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THE STORY OF THE HUMANITY: THEATRE AND DANCE IN THE TWENTIETH ISTANBUL THEATRE FESTIVAL

Beki HALEVA - Ayrin ERSÖZ***

ABSTRACT

Istanbul Theatre Festival is recognized as one of the most prominent theatre festivals in the world and the most important international theatre festival to take place in Turkey. The festival consists of local and international stage plays as well as dance and performance productions, and hosts many educational side events such as talks, performances, symposiums, exhibitions, master classes and workshops attended by well-known guests and experts. After giving a brief information about the festival's organization this article discusses with a critical approach two pieces which took place in the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival held between 3–28 May 2016: *The Kindly Ones* from the field of theatre and *d'après une histoire vraie* from the field of contemporary dance. As is revealed by the analysis, the Istanbul Theatre Festival does have a concern about the sociopolitical conjuncture in Turkey and the world, and addresses issues related with actual politics and the contemporary human condition from a humanistic point of view. Greatly occupying the global agenda especially in recent times and turning human values upside down, such concepts are also important for the festival in terms of realizing its artistic mission.

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Istanbul Theatre Festival is recognized as one of the most prominent theatre festivals in the world and the most important international theatre festival to take place in Turkey. Founded by IKSŞ the festival consists of local and international stage plays as well as dance and performance productions, and hosts many educational side events such as talks, performances, symposiums, exhibitions, master classes and workshops attended by well-known guests and experts. After giving a brief information about the festival's organization this article discusses

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with a critical approach two pieces which took place in the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival held between 3–28 May 2016: *The Kindly Ones* from the field of theatre and *d'après une histoire vraie* from the field of contemporary dance.

The festival's founder IKSVM is a non-profit organization which aims to introduce outstanding artistic works from around the globe to Turkish art lovers and promote the cultural and artistic values of Turkey through an international platform. The Theatre Festival was realized as a product of this initiative for the first time in 1989. This important international event which became annual in 2017, held biannually since 2002 up to 2016 and presents works from across Turkey and abroad.

With the goal of providing an example from the prominent international works of theatre visiting the Festival, we will focus first on the analysis of *The Kindly Ones*. The play was one of the highlights of the festival program, discomforting the audience and making them question their assumptions about public crimes effectively by helping them to remember the past and be alert against future dangers. Directed by Guy Cassiers and staged by the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, the play was adapted for the stage from Jonathan Littell's novel, *Les Bienveillantes*, published in 2006 which received two of the most prestigious awards in France, the French Academy Award and the Goncourt Prize. Preserving the opening and closing scenes of Littell's massive novel exactly as they are, Cassiers made a selection out of the multilayered narrative in order to build his own playscript and stage a two-act play running approximately 190 minutes. In fact, considering the subject matter and staging style, which is partly reminiscent of play reading, it could have easily become a theatrical piece which is quite difficult to watch for the audience. Cassiers has, nevertheless, managed to create a rhythm which keeps the pot boiling throughout the performance by embellishing the linguistic structure with conscientiously chosen extralinguistic, visual and auditory elements.

In the play, we watch an antihero, the SS officer Max Aue, questioning the Holocaust according to his own worldview. All the characters are fictional except for Adolf Eichmann, who was one of the leading figures of the Holocaust. The play opens with Max's appearing on stage in plain clothes and telling the audience a few sentences meaning 'I am also someone like you. I have done my job, that's all. If you had been in my shoes, you would have done the same.' as if he wants to talk heart to heart with the audience. The piece mostly concentrates on Max Aue's stay in Kiev, Stalingrad and Berlin although touching upon the protagonist's childhood and highlighting his homosexual identity between the lines: It sketches out step by step how a so-called ordinary person turns into a killing machine, a mere element of a system of destruction.

The approach to the stage design is simple but impressive, opting to highlight the playscript. An impressive visual effect is created by the video images projected on a transparent curtain stretched in front of the stage. These images express Max Aue's hallucinatory inner world through complex projections, sounds and changing colours. The play does not employ any kind of emotional abuse or show any violent scenes. The

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director utilizes language as the most effective tool to convey the meaning. In fact, the audience witness how the process of otherization starts on a linguistic level and becomes efficacious step by step throughout the performance while ordinary people turn into 'insensitive puppets stuffed with wood chips'. In terms of the costumes, the only piece which can remind the audience of Nazism is the black boots, underlining the fact that whatever happened can take place again anywhere on earth. In this impressive production supported with effective sound and light design, in which all the actors deliver outstanding performances, it is of course inevitable for the spectators not to become uneasy by Max Aue when he declares: 'You cannot say "I will never kill.". This is impossible. You can at most say "I hope I will never have to kill.".'

