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## **Friedrich Schillers trip to Maputo and back**

Globalisation versus local

The modern world is undergoing a process of globalisation.

Capital, workers and other resources are on the move internationally, and markets influence the sharing of resources both in national and international economic systems.

Some believe that "the information age" creates a basic tension between global "networks" and local cultures, and between transnational and national "identities" and the self. Personal relations between individuals seem to be in concurrency with the power of an international competitive system, which appreciates commercial efficiency. Values like solidarity, caring for others seem to be outdated.

The structural rationality of the system threatens the communicative rationality of the world of experience and human interactivity. With these sometimes conflicting phenomena we are all very often confronted in our daily work.

Theatre and performance are struggling as well with questions of globalisation to a wide extent today.

On one hand they want to share knowledge about contemporary performance practices across a world spectrum and they are aiming to develop a complex theoretical grasp of the relationship between performance and culture in a rapidly changing climate of globalisation and transnational mobility.

But on the other hand theatre and performance, however, meet their audiences in time and space, and exist in that communicative event. The world of experience and human interactivity cannot easily be overshadowed by global "networks" or commercial systems. Therefore theatre and performance because of their locality have become globally more important than ever. They are very much needed in this contradictory field of global and local.

At the same time, the situation stimulates the creation of new aesthetic categories, which might adequately describe the tendency towards multi-medialization and hybridity.

How is the theatre responding to this challenge of situation itself between the global and the local?

What does “global”, “transnational”, or “international” signify when coupled with the performance or performance context?

## **Going transnational and back**

We wanted to make a journey, wanted to explore this field of global and/or local. And we wanted to take a classic poet on our trip. In order to place literature and theatre in it's proper milieu either as part or as a rejection of a social order it is essential to understand what is called the culture of a particular country.... Was that our only approach?

The intercultural theatre project I want to talk about goes far back in history and in biographies. Mozambique is „my“ country already for many years. I researched there, I wrote my thesis there, I was and am linked with the cultural life of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. And I am very glad when I can help with my contacts and networks when Austrian colleagues travel in this country.

Stephan Bruckmeier, at that time director of a very open and successful festival and theatre director himself approached me one day for contacts in Maputo. I told him about Teatro Avenida and its director Manuela Soeiro. He went to Maputo and to the theatre and fell in love with everything, the theatre, the people, the town. That is not astonishing to me. Maputo is a place one can immediately fall in love with – with its friendly and open atmosphere at the sea, many cafes and galleries, beautiful architectures sometimes between ruins, and its colourful cultural life.

And in this rather uplifting situation where people find new possibilities after a long time of war and suffering the Austrian director found his own perception of „Sturm und Drang“, the famous German literary movement of the late 18th century. The origins of this movement lie in the opposition to a society when the philosophical and literary scenery of the German-speaking Central Europe was dominated by the Enlightenment's ideas. Young and revolutionary writers exalted nature, feeling, and human individualism and sought to overthrow the Enlightenment cult of Rationalism.

Why not seeing this in Maputo – after a war, after a long time of ideological thinking that the society is more important than the individual one could find this very individualistic thinking in the air, in a country full of new chances.

But – is it possible to go with an European classic to Africa? Is it possible to find a link? Is it possible to find an intercultural dialogue in a situation where the heritage of colonialism is still alive?

## **Looking for the missing link**

Schiller is considered to be Germany's most important classical playwright. Critics have noted his innovative use of dramatic structure and his creation of new forms. „The Robbers“, his first play and the one we wanted to stage in Maputo, is considered by some to be the first European melodrama.

The play pits two brothers against each other in alternating scenes as one quests for money and power, while the other attempts to create a revolutionary anarchy in the Bohemian Forest. The play strongly critiques the hypocrisy of class and religion, the economic inequities of German society, and conducts a complicated inquiry into the nature of evil. The language of „The Robbers“ is highly emotional and the depiction of physical violence in the play marks it as a quintessential work of Germany's Sturm und Drang movement. The play was a scandal, the writer had to flee the country after the first performance.

Lets look at the topics – quest for money and power, economic inequities, revolutionary dreams of taking from the rich and giving to the poor – how can players in an intercultural dialogue deal with this topics and the values behind.

On a very general level we decided to open ourselves and the play towards an intercultural approach.

The purpose of this approach was first to dissolve the boundaries of areas of knowledge and encourage learning across borders, second to develop a plan to see the areas for integration and develop thematic units and third to find a way to transfer knowledge and start a creative process.

It needs two partners who trust each other and know each other to a certain extent so that this approach can work.

In our case the partners were Teatro Avenida, the actors, Manuela Soeiro, the director of the theatre and Mia Couto, the countries best known writer who has a long working relationship with the theatre. Teatro Avenida is the country's only professional theatre group. Its actors and actresses are well known, play in cinema and TV and have a high professional quality. They are used to play abroad and used to work with

directors from foreign countries. But on the other hand they are deeply rooted in the theatrical tradition of the country.

## **People' theatre versus classical theatre**

Theatre is an important part of Mozambican life, theatre is important within the society for many reasons. In a country where still many people are illiterate theatre has an important function for educating people, for informing people – campaigns for democratic elections or for raising the awareness of people against landmines or Aids could not be successful without theatre groups going to villages and performing there.

