

Restricted Area — Zone Restreinte

Die transkulturelle Kooperation vom Schweizer Theater Maralam und dem tunesischen Théâtre Mass'ART zeigt im Oktober eine neue Uraufführung im Fabriktheater. Die Schauspielerinnen Meret Bodamer aus Zürich und Yousra Ammouri aus Tunis sprechen über kulturelle Teilhabe und die universale Sprache des Theaters.

Steinbeck: What can you tell me about the play?

Meret Bodamer: It's a tense situation. Two characters meet in this room they don't wanna be in. There is a threat, posed by a woman who's coming. All women become suspects, and we don't know why. That's the beginning.

Yousra Ammouri: Two women from different countries with very different cultures. It's not easy for them to connect to each other in the beginning, but they develop some kind of relationship which is very intimate, but also strange.

MB: What do they think about each other, what prejudices do they have, and what is the reality? Also: a European woman, an Arabic woman, what is that?

YA: The first image that pops into your head when you see the other person – they're exotic, they're from another country – this image is drifting as you get to know the reality of the other person.

S: How does this resonate with you as two actual women from different countries?

MB: We have a good connection, on stage but also private. When we talk about our acting schools – how we worked with the body and the voice – there are similarities and also differences. And the working world of the theatre here and there is different. But on stage there are no differences, it's just the two of us, together.

S: How did you get into this production?

MB: Three years ago, I already worked with Theater Maralam in the Rote Fabrik, a play called «tant de mer entre nous». It was – like this one – a cooperation with a Tunisian theatre, so I had a chance to experience the landscape and the culture.

YA: I saw this play in Tunisia because I worked for the Théâtre Mass'ART, and there was a casting for «restricted area». With this we will play at the national festival of theatre in Tunisia, «Carthage». And we will do a tournee in the whole country.

MB: Last time we played in little schools and very big theatres, so we had to adapt every time. We have a Swiss version here and we'll have another version in Tunisia because of the language: we have German, Arabic, and French – so after the premiere here, we'll develop the other one.

YA: That's just the language that changes though, not the content. It's not a censored version. Even if you don't understand much of the language, you can explain the ideas acting, with body language – even if you don't understand the words, you just feel and you answer what you feel.

MB: Sometimes we'll have subtitles or something similar, so the audience will understand, but we play with this clash of culture, like «you're so stupid I can't understand you, why did she say that like that».

S: Yousra, how was it for you to work with a Swiss director?

YA: It's always different between one director and another – not for Tunisian or Swiss, but for any directors. With Peter [Braschler] it's a great pleasure, and much more than a production, it's a transformation for me.

S: The threat in the play is posed by a woman. What does that mean for you?

MB: My character is very aggressive, she knows it's her country, she knows the rules and she knows the bureaucracy and she knows her rights. She's like «what – woman, what is your problem, because I have those genitals or because I'm feminine or what», that's her. It's interesting to do this provocation, to play with what's going on in the mind of the audience, because everybody is in a film of their own, asking what will happen now.

YA: For my character there's a lot of pressure, because the first woman they look at is her. She's wearing a hijab, so she is one of «them». It's very hard for her to be calm in this situation. But she doesn't surrender.

MB: It's not a world with women only – bien sûr. There's the other two, the «Doppelbesetzer». We call them the

«männliche Präsenz». Here in Switzerland it's a German one and in Tunisia it's an Arabic one. They are the pressure from the outside – a security agent who is there with voice and video.

S: Why a transit room and how do you make it a theatrical place?

YA: It's just like a prison. You don't know the person who's there with you, you cannot leave as you like, there is something to be done to leave. You try to keep your own space, but in this place, there are other rules. Like in prison.

MB: Because it's not the normal world anymore, it's like this state of emergency, weak law situation, anything is possible. And it's very important not to lose oneself in this pressure.

S: For Theater Maralam, cultural participation is an important theme. How do you understand this term?

MB: For me it means that we work with other cultures, it expands the horizon, and also it's just the reality of today. We have to adapt to the world, everything is changing.

YA: I worked in Tunisia in Tunisian plays, and now the reality that we are living makes us experience new things, it's good, and it's real. It's not just strange to have an experience with another country; it's the reality which makes us open.

MB: To do a project here in Switzerland with the people from Théâtre Mass'ART and then to play it in Tunisia, that is «transkulturell» itself. When I was there before with «tant de mer entre nous», there was one situation with ten or twenty students. We'd played before in big theatres in front of 500 people, but those students were so touched because they'd never seen a theatre! And in this moment I thought: that's it, that's why I'm doing this, for that I rehearse everyday. It's just a little moment, but it meant the world to me.

S: So how does your own background shape the play?

YA: As an actress, I think it's really important to be open to learn new things – when I come here, I'm prepared for everything new. The training, the exercises we do, how we work with the text – it's a different way to work, it's a new text. I found myself building myself up in this experience.

MB: These two roles are made for us and our experience. The characters are inspired by our own stories. Our director Peter has to ask Yousra a lot of things because he doesn't know her culture that good, especially for women. In Switzerland he knows more about the system, but he doesn't know how it is as a woman neither, so he has to ask me. We put a lot of our own experiences in it and we can form it.

YA: My character, Leila, is a Tunisian woman and I know the women there, how they react. Leila is encountering Luiza, the character of a Swiss woman, played by Meret. So as I'm developing my character, she's developing hers, and they find some connections and big differences. The point where they meet is humanity. Women. Two women, in a closed space.

MB: It could be anybody – it's about women, but when it's really about survival and humanity, it could also be men.

YA: It's like when you have a child, born into a culture, which is many many things, but when you take those cultural things away, you can see that it's just human. When you leave the culture, a human being is there.

S: Theater Maralam is politically and religiously independent – is that possible?

MB: They don't take money from the church or are subsidized from the government. They want to be independent. But how they do the theatre, that is always political. Theatre is always political because you put a theme in focus, you do something with it and you have a reaction always. Also this play, there are these countries together and also the racism – it is political! Maralam doesn't exclude that, not at all.

YA: I'm excited how the audience will react.

MB: It's also pressure. (Lacht.) The premiere is on the 18th October and we play eight times until the end of October. Then Yousra has to leave and we follow her in the end of November. And then we'll play there.

Interview von Sophie Steinbeck

Restricted Area/Zone Restreinte spielt ab dem 18. Oktober im Fabriktheater.