The Istanbul Theatre Festival does not only contribute greatly to the field of theatre but also the field of contemporary dance in Turkey. Many factors can be said to play an important role in this. The only international guest of the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival in the dance category was the French choreographer Christian Rizzo with his piece *d'après une histoire vraie*. Aiming to delve deeper into this prominent dance production presented in the festival, firstly, we will try to explore the choreographic truth of *d'après une histoire vraie*, which literally means 'based on a true story'. Eight male dancers are accompanied by two onstage drummers in the choreography, the main motif of which is the typical movement pattern of the horon. In contrast to the usual multitude of objects to be seen on stage in Rizzo's works, the stage in *d'après une histoire vraie* is very plain so as to allow the dancers the greatest ability to move around. The stage is illuminated with a very dim grey light; there are two drum kits on a platform in the back right corner and an iron chair with a pointed-leaved plant next to it in the front left corner.

With the aim to peel off the layers of meaning available in a staged performance, we can in fact resort to a fundamentally different perception of the work of art than what the western audience is accustomed to having. Such understanding is possible through a perspective questioning the rarely spoken assumptions of western performing arts. Among these assumptions is the tendency to see the work of art as an isolated unit and the audience as a homogenous structure starting with a capital letter. Another faulty presumption is the inclination to find exact uniformity between the truth of the work of art and the truth of the choreography. A dance criticism which attempts to question these assumptions would necessitate a lengthy discussion concerning historical colonialism as well as otherization and racism, which are dependent on it.

Contemporary dance criticism considers a dance artist's utterances to be a part of the context as much as the work of art. Therefore, the choreographer's discourse should also be pointed out: As Christian Rizzo himself puts it, he 'feels no interest in recreating a pre-existing dance in its entirety'. What he is actually interested in is 'the factual and decontextualized observation of movements and systems of composition'. Thus this 'factual and decontextualized observation' or, in other words, the 'objectivity' that depends on a kind of self-rationalization is a great invention of the western mentality, and is historically rooted in the

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construction of the colonial world order which has acquired supremacy over the rest of the world. The main attitude of the colonialists against their colonies was summarized in the famous motto 'Import raw materials and export products.' which has become the common cultural approach of the West. Also in dance every movement material can be used as a 'raw material' for the making of 'artistic products'. In *d'après une histoire vraie*, it is obvious that no value is given for the 'entirety' of the movement resource. Nor is the 'context' of the movement recognized and respected. Considering this colonial framework, Rizzo's piece is neither the first nor the last among many western works of art which take advantage of this historically established asymmetrical position optimally.

Rizzo describes his impression of the men he watched dancing the horon in Istanbul in 2004. Undoubtedly, *d'après une histoire vraie* is no imitation of the horon dance Rizzo saw in Istanbul in 2004. This is a piece in which the 'raw (movement) material' is profoundly analyzed, examined, manipulated and transformed down to its tiniest details, as a result of which a powerful feeling of male brotherhood arises out of the community created on stage through choreographic strategies. The horon in general has been subjected to a multilayered domestication both as a consequence of its being reconstructed through a western approach using the choreographic and compositional elements of western art of dance as exemplified by *d'après une histoire vraie*, and in its actual, contemporary practice where it is now impossible for the horon to refer to its archaic Dionysian meaning. Performed only by male dancers and defining the male gender as perfect, the horon in *d'après une histoire vraie* is civilized and domesticated, revealing a certain historical evolution in the way its revolt and resistance is already repressed and cancelled within its own boundaries. In another sense this piece can be seen as a colonial nostalgia for an *eloquentia in falling and touching* according to western choreography.

