

PRESS RELEASE

Zokwezo

by **JULIEN MABIALA BISSILA**

inspired by « A Particular Day » by Ettore Scola



© Ester Paredes

Creation Company Apsara
Geneva - Switzerland

First period rehearsals in Benin in January 2016

Performances at the Institut Français in Cotonou January 20-21st, 2016

Performance at the Institut Français in Parakou le 24th January, 2016

Creation at the Théâtre du Galpon in Geneva (Switzerland) – March 29th until April 10th, 2016

Duration: 1h05

Starring

Conception **Silvia Barreiros**

Author **Julien Mabilia Bissila**

Director **Andrea Novicov**

Set and lighting design **Michel Faure**

Video **Benjamin Ephise**

Sound directors **Ondina Duany and Luis Aballe**

Actors **Silvia Barreiros, Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, Bardol Migan**

Costumes **Corina Pia**

Make-up **Arnaud Buchs**

Poster **Esther Paredes**

Administration **Sylvia Amey**

Two destinies intersect.

A woman. A man.

Up to this point, it's simple, albeit always complex.

She is white.

He is black.

Despite the fact that times are changing, everything seems to be impossible between them.

Maybe that's because we are in Africa.

Each character is shut up in their apartment, taking refuge in their own solitude. The woman owns hers, the man doesn't.

The rest of the building is deserted today, except for an overly curious caretaker who does endless rounds.

The large city surrounding the building is celebrating the investiture of its emperor in the eyes of the international community and its thousands of expats...

Everyone is at the parade, except for Delphine and Boullass.

She hasn't got the heart to party.

Neither has he.

This fortuitous encounter will upset everything.

Lui non plus. Une rencontre fortuite qui va tout bouleverser.

PRESENTATION

Conception

Silvia Barreiros – director of the Company Apsara - met Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, an actor from Benin, at the Béjaïa International Theatre Festival in 2013. Following this encounter, she had the idea to draw inspiration from the Ettore Scola film *A special day*.

According to her, setting this creation in Africa and attributing the roles of Boullass (Gabriele in Scola's film) and the caretaker to African actors provides a whole new reading to this cinematographic monument.

“Most of all it was essential that the encounter between Swiss participants and those from Benin happen on African soil, so that we could discover them – on social, human and artistic planes – just as Delphine, a Swiss woman expatriated to Africa, does in the play. This is **why a first phase of work took place at the French Institute in Cotonou**, who kindly made a space available to us. We rehearsed there, then we gave two performances in Cotonou and in Parakou. A second creative phase took place in Switzerland, before the **opening on March 29th 2016 at the Galpon Theatre, in Geneva.**”

The story of the meeting of two solitudes...

“One always ends up conforming to other people's mentality... even when they are wrong”

“It's the worst thing: that you try to appear differently from what you are... that they force you to be ashamed of yourself”

(Excerpt from dialogues in the film *A Special Day*)

Zokwezo is situated in the context of an imaginary totalitarian régime.

Delphine is a housewife, who is neglected by an unfaithful husband. Mother to four children, now grown up, she is now all alone.

Boullass has no family. Homosexual, a hacker, a dissident activist, he has to keep changing homes to escape law enforcers.

They would never have met if all their neighbours hadn't been away attending celebrations for the anniversary of the independence of the Nation.

By taking this military parade day as its framework, the play rings a warning bell: progress in matters of equality in our post world war 2 societies is being questioned by conservative and populist movements.

Despite some achievements, the road towards full equality is still long. Reactionary forces, whose voices have recently been heard in France during demonstrations against the “marriage for all” law, are still legion.

Zokwezo provides a formidable response to those who still cultivate a certain nostalgia towards an era when women stayed at home and homosexuals remained hidden.

This work depicts the unlikely and magnificent encounter of two people that everything seems to keep apart.