This means that Mozambican theatre is in the tradition of a popular theatre showing the people with their habitat, with all their contradictions and multifarious activities. It gives a glimpse of their style of speech, music, dance, dress, behaviour, humour, proverbs, wit and wisdom. It contains a rich store of mythological heroes, romances and tales, social customs, beliefs and legends – is that what today's melodramas show as well?

Mozambique is a country with many poets too. In the time of national liberation many people turned to poetry to express their feeling and urge others to join their struggle.

After independence there was a vivid cultural life with poetry reading in huge parks and theatre, dance and songs in factories and working places. Therefore one finds rather productive and internationally known writers. And one of them is since many years linked with the theatre.

Mia Couto was born in 1955 in Mozambique and is the most prominent writer in Portuguese-speaking Africa. He has studied biology and has been active as a journalist. He lives in Maputo where he works still as an environmental biologist and as a writer.

Couto has begun developing a new literary language based in the African oral tradition and on African transformations of spoken Portuguese. In Mozambique, he is thought to have successfully integrated into his prose the transition of Portuguese from the official language to the kind of flexible medium in which speakers of other languages might find themselves at ease. Another dimension of Couto's originality is the "peculiar blend of fantasy and reality" which runs through all his fiction, "straddling the dividing line between reality and fantasy". Here his work as a biologist comes into his literary perception. He is full

of stories of the villagers of mythological version of plant and animals and natural occurrences.

Before we came to Maputo everybody involved in the production had the original play of Schiller – a long play in a highly emotional language. We arrived with a short version with only twelve scenes – Schiller light so to say.

### **Another view – postcolonial versus subaltern**

And then the work began: with improvisation and first possible stories, with connecting the country's history with Schiller. And this connection became the important red thread.

Many Mozambicans had worked and studied in the Ex-GDR during the time of socialism and came back with dreams mostly shattered.

The team – directors and actresses and actors and the writer – coming from very different backgrounds and countries and cultures – created together a story and the story grew everyday.

New experiences and new views mixed with knowledge about history and biographies of the so called Madjermanes, more than 20.000

Mozambican coming back from Germany. This common history began in 1979 shortly after independence and ended in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin wall.

After coming back from working for only half of the salaries the value of the other half of the promised money was worth nothing due to different systems of currency and high inflation rates.

Still in the year 2004 when we started to work on our production enraged Madjermanes occupied the German embassy in Maputo.

But the experience of so many students and workers in a highly developed country meant something more as well: new approaches to modernity and a gain in practical knowledge.

The story grew and grew – sometimes the writer went back home with improvised scenes and came back the other day with new dialogues.

Sometimes we – the director - were writing stories in the evening,

translating it into Portuguese next day and rehearsing them already –

there was a constant flow of ideas and languages – mainly German and Portuguese but as well English the language we all could communicate

with. Our team from Austria and Mozambique was joined by a

Zimbabwean painter and stage designer and a South African costume

designer – 6 women and 7 men, from African origin or mixed ancestors

from Asia, Europe and Africa to Europeans we were a really international team.

And this team eager to learn from each other created a story with German princes and princesses played by a Mozambican theatre group. Theatre arrived in a backward village where reality and dreams and fears intermingled. Love for theatre and the power of literature got a distinct African face with the appearing of the spirit of Schiller during the rehearsals.

I have to admit that my contribution is not so much of a very scientific approach of problems and solution in carrying out international cultural projects, but it is definitely a best practice approach, showing that such a crazy project is possible. And why??

### **Structural rationality versus Intercultural dialogue and teamwork?**

Coming back to one thesis of the beginning: globalisation of the structural rationality of the system is threatening the communicative rationality.

As a point of departure we can use this and find a way to get over it: restructuring the communication in such a way that we will be able to do justice to what is going on in the different art scenes as well as to the aesthetization of culture in general. We thought that it makes more sense to proceed from the idea of a dynamic field of art – quite naturally embedded in and entangled with other dynamic cultural fields – where various processes of differentiation exist.

Such differentiations allow the structures or elements constituting the field to be open to a permanent re-grouping resulting in new and changing constellations. Such processes may result in what is traditionally regarded as a particular art form of one country or as a special combination and mixture.

The long-term goal is the creation of a new approach, of new experiences which refer to different types of Interart phenomena and which cannot be grasped by a single country.

From this approach it follows that what we need today are new theories and methodologies that are not restricted to one particular form or idea.

Let me repeat the development in the last decades: two tendencies are to be observed: on the one hand a still growing tendency towards an annulment, a dissolution of the boundaries between different art forms, as brought about by performativity, hybridization, multimedia; on the other hand, we have observed an aesthetization and theatricalization of other cultural fields, including politics, economy, the media, sports,

everyday life, that tends to abolish the boundary between art and non-art.

But these theories are very much centered on an European discourse. In other cultures, on other continents these boundaries either never existed or were regarded much less important. To learn this from an international cultural project is a lot. And I warn you it is like a fever once experiencing this especially vibrant atmosphere makes you wanting more and more.