As the discussion of the two works in this article reveals, we can claim that the Istanbul Theatre Festival is poised to host local and international productions with a humanistic perspective, those which have a concern, which continuously reexamine previous works realized in the field of performing arts, and those which address issues related with actual politics and the contemporary human condition and take up subjects such as otherization, racism and violence depending on the sociopolitical conjuncture in Turkey and the world for years to come as long as the festival exists. The role of theatre and dance criticism here is to try to uncover the immanent truths in these works of art beyond the artists' consciousness and intentions while trying to understand and introduce the works. As is revealed by the analysis, the Istanbul Theatre Festival does have a concern about the sociopolitical conjuncture in Turkey and the world, and addresses issues related with actual politics and the contemporary human condition from a humanistic point of view. Greatly occupying the global agenda especially in recent times and turning human values upside down, such concepts are also important for the festival in terms of realizing its artistic mission.

Keywords: Istanbul Theatre Festival, otherization, soliloquy, choreography, folk dancing, colonial discourse.

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İNSANLIĞIN TARİHİ: YİRMİNCİ İSTANBUL TİYATRO FESTİVALİNDE TİYATRO VE DANS

ÖZET

Türkiye'nin en önemli uluslararası tiyatro festivali olarak tanınan İstanbul Tiyatro Festivali dünyanın da önde gelen tiyatro festivalleri arasında yer alır. Yerli ve uluslararası tiyatro oyunlarının yanı sıra dans ve performansı da kapsayan bu etkinlik, ünlü konukların ve uzmanların katıldığı söyleşi, gösteri, sempozyum, sergi, ustalık sınıfı ve atölye çalışmaları gibi eğitici birçok yan etkinliğe de ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. İlk olarak 1989 yılında İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı (İKSV) tarafından hayata geçirilen ve o günden bu yana aralıksız süregelen bu önemli etkinlik Türk tiyatro sanatına ivme kazandırmakta, ayrıca eğitim projeleri, ortak yapımları ve günümüz toplumsal sorunları işleyen temalarıyla da öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışma festivale yönelik kısa bir bilgilendirme yaptıktan sonra 3-28 Mayıs 2016'da gerçekleştirilen Yirminci İstanbul Tiyatro Festivalinde yer alan iki gösterimi eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla ele almaktadır. Bunlardan biri festivalin tiyatro bölümünde oynanan *The Kindly Ones* başlıklı oyun, ötekiyse dans etkinlikleri arasında öne çıkan *d'après une histoire vraie* başlıklı modern dans gösterisidir. İncelemelerin de gözler önüne serdiği üzere İstanbul Tiyatro Festivali'nin Türkiye ve dünya konjonktürüne bağlı olarak mesaj kaygısı taşıyan, hümaniter yaklaşımı olan güncel politika ve insanlık durumlarına değinen bir çizgide olduğu açıktır. Festivalin insanlık değerlerini baş aşağı eden, özellikle de son zamanlarda dünya gündemini çok meşgul eden ötekileştirme, ırkçılık, şiddet gibi, kavramları sahneye taşımaysa sanatsal misyonunu yerine getirmesi açısından önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İstanbul Tiyatro Festivali, ötekileştirme, solilok, koreografi, folklor, sömürgeci söylem

Introduction

Istanbul Theatre Festival is recognized as one of the most prominent theatre festivals in the world and the most important international theatre festival to take place in Turkey. Founded by İKSV (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts) the festival consists of local and international stage plays as well as dance and performance productions, and hosts many educational side events such as talks, performances, symposiums, exhibitions, master classes and workshops attended by well-known guests and experts. After providing some background information about İKSV and the festival's organization, this article with the aim to provide examples from the prominent international productions presented in the festival, and explore some discussion points we find to be critical, discusses with a critical approach two pieces which took place in the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival held between 3–28 May 2016 *The Kindly Ones* from the field of theatre and *d'après une histoire vraie* from the field of contemporary dance.

İKSV is a non-profit organization which aims to introduce outstanding artistic works from around the globe to Turkish art lovers and promote the cultural and artistic values of Turkey through an international platform. Founded by a group of businessmen and art lovers under the chairmanship of Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı in 1973, İKSV started with a music festival and increased the variety of its events before long. The Theatre Festival was realized as a product of this initiative for the first

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time in 1989 and held annually up to 2002. The festival became biannual since 2002 up to 2016 and became annual again in 2017.