The nature of the relationship created between Boullass and Delphine is complex and powerful. Their path towards each other is both necessary and ambivalent. It is a spontaneous and “physical” inner path - the path of sensuality which, for a moment in time, will allow them to hope and to forget, in turn. All of this demands the full relinquishment of the actors.

Author's note

“To draw my inspiration from an Ettore Scola film to bring it to the theatre in a contemporary version was a real challenge. I felt like I was facing a masterpiece of painting, untouchable and inalterable. To adopt it, I couldn't make it mine or paraphrase it. I wanted to understand the process, the poetry, the sensuality, the genius of Scola. I had to find the paths to be able to navigate throughout the geography of his writing before I could set down my own words, whilst still retaining his cinematographic tempo.

Cinema, with the strength of images, can make us read what has not been written. We manage to find words in our imagination. However, the theatre, foremost, is language, words and poetry. Theatre is talkative, it likes to juggle, be musical. I had a wild urge to revive this story about loneliness and pressures with colour drawn from language, words and expressions. I wanted the African presence to be felt by way of sayings and riddles...

The importance of art is to search, not to find, which is why the play poses more questions than it provides answers.

In **Zokwezo**, the story takes place in one of the Africas... somewhere between present and future. If the initial work, *A special day*, had the era of fascism in Italy as its backdrop, it is also marked by an important event. I wanted to revisit African dictatorships, among which that of the Central African Republic is the most poetically awful, with the investiture of the first African emperor. Funny and pathetic, this coronation and all its decorum reveal a politic of horror in its most cruel splendour. In this political drama, it is the motto of the Central African Republic which caught my attention – **Zokwezo**, which means **“Every human being is a person”** or **“Every man is worth another”**. This title evokes universal tolerance in a shattered world.

Zokwezo talks about solitudes imposed by dictatorship. Two completely different solitudes with only one point in common: the absence of freedom. The first solitude, Delphine's, is an inner solitude, born of self-sacrifice. The second solitude, Boulass's, is an outcast's loneliness but also that of a fighter. He hungers to reach out to others. When these two solitudes collide, what is the result? Does their difference make or break the situation? What does it mean to live under a political, marital or social dictatorship, be it today or tomorrow? What does being alone mean? Homosexuality, difference, the perception of others: these are the bedrock of this silent combat.”

Julien Mabilia Bissila

Director's note

“The relationships between cinema and theatre have always fascinated me and, in the course of my career, I have had a number of opportunities to explore this attraction.

Theatre was there before cinema arrived. It told stories with its “poor” tools. You almost had to shout to be heard. It took ages to do set changes. You had to reproduce the same thing every evening. And no trace of any of this survived. It was all fragile, but so exciting. You could feel the fear and the adrenalin, you could see the saliva and the sweat of the actors. And this, in a venue full of people, smells and heat! Cinema is cleaner. When the film appears on screen, production problems have been overcome, filtered out, or even forgotten. Cinema is powerful: no down-time between set changes. You can hear the actors properly, even when the music is turned up. And you can see the film again dozens of times, sprawled in an armchair at home.

Why come back to the theatre? Because it is the birthplace of narration, where everything started: lying on the bed in the evening, with shadows created by the table-lamp and our mother's voice, telling us a story. Nothing can replace the surprise and the emotion of seeing princesses and wolves appear in our own bedroom, by the simple act of speech. Nothing will make us forget the moment when we understood that there was daytime reality, and “another” reality which is mysterious and elusive, concrete and volatile, fragile and powerful. Theatre is very close to what we feel when we are alive.

Why bring cinema to the theatre? Because some of its instruments can help us tell a better story today. We can create images with speech and then, suddenly, surprise the audience with a projected image, to then go back to titillate the imagination with a gesture and another word. We can borrow cinema editing techniques to refine our ability to go from a noisy battle to intimate whispering in a bedroom. We can get microphones to help us multiply the evocation effects of words. And, finally, because I like to imagine the relationship between Africa and the Western World as similar to the relationship between theatre and cinema. On the one hand, minimum means and maximum humanity, on the other, an excess of technical means and suffocating solitude.

