tabori: *Matkina guráž*. Drama Company of the Slovak National Theatre Bratislava, premiered on 8 and 9 December 2012. Translation: Peter Lomnický, direction and adaptation: Martin Čičvák, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran, stage design: Tom Ciller, costumes: Marija Havran.

28 Elfriede Jelinek: *Rechnitz – Anjel skazy*. Drama Company of the Slovak National Theatre Bratislava, premiered on 8 and 9 June 2013. Translation: Peter Lomnický, direction: David Jařab, dramaturgy: Martin Kubran, stage design: David Jařab, costumes: Sylva Zimula Hanáková.

The play does not deal with the Holocaust or the systematic deprivation of Jews' rights as citizens. It is not a mere account of an event which for decades has been kept in silence and whose perpetrators have never been held responsible. It is a memento for the future of the ever-expanding multicultural societies and of the ever-growing disparities between the economic potential of various strata of society. The antisemitism of the modern era is also based on a sociocultural relationship which follows three axes: i.e., material, behavioural, and semantic.²⁹

Conclusion

The above productions capturing the Holocaust have shown that despite a period of over seventy-five years, it makes sense to revisit the events and memories of that time and even today to present a dramatic image containing generational time (the last of the survivors), family time (coming to terms with these events), and social time (a memento for the future). They have been included in social discourse about the Holocaust. Increasingly, collective trauma in the context of individual trauma is not the only thing discussed. The Holocaust on the Jewish population has become a much-debated issue of the 20th century, and over the past two decades, research on this issue is ongoing.

In the autumn of 2013, the new Muzeum historii Żydów Polskich [Museum of the History of Polish Jews] (POLIN) was commissioned in Warsaw. This unique project fulfils a unique role as an instruction and cultural centre that facilitates the broadening of knowledge of the arrival of Jewish merchants into historical Poland (including present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and partially Russia) and encompasses Central and partly Southern Europe. Roughly from 960 the co-existence and animosities concerning Christian and Jewish populations can be observed, which culminated in the 1940s in the devastating pogrom triggered by Nazi Germany.

Slovakia is prepared to accept its collective guilt, but let us not forget that there were numerous Slovak citizens who helped Jews and put the lives of their families at risk. The Radio and Television of Slovakia state broadcaster has developed and broadcast a programme entitled *Encyklopédia spravod-*

29 Cf. VAŠEČKA, M. Sociologický výskum antisemitizmu na Slovensku po roku 1989 v kritickej perspektíve. In *Sociológia*, 2006, Volume 38, Issue 4, pp. 283–311.

*livých*³⁰ [The Encyclopaedia of the Righteous], featuring the authentic testimonies of Slovaks who saved the Jews from deportation. A lot of Slovaks have been awarded the honorary title of Righteous Among the Nations by a commission in Israel; in fact, Slovakia has the highest number of awardees per capita.

It is the social, political, and especially moral responsibility of the theatre to employ the language of the theatre and raise themes that not every viewer or citizen may feel comfortable with. In terms of the Roma Holocaust, there is another huge moral imperative that awaits fulfilment by European Holocaust research and the theatre.

Translated by Mária Švecová

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30 The programme was broadcast every Sunday morning after the live broadcast of liturgical assemblies of individual churches. The programme was wound up in 2015.

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Biography:

Dagmar Podmaková is a researcher at the Institute of Theatre and Film Research of the Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. She specializes in the research of Slovak and Russian theatre. She has written monographs *Peter Kováčik – divadelný dramatik* [Peter Kováčik – Theatre Dramatist] (1998); *Divadlo v Trnave. Ako sa hľadalo* [The Quest for Trnava Theatre] (2006); *Osvaľd Zagradaňnik i ego predshevstennik: dolgaya predystorya spektaklya Solo dlya chasov s boyem* [Osvald Zahradnik and his Predecessors. The Long History of the Performance "A Solo for the Striking Clock"] (2008); and *Pribeh divadla. Divadlo, ktoré nezaniklo* [The Story of a Theatre: The Survival of a Theatre] (2009). She is a co-author of books *Slovackaya literatura XX veka* [Slovak Literature of the 20th Century] (Moscow, 2003); *Globalisation Trends in the Media* (Cambridge, 2006); *Theatre After the Change 1* (Budapest, 2011); *Hodnota zmeny – zmena hodnoty. Demarkačný rok 1989* [The Value of Change, the Change of Values: The Demarcation Year 1989] (2009); and *Gustáv Husák: Moc politiky – politik moci* [Gustáv Husák: The Power of Politics. A Politician of Power] (2013). She is also a co-author and editor of several collections of papers dedicated to acclaimed theatre directors and actors of Slovak theatre as well as more encompassing themes.

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