This important international event presents works from across Turkey and abroad.¹ Prof. Dikmen Gürün (2006, 17) who became the festival director in 1993 and served in this position during the fourteen festivals held until 2012, describes the fundamental aims of the festival as below:

“To build a bridge between the Turkish theatre and the theatres of the world as strongly as possible; in this context, inviting prominent groups and artists to Istanbul, bringing them to the attention of their Turkish counterparts and the Turkish audiences. To encourage international joint projects and to provide grounds for mutual exchange and communication. To support dynamic young artists in theatre as well as design different workshops for them.”

Since the first festival, which hosted 12 plays comprising 7 local productions and 5 plays from France, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and the US, the event has gradually grown and acquired international recognition and respect, proving its worth in a short period of time. Commissioning its first production in 2002 and opening doors to new local productions, the festival has thus accelerated the development of Turkish playwriting. The festival is also well-known for its education projects, joint productions and themes focusing on contemporary social problems.

The Kindly Ones: An Ethically Responsible Stage Play from the Culprit’s Point of View

The Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival consisted of 30 productions including dance and performance pieces in addition to stage plays, 23 of which were from Turkey and 7 from Germany, Belgium, France, Holland, England, Switzerland, Iran and Portugal. An international production made its world premiere and 21 local productions made their debuts in front of the Turkish audience. The number of joint productions commissioned by the festival increased to 13 including 4 international and 9 local performances. One of the most hotly anticipated play by the Turkish audience was one of the international projects, *The Kindly Ones*, concerning the Nazi persecution.

With the goal of providing an example from the prominent international works of theatre visiting the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival, we will therefore focus on the analysis of *The Kindly Ones*. The play was one of the highlights of the festival program, discomforting the audience and making them question their assumptions about public crimes effectively by helping them to remember the past and be alert against future dangers. Directed by Guy Cassiers and staged by the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, the piece is a coproduction realized with the support of the Creative Europe Program of the European Union in addition to various festivals and institutions including the Istanbul Theatre Festival, Festival Temporada Alta, Festival RomaEuropa, Maison de la Culture d’Amiens, Le Phénix, Scène nationale de Valenciennes, and deSingel.

The play was adapted for the stage by the Belgian theatre director Guy Cassiers and Erwin Jans from Jonathan Littell’s novel, *Les Bienveillantes*, published in 2006. The author is an American with a French citizenship and belongs to a Jewish family which has immigrated to the US. Interestingly, Littell set out to use the French language rather than his native tongue English in his first novel, and has achieved an extremely difficult goal at a young age with his 1,408-page book by receiving two of the most prestigious awards in France, the French Academy Award and the Goncourt Prize.

The genocide during the World War II has often been a subject of literary, visual and auditory representation in various branches of the arts; however, this time, it is peculiarly handled from the executioner’s point of view rather than the victim’s. The literary critic Michel Murat (2014, 152-161)

¹ For more information, see <http://www.iksv.org/en/aboutus/history>

sees Littell's novel as a reflection of the world today, and underlines that we need to learn a lesson from this story in an attempt to cultivate the morality of our times. The director of the play, Guy Cassiers, is of the same opinion. In fact, through this work, Cassiers does not only start questioning the subject on an individual level but he also approaches it from a public viewpoint, displaying an exemplary ethical responsibility. As Cassiers puts it: 'Littell wanted to show the monster in the human and the human in the monster. Most of the SS officers were not monsters; they returned back to their families and normal lives after the war. The problem is how such behaviour can arise and what role the conditions and personal identity play in it.'²

The Belgian director has won great recognition in his country as well as internationally for combining his passion for literature with visual and technological tools in his stage productions. Questioning the relations among art, politics and power, Cassiers focuses especially on European political history. As a theatre man, he is also recognized for putting cultic novels of prominent authors such as Robert Musil and Marcel Proust on stage. *The Kindly Ones* met the festival audience as the director's latest work which melts all these concerns in the same pot. Preserving the opening and closing scenes of Littell's massive novel exactly as they are, Cassiers made a selection out of the multilayered narrative in order to build his own playscript and stage a two-act play running approximately 190 minutes. In fact, considering the subject matter and staging style, which is partly reminiscent of play reading, it could have easily become a theatrical piece which is quite difficult to watch for the audience. Cassiers has, nevertheless, managed to create a rhythm which keeps the pot boiling throughout the performance by embellishing the linguistic structure with conscientiously chosen extralinguistic, visual and auditory elements.