It is with happiness that I await the moment when we will manage to get these two worlds to live together – theatre and cinema – and to invite, thanks to the show, Africa and the Western World to do the same.”

Andrea Novicov

Curriculum Vitae

The author

Julien Mabilia Bissila

Author, storyteller, actor and director



Born on August 30th 1976 in Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo.

- **Prize at the 2011 drama writers Journées de Lyon** for “*Au nom du père et du fils et de J.M. Weston*” (*In the name of the father, the son, and J.M. Weston*)
- **RFI-Theatre prize in 2014** for “*Chemin de fer*” (*Railroad*)

Julien Mabilia Bissila followed a drama course which was interrupted in 1997 due to civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

From 1999 onwards, he devoted himself to the theatre and took part in a number of productions with the Théâtre des Tropiques and the Saka-Saka Theatre.

In 2002, he created the Nguiri-Nguiri Theatre Company, with which he is often invited to African stages and festivals. He directed his own works **Le Musée de la honte** (*The museum of shame*), **La dernière chance** (*The last chance*), and some texts by Emmanuel Dongala adapted for the stage.

In 2005, for the *Écritures d’Afrique* programme, he was welcomed by the Vieux-Colombier Theatre. In 2009 he took to the stage at the Bernardines Theatre in Marseilles for a production by Eva Doumbia of a work signed by Aristide Tarnagda: *On ne payera pas l’oxygène* (*We won’t pay for oxygen*).

In 2010, Eva Doumbia held a first reading of his play **Crabe rouge** (*Red crab*) in Marseilles. The text was later read in Paris at the Rond-Point theatre, in Limoges as part of the *Nouvelles Zébrures 2010*, and in Montreal at the *Dramaturgie en Dialogue* festival. The play was then produced in Germany by the Town Theatre of Saarbrücken.

His work ***Au nom du père et du fils et de J.M. Weston*** was read at the Avignon festival in 2013, in collaboration with RFI and France Culture radios.

In the autumn of 2013, Julian Mabilia Bissila was invited to the *30èmes Francophonies en Limousin*, with a production of **Crabe rouge**, which he directed himself, and a production of **Imagine**, written to order for the *Cahier d’histoires #3* project and directed by Philippe Delaigue.

In January 2014, ***La première chose que je peux vous dire...*** (*The first thing I can tell you...*) was published in the first issue of the magazine *La Marelle*.

Le metteur en scène

Andrea Novicov

Actor, director, scriptwriter and producer



Born in Canada in 1958, his father of Russian origin and his mother of Swiss-Italian origin, met in Argentina. Following his parents' travels, **Andrea Novicov** has lived in Argentina, Canada, Italy, and finally in Ticino (Switzerland) where he enrolled at the Dimitri Theatre School.

He pursued his training in Lisbon (*A Comuna* theatre school), then in Milan with Dominic de Fazio (Acting Director of *Actor's Studio*).

In Italy and Switzerland, **Andrea Novicov** has performed on stage, but also for cinema and television. He first directed in Italy, where he also worked as a scriptwriter for cinema (for S. Soldini in particular).

Living in the French part of Switzerland since 1994, **Andrea Novicov** created the Angledange Company (Angledange.ch). His work with this company is notable for being eclectic: classical and contemporary texts, montages, work defined by the actor's play, aesthetic research playing with different forms of artistic expression (poetry, painting, music, video).

Andrea Novicov has also been teaching drama, in particular at the *Accademia d'Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi* in Milan and at the *Manufacture* (Higher Drama School of French Switzerland).

In 2009, he was named Artistic Director of *Arc en Scènes*, a centre for performing arts (which used to be the Théâtre Populaire Romand & L'Heure bleue) at La Chaux-de-Fonds near Neuchâtel, where he was responsible for creation, programming, distribution and training until July 2013.

The works of Andrea Novicov often tour in Switzerland and abroad. His theatre explores new forms and new languages, visits and interrogates society, whilst always highlighting the collective aspects of production.

Sound and musical director

Ondina Duany

Musician, singer and musical pedagogue

Born in 1968 in Camagüey, Cuba.

Ondina Duany obtained a B.A. in musical education at the Instituto Pedagógico Enrique José Varona in Havana and later taught at this institute. At the same time, she joined the *Popular Soneras Son y Quasi-Jazz* band as a percussionist.

Since her arrival in Geneva in 1998, she has taken part in a number of musical projects with the *Santas Raices* band, the Compagnie Spirale and the Théâtre de l'Épiderme.

She has been musical director for the Apsara Theatre Company since 2002.

She also belongs to a number of Swiss salsa bands (Batambo, Melao, Julio D'Santiago y las 7 potencias, Limon y menta, Color café, Aqua potable, etc.) in which she sings and plays minor percussion.

In 2010 she played on the Ella Fitzgerald stage in the Parc Lagrange, Geneva, with Batambo and Pepito Gomez.

In 2015 she realised her first CD "Pimienta Negra" with her group Vocla Iroko. She signed the musical arrangements with Arlety Valdès (Cuba).

Set design and lighting

Michel Faure

Set designer, lighting technician and director, Michel Faure was born in Geneva.

After a number of years dedicated to painting, for the last thirty years he has worked for independent dance and theatre, mostly in Geneva and Africa. He has been collaborating with Le Théâtre des Intrigants in Kinshasa for twenty years.

To date, he has participated in the creation of over one hundred and fifty shows. With two other companies, he manages the Théâtre et le Grand Café de la Parfumerie in Geneva. He also teaches set design and lighting.

The directors with whom he has recently worked are Oskar Gomez Mata, Evelyne Catellino, Serge Martin, Patrick Mohr, Francine Wohlrich and Eveline Murenbeeld.

Video conception

Benjamin Ephise

Graphic designer and images-video designer. He was born in 1982 in Evian.

Having trained as a graphic designer as well as in varied aspects of performance techniques, Benjamin Ephise now focuses mainly on animated images and video.

His work is marked by a desire to put new digital technologies and projection techniques to use in contemporary art and the performing arts. This desire has taken shape through audiovisual performances, installations and set designs. Recognised for his technical competence and his artistic creativity, Benjamin Ephise regularly works with many artists in the worlds of theatre, opera, circus and contemporary art.

Acting

Silvia Barreiros

Author, actor, director



Born in Montreux in 1964 to Spanish parents, Silvia Barreiros holds a diploma from the Serge Martin Theatre School (Geneva).

For ten years, she pursued her career in Spain, Italy, France and India, collaborating in particular with company directors **Gabriel Alvarez**, **Walter Pfaff**, **Renzo Vescovo** and, in Switzerland, **Jacques Gardel**.

As her career unfolded, she decided to develop corporal and vocal work in the theatrical direction of Meyerhold, Grotowski and Barba, drawing inspiration from Indian dances but also from the Flamenco of her roots.

Patrick Mohr, **Pierre Rosat**, **Agnès Boulmer**, **Miguel V. Fernandez**, **Stephan Parent**, **Roberto Salomon**, **Christine Aebi** and **Patrick Brunet** are some of the directors she has acted for over the last ten years, without forgetting the **Rêves en Stock** productions. She was also assistant director for two of **Thierry Piguet**'s shows.

In 2001 she created the Apsara theatre company in Geneva, taking on not only the conceptual design but also acting and sometimes scriptwriting. In particular, she was the author of **Dolores... en La Majeur** in 2002, and **Medea in Spain** in 2005. She also wrote a number of scripts for **Meurtres et Mystères**, some of which she directed. In this series, she wrote and directed **Secrets d'Alcôve à Oron** in 2013. Outside of Switzerland, her shows have toured a large number of countries, including Brazil, Cuba, Tunisia, Morocco, El Salvador, Senegal, Israel, Lebanon, Peru and Bolivia.