In the play, we watch an antihero, the SS officer Max Aue, questioning the Holocaust according to his own worldview. All the characters are fictional except for Adolf Eichmann, who was one of the leading figures of the Holocaust. The play opens with Max's appearing on stage in plain clothes and telling the audience a few sentences meaning 'I am also someone like you. I have done my job, that's all. If you had been in my shoes, you would have done the same.' as if he wants to talk heart to heart with the audience. It continues with a pretty long monologue-like speech which can be called a soliloquy³. Despite its resemblance with play reading, the soliloquy technique is often used throughout the play, and is an important factor in making the audience question the past, the present and even the future. In other words, it pushes the audience out of their comfort zones by posing questions for them to ponder. The piece mostly concentrates on Max Aue's stay in Kiev, Stalingrad and Berlin although touching upon the protagonist's childhood and highlighting his homosexual identity between the lines: It sketches out step by step how a so-called ordinary person turns into a killing machine, a mere element of a system of destruction.

The approach to the stage design is simple but impressive, opting to highlight the playscript. There is a massive cabinet covering the whole background horizontally and vertically, with numerous iron drawers, tagged with a number each, used by Eichmann as a document archive during the play. This design is functional in the way it emphasizes how this merciless executioner known as a meticulous bureaucrat carries out his job in a systematic manner as a matter of plain bureaucracy,

²“Théâtre:avec ‘Les Bienveillantes’, Guy Cassiers alerte sur l’Europe aujourd’hui ”, in *Le Point Culture*, 15 March 2016, http://www.lepoint.fr/culture/theatre-avec-les-bienveillantes-guy-cassiers-alerte-sur-l-europe-aujourd-hui-15-03-2016-2025524_3.php (accessed 14 September 2017).

³ This term points to a method and a type of speech which goes further than a monologue, in which internal conversations are unleashed and the subconscious is revealed while the character talks to oneself, reflecting on his psychological state thoroughly. The *soliloquy* technique opens the play character's inner world to the audience. Thus it opens up an epic and lyrical dimension in addition to its autonomous value while also disrupting the illusion and enabling direct communication with the audience. For more information, see Beki Haleva, *Çağdaş Bir Klasik: Bernard-Marie Koltès*, Istanbul: Mitos Boyut, 2012, p. 106–7.

starting with bullets and ending with gas chambers as it turns out to be more economical. The iron drawers open and close noisily and incessantly towards the end of the play when the Germans start to get defeated. This creates a spectacular image while signaling that the entirely self-enclosed system starts to crack and the doors become ajar as the outer world explodes.

Another salient, functional detail in the stage design is the railroad tracks traversing the stage horizontally, reminiscent of the road leading to the concentration camps. These also contribute to one of the most intense scenes of the play: The boots lined up along the tracks are tied to a mechanism with red strings and take off the ground in bulk towards the ceiling at one moment, giving birth to an impressive image full of references. At this moment, it is impossible for the audience not to remember how the Holocaust victims' personal belongings were meticulously stored in the concentration camps as is often mentioned in historical documentaries. Another impressive visual effect is created by the video images projected on a transparent curtain stretched in front of the stage. These images express Max Aue's hallucinatory inner world through complex projections, sounds and changing colours.

The play does not employ any kind of emotional abuse or show any violent scenes. The director utilizes language as the most effective tool to convey the meaning. In fact, the audience witness how the process of otherization starts on a linguistic level and becomes efficacious step by step throughout the performance while ordinary people turn into 'insensitive puppets stuffed with wood chips'. In terms of the costumes, the only piece which can remind the audience of Nazism is the black boots, underlining the fact that whatever happened can take place again anywhere on earth. In this impressive production supported with effective sound and light design, in which all the actors deliver outstanding performances, it is of course inevitable for the spectators not to become uneasy by Max Aue when he declares: 'You cannot say "I will never kill." This is impossible. You can at most say "I hope I will never have to kill."'.

In addition to the making of the play, Cassiers has started a project called 'Invisible Cities', realized together with students from cities where the play travels, and also launched the website 'Test of Civilization'⁴, providing historical information and documents about the Holocaust to those interested in the subject.