She has taken part in productions for RTS (French-speaking Swiss television), in radio shows and in two feature-length films: **Jonas et Lila, à demain** by **Alain Tanner** and **La Mémoire des Autres** by **Pilar Anguita-MacKay** with Julie Depardieu and Marie-José Croze.

Finally, she directed for the first time with **Romance en Fa** by **Sophie Arthur** and **Sylvie Audcoeur** at the Maison Chauvet-Lullin in Vernier, Geneva, in 2011.

Nicolas de Dravo Houénou

Actor, storyteller, choreographer and director

Born in 1967 in Godomey, Benin.



Nicolas de Dravo Houénou is a very well-known artist in Africa. He was recently appointed assistant director at the Cotonou National Theatre.

He has militated within a number of companies in Benin and Africa. He has worked with great directors, both national and international. He has participated in a number of workshops, training programmes and productions in Benin and throughout the world.

He is director of the Gueli company, which specialises in theatre, storytelling and dance. In 2012 he created the Les Diseurs de Vérité company, which has represented Benin at a number of international meets.

His experience makes him one of the most accomplished actors from Benin. He says: “we must break down barriers and go beyond to learn about and better understand life. To give and to receive make us whole people”.

Bardol Migan

Actor, storyteller

Born in 1985 in Benin.



He obtained a diploma from the Higher School of Professions in Art and Culture.

His presence and his talent granted him admission to the Benin National Theatre, where he attended in 2015 and 2016.

With his protean and independent talent, his career path as an actor has enabled him to work with the most popular directors in Africa, Tola Koukoui, Isidore Dokpa, Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, Patrice Toton, Dine Allogbine, and Bruno Thircuir amongst others.

The Company Apsara

Apsara Theatre Company was created in Geneva in 2001 by Silvia Barreiros. She likes to tell us stories of and about women, within a precise social context. She uses drama, dance, and live music, finding creative inspiration in cross-cultural diversity.

Creations

- Her first original work "Dolores... En La Majeur" ("Dolores... in La Major") portrayed a cabaret dancer from the Charleston era in Madrid and Havana, faced with "love and art". The first production took place at the Théâtre du Galpon in Geneva in 2002 (May 17 – May 31), and was followed by tours of Cuba and Switzerland in 2003, a tour of Brazil in 2005 and of El Salvador in 2007.
- Her second work, "Medea in Spain", performed at Geneva's Théâtre Pitoëff from November 25th until December 18 2005, brings back to life the myth of Medea: transposed into the present era, she confronts her women's identity and the idea of marriage. This "modern savage" is no different from today's women who submit to their fate in silence until anger and madness resulting from physical and mental pain compel them to seek freedom, to find their own identity, by committing the irreversible act of infanticide. This production casts two actresses, a kathak dancer, a flamenco dancer and flamenco musicians.
- Her third creation, « Les Papiers de l'Amour », in 2009 at the Pitoëff Theatre in Geneva, covers the topic of mixed marriages in Switzerland when a Swiss Jew is confronted with the love she feels for a Palestinian. Everything appears to go against them; however, they manage to overcome their cultural and religious differences in the name of a love which recognizes neither borders nor paperwork. Tour in 2012 in Tunisia, Morocco and Senegal. In 2013 in Israel and Lebanon. In 2014 in the British Columbia, Atlanta (USA) and Canada.
- Her fourth creation "Mermaids's Season", in 2013 at the Galpon Theatre in Geneva, puts on stage two sisters who are passionate about song and dance. They make a flamboyant if somewhat outdated duo – *The Caribbean Mermaids*. "Le Temps des Sirènes" is a tragi-comic huis clos which reflects everyday difficulties: the perpetual anxiety to escape the traps of female immigration, a universe where the "cabaret artist's" contract – an open door to prostitution – is never far away. Because nobody emigrates with total impunity. Especially not a woman. Tour in Switzerland, Cuba, Algeria and France in 2013 and Peru and Bolivia in 2014.

More d'information: Apsaras.ch/Zokwezo

Swiss press

« Zokwezo » : an African nod towards Ettore Scola

There are two of them, like in “A Special Day”, alone (almost) in a deserted building.

After Cotonou – the capital of Benin – Geneva is hosting the show “Zokwezo”. Three actors take part on the stage of the Galpon Theatre. Take the characters from Ettore Scola’s film “A Special Day”, transpose their encounter to an African town, give both main roles to a European (Silvia Barreiros) and an African (Bardol Migan) and you will get this moment of intercontinental theatre signed Julien Mabilia Bissila for the text and directed by Andrea Novicov. *Zokwezo*, which means “every human being is a person”. And every person is different from what we believe them to be. Thus, the abandoned housewife, white expat in Africa, has ideas about her black single neighbour. She goes from one surprise to the next as she discovers his true personality. As in the Italian film, Delphine and Boullass meet in their apartment building which is otherwise empty due to a popular jubilee. Cinema *oblige*, the set design uses a skilful and suggestive visual support which allows the text to focus on the essentials. The actors embrace this with ardour, Bardol Migan in a poetical language which is not without charm and Silvia Barreiros in a straighter, more European register with which she shows the makings of a Swiss Girardot. A second Beninese actor, Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, steps in in a downright comical fashion as the troublemaking caretaker.

Tribune de Genève, Geneva

Tuesday 5th April 2016

Benjamin Chaix

The pained-hearts rumba

Produced at the Galpon Theatre in Geneva as part of the Migrations festival, “Zokwezo” by Julien Mabilia Bissila tackles the subject of homosexuality in Africa.

One of the virtues of the arts is to allow surprising associations which turn out to be fruitful. The play “Zokwezo” by Congolese author Julien Mabilia Bissila, on stage at the Galpon Theatre in Geneva at the moment as part of the Migrations festival, gives us the opportunity to see that matters of homosexuality in Europe and of independence in Africa are similar: in both cases, we are a long way from acceptance, and even further from establishment.

With the notable exception of Switzerland, who took the step in 1942, we had to wait until 1976 in the United Kingdom for homosexuality to be decriminalized; 1969 for Germany; and in France until the first term of presidency of François Mitterrand. At the same time, in the early sixties, a large proportion of French colonies in Africa were taking steps towards independence after centuries of evangelisation and plundering. As we well know, a little over fifty years later, the independence of the old colonies is far from complete. But in the meantime, on the road to modernity, the emancipation of the peoples seems to have been superseded by individual rights. In this case, the public display of homosexuality, even if it dates of yesterday, is one of the markers that allow Western Europe to situate itself in the centre of the world and have a yardstick against which to measure progress elsewhere. So, inevitably, one can detect the spirit of a young modern missionary in the latest project by Geneva-based actress Silvia Barreiros, who had the idea to transpose Ettore Scola’s “A Special Day” (1977) to Africa.

Two lonely souls

In an undefined country, which could be Bokassa’s Central African Republic, a president is celebrating his coronation as emperor with great fanfare. The whole town is taking part, except for one man and one woman who have chosen to stay at home. Boullass (Bardol Migan) is an ex-computer technician who has been marginalized since he was designated a homosexual by the authorities.

Delphine (Silvia Barreiros) is the wife of an expat. Is he an NGO worker? Or the manager of a multinational? We don’t know – western expats are not the play’s subject matter. She followed her husband to Africa where his work called him. He neglects her in favour of a younger woman. During

this unusual day, our two characters haunt their empty building. They are elsewhere, out of time, alone. They meet, sometimes at his place, sometimes at hers, whilst trying not to draw the attention of the building's caretaker (Nicolas de Dravo Houénou).