Contribution of the Theatre Festival to Contemporary Dance in Turkey

The Istanbul Theatre Festival does not only contribute greatly to the field of theatre but also the field of contemporary dance in Turkey. Many factors can be said to play an important role in this: The lines demarcating different live performance-based artistic activities are growing more and more transparent. The hybridization among various disciplines is accelerating and becoming more commonplace. We have also been witnessing a proliferation of qualitative names in the field of dance especially since the conventional title of 'dance', which is used to describe the discipline, has been problematized in the official discussions opened in the framework of the EU cultural policies.

At least some of the young, independent choreographers who produce work under the general title of 'dance' in Turkey can get the chance to meet the festival audience and show their work in various performance halls in Istanbul every two years. Thanks to a new decision taken during the preparations for the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival, the festival committee aimed to offer opportunities for young artists to realize their dreams, and proposed to give financial support for the production of such work this year. However, another consequence of this decision was the impossibility to host as many performances as the earlier years due to budget limitations.

⁴ <http://testofcivilisation.eu/tr/intro> (accessed 05 October 2017).

A Contemporary Dance Performance Inspired by Turkish Folk Dancing: *d'après une histoire vraie*

The only international guest of the Twentieth Istanbul Theatre Festival in the dance category was the French choreographer Christian Rizzo with his piece *d'après une histoire vraie*. This performance also sees the Turkish dancer Kerem Gelebek, who has worked with Rizzo in previous productions, take to the stage. Rizzo states that he was inspired by a display of Turkish folk dancing he witnessed in Istanbul to create his choreography, which was one of the remarkable dance works presented in the festival. After its world premiere at the Avignon Festival in 2013⁵, the piece was performed in England, Italy and Canada outside of France.

Aiming to delve deeper into this prominent dance production presented in the festival, firstly, we will try to explore the choreographic truth of *d'après une histoire vraie*, which literally means 'based on a true story'. This is not the first encounter of Rizzo with an element of Turkish culture. In his previous work realized with the Turkish dancer Kerem Gelebek, he pursued the meanings of a Turkish saying: 'Sakınan göze çöp batar.' ('An over-protected eye always gets sand in it.') He used the Turkish saying as the title of his piece without translating it to French. Thus Rizzo is no stranger to some motifs of Turkish culture and, with *d'après une histoire vraie*, he has entered a more directly folkloric space, exploring the steps of a traditional dance going back to antiquity, the horon, as the root of his contemporary choreography.

Eight male dancers are accompanied by two onstage drummers in the choreography, the main motif of which is the typical movement pattern of the horon. In contrast to the usual multitude of objects to be seen on stage in Rizzo's works, the stage in *d'après une histoire vraie* is very plain so as to allow the dancers the greatest ability to move around. The stage is illuminated with a very dim grey light; there are two drum kits on a platform in the back right corner and an iron chair with a pointed-leaved plant next to it in the front left corner.

A young male dancer enters the stage; he walks towards the white floor, at the edge of which he takes off his shoes, and walks further to the middle of the stage where he squats with his back to the audience. Squatting is a posture of sitting, resting and mostly waiting, which is seen oftentimes among Anatolian men. This male posture is in fact a very common sight everywhere in Anatolia. After waiting in the squatted position for a short while, the dancer extends one of his feet forward, switching his weight slowly, brings his head down and rises to his feet with a little spring of his legs. The fact that these transitions originate from contemporary dance vocabulary implies to the spectators that they will be watching a piece of contemporary dance choreography which is based on the folkloric. The dancer softly releases his body to the floor again, rolls over, and raises his arms and legs in the air, buttocks on the floor. In the meantime, another male dancer enters from backstage, places his body on the floor and imitates the form of the previous dancer's body on the floor. The two start a very slow and simultaneous floor dance of switching weight together. As the other dancers continue to enter the stage one by one, the eight dancers perform a minimal dance almost like a contemporary ritual, moving in unison for short moments but mostly dancing in couples, trios and quartets side by side, shoulder to shoulder, face to face or in a circle. Throughout the performance, the patterns of the horon are completely deconstructed and reconstructed through the compositional tools of contemporary dance although the authentic feeling of the traditional form can still be felt at certain moments. The drums turn the main motif of the horon's rhythmical patterns into a variation

⁵ Christian Rizzo (June 2013), *d'après une histoire vraie*, http://www.christianrizzo.com/christian-rizzo/choreographe/spectacles_eng/christian-rizzo-choreographe-spectacles.php?id=98779798 (accessed 23 June 2016).

of *psychedelic rock*⁶ beats in the same manner the movements of the horon are choreographically reconstructed.