It is Silvia Barreiros who commissioned the work from Julien Mabilia Bissila. She also dragged two actors from the Benin-based company Les Diseurs de Vérité into the adventure, and took on Geneva-based director Andrea Novicov. Mabilia Bissila has a sense of monologue which admirably translates inner torments: he carefully deflects the meaning of certain words to open up their horizon; he keeps in store some masterful tirades which Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, a real ferret, delivers with comical bravery and virtuosity.

In the role of Boullass, young Bardol Migan plays with words and his own body to articulate his distress. Their expressivity partly makes up for stage directions that are rather economic in movement, where most of the rhythm is provided by a stream of images projected onto a screen which serves as a backdrop. The budget is obviously tight, but the message gets across.

Here and there

In Benin, where the play was performed as a work-in-progress in the chic setting of the French Institute, the idea was to be provocative. Homosexuality is a topic which "does not exist", as Silvia Barreiros and her director Andrea Novicov like to emphasise.

It is however noteworthy that one of the local online media (229culture.com), giving an uncensored account of the show, dared to ask a question which is far from pure form: "Should we, with zealous human rights defenders, bring a society to accept what they may perceive to be a flaw?" The debate is therefore open, both here and there.

Le Courier, Geneva

March 31st 2016

Jorge Gajardo

A social satire with a humorous background

The theatre show called “Zokwezo” devised by “Les diseurs de vérité” (“the truth tellers”) from Benin and “Apsara Cie” from Switzerland had its grand opening on Thursday January 21st 2016 at the French Institute in Cotonou. It is a drama which takes dark social facts and bathes them in humour.

Three actors took to the stage on a virtual set projected onto a giant screen: Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, Bardol Migan and Silvia Barreiros. As the curtain went up, a military parade bringing the colonial era wonderfully to mind was screened. Bardol Migan and Silvia Barreiros appeared respectively as the characters Boulass and Delphine, under the light of night. “Oh! What was I saying? The president here is going to proclaim himself emperor. The country is in the hands of a dictatorship and poverty which are rigged” says Delphine, from the onset of the plot. This cue beautifully presents the tyranny to be found under a full presidential regime – a mark of the everyday lives of African peoples, where one encounters harrowing situations which at times leave victims in their wake. Especially when you know that under a dictatorship, the governors do not stop at tormenting their subjects, they mix in the phenomena of the neglected, of unemployment, of chronic poverty and all its corollaries. Fashioned as a domestic scene, the show “Zokwezo” not only denounces bad governance but also revokes the scourge arising from cohabitations. Especially when there are homes where the husband often goes on business trips and leaves his wife behind – and next door a young idle single man is bored of living alone but is quick to get excited. “Lucky the next door neighbour showed up, or else this death would have taken me... good-bye... no, don’t go, I often lack in manners. My mother says that you don’t leave a stranger with a dry throat, let me get you some water” mumbles Boulass, in one of his lines to try and detain Delphine (Silvia Barreiros), whose beautiful and shapely figure clad in night clothes he has just seen. Thus, from computer repair to power failure by way of other arguments, the irreparable occurs. The other person’s wife and the young unattached man discover each other’s talents and qualities. Fortunately the watchful eye of the caretaker character (Nicolas de Dravo Houénou) is there to pass judgment, as any neighbour in on the secret would. “Zokwezo” is the cymbal of social horrors.

Matin Libre, Benin Daily

Monday 25th January 2016

Teddy GANDIGBE

Opening of the show « Zokwezo » at Cotonou : An insidious defence of homosexuality

Zokwezo is a play for three characters: Bardol Migan plays the role of Boulass, a young African, the Swiss Silvia Barreiros plays Delphine, a white woman neglected by her plane-hopping husband, and Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, another actor from Benin, plays the role of the impertinent caretaker.

Brave declaration

Over sixty minutes of short scenes plunged the audience into a reality like an opera would. The plotlines go by, but no longer resemble each other. Boulass, tormented by his past as a victim of sexual abuse, and Delphine, neglected, with her coloured-woman looks but still inaccessible to a black man on heat, find that they have a natural and mutual attraction to each other. But they are both mired in distrust and neither is brave enough to cross the Rubicon to the final falling point. The meddling of a gossip-loving caretaker will render Delphine beside herself. At that moment, Boulass makes a surprise declaration: “I am a man who looks at women with the eyes of women. I am a homosexual” he says to Delphine. The latter lacks in masculine warmth and thinks about Boulass, who will finally be only a passing fancy. The two neighbours hold on. Hence the title “Zokwezo: every human being is a person”. This is the message from the trio of actors who teach each and every human being. The scene is fuelled by the cheers of the audience until the curtain falls.

A barely perceptible difficult lesson

The play Zokwezo, far from lecturing a certain class of African society, highlights a taboo subject which is eating it from the inside like a cancer. Even if the authorities do not recognise the veracity of the phenomenon of homosexuality, it does exist in our country. They can be found in nightclubs or on beaches. Fervent defenders of human rights are needed to bring a society to accept what they may perceive as a flaw. The next performance of Zokwezo will be on the 27th of January 2016 at Parakou.

Bénin Monde Infos

Tuesday 26th January 2016

Stéphane Alla

After the Cotonou leg : Parakou hosts the play « Zokwezo »

The plot which recounts a whole life situation with, at its heart, a harrowing denunciation of the vices and deviations of society was reproduced in the Kobourou city on Wednesday January 27th 2016. The same actors who were on stage in Cotonou, viz Bardol Migan, Silvia Barreiros and Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, arrived on stage in front of a warm and enthusiastic audience. In the roles, respectively, of Boullass, Delphine and the caretaker, the actors displayed their genius with humour, monologues, asides and other tricks of the drama trade. The show attracted an impressive crowd, demonstrating that the collaboration between the Benin company “Les diseurs de vérité” (“The truth tellers”) and “Apsara Cie” from Switzerland was a success. From the phenomenon of tyranny under a presidential regime to marital infidelity, by way of suicide and other human torments, everything was called upon, on a set projected on screen, to make the performance enjoyable. The rest of the adventure will take place in Switzerland where both companies will once more deliver the fruit of their collaboration for the greatest pleasure of the inhabitants of Geneva.

Matin Libre, Paraku

Friday 29th January 2016

Teddy GANDIGBE

The flaws of African societies denounced

On 21st and 22nd January last, the French Institute of Cotonou accommodated performances of the theatre show Zokwezo. They made use of humour to paint social realities. It is the result of a collaboration between the Swiss theatre company “Apsara Cie” and the Benin-based “les diseurs de vérité” (“the truth tellers”).

Three actors took to the stage to spread social realities on a plate of humour. On a virtual set provided by films projected onto a giant screen, Nicolas de Dravo Houénou, Silvia Barreiros (as Delphine) and Bardol Migan (as Boullass) presented a show exposing dictatorship in full presidential régime, a reality lived by African peoples. Unemployment and poverty were not overshadowed. “The country is in the hands of a dictatorship and poverty which are rigged” deplores Delphine. Zokwezo denounces not only the bad governance of African states but also accentuates the realities of life as a couple. Husbands are often away from home, for one reason or another, leaving the wife alone in her everyday life. Cumbersome neighbours and sentimental disappointment have their part in this performance. “Lucky the next door neighbour showed up, or else this death would have taken me... good-bye... no, don't go, I often lack in manners. My mother says that you don't leave a stranger with a dry throat, let me get you some water” says Boullass, in one of his lines to try and detain Delphine, the woman from next door whose husband has been travelling for years. The young man and the neighbour-married-to-someone-else thus discover each other, which is when the all-watching eye of the third character, the caretaker (Nicolas de Dravo Houénou), comes into action. Zokwezo is a story which denounces realities and brings you back to them as in real life.

Fraternity

Tuesday 26th January 2016

Gloria Koessi-Govor