The dancers are tilting over in an upright position as if calling for the ancestral roots of the movement. Their legs are elevated, knees slightly bent, just for their feet to be put back on the floor again abruptly, which is one of the hallmark gestures of the horon, the incessant beating of the floor. Endless *pas de bourrées* are introduced to turn and move across the stage to elevate the energy. The dancers hold arms and shoulders touching one another in a manly fashion although not exaggerating the masculinity – after all they are dancing a contemporary ritual in which the main tools of classical composition are clearly in place: The variation and development of the theme and the motif is present almost like a composition lesson. The motif manifests itself at abrupt moments like a lightening in a stormy night. Towards the end of the performance, the dancers and the drum beats surrender to the ‘horon’ they have created themselves. The audience likewise surrender themselves to an ‘inner horon’ at the end of the performance when the performers are greeted with a storm of applause.

Remnants of a Colonial Discourse: Side Notes on *d’après une histoire vraie*

With the aim to peel off the layers of meaning available in a staged performance, we can in fact resort to a fundamentally different perception of the work of art than what the western audience is accustomed to having. Such understanding is possible through a perspective questioning the rarely spoken assumptions of western performing arts. Among these assumptions is the tendency to see the work of art as an isolated unit and the audience as a homogenous structure starting with a capital letter. Another faulty presumption is the inclination to find exact uniformity between the truth of the work of art and the truth of the choreography. A dance criticism which attempts to question these assumptions would necessitate a lengthy discussion concerning historical colonialism as well as otherization and racism⁷, which are dependent on it, since it is historical colonialism which prepares the ground for these assumptions in the first place. Although such a discussion does not belong in this article, we would like to bring up the subject briefly as a side note in the framework of *d’après une histoire vraie* with an eye to a critical take on the colonial connotations of the discourse and the truth of this work of art.

Contemporary dance criticism considers a dance artist’s utterances to be a part of the context as much as the work of art. Therefore, the choreographer’s discourse should also be pointed out: As Christian Rizzo himself puts it, he ‘feels no interest in recreating a pre-existing dance in its entirety’. What he is actually interested in is ‘the factual and decontextualized observation of movements and systems of composition’. Thus this ‘factual and decontextualized observation’ or, in other words, the ‘objectivity’ that depends on a kind of self-rationalization is a great invention of the western mentality, and is historically rooted in the construction of the colonial world order which has acquired supremacy over the rest of the world. The main attitude of the colonialists against their colonies was summarized in the famous motto ‘Import raw materials and export products.’ which has become the common cultural approach of the West. Also in dance every movement material can be used as a ‘raw material’ for the making of ‘artistic products’. In *d’après une histoire vraie*, it is obvious that no value is given for the ‘entirety’ of the movement resource. Nor is the ‘context’ of the movement recognized and respected. Considering this colonial framework, Rizzo’s piece is neither the first nor the last among many western works of art which take advantage of this historically established asymmetrical position optimally.

⁶ <http://mercatflos.cat/en/espectacle/dapres-une-histoire-vraie-2/> (accessed 05 October 2017).

⁷ It is colonialism which gives otherization a historical form. And this otherization, constitutes the historical mindset which determines racism, sexism, social class differences and ethnocentrism at the same time.

Rizzo describes his impression of the men he watched dancing the horon in Istanbul in 2004: 'I am overtaken by a deep and almost archaic emotion... this sensation has remained anchored in me ever since.'⁸ Yes, it is possible to have all kinds of personal impressions of the horon but none of these comes to mean that a relativist approach of picking and gathering can be forced on the horon, the truth of which would then be infinitely divided. The truth of any dance is factual but the truth of the horon is historical; thus the difference between the impression and the truth abides. In order to be able to discuss the horon and understand the contemporary form it has taken after having gone through several transformations since the choreia⁹ up till now, first of all, we should consider that 'dance' does not have an independent, isolated history of its own but rather it can exist in a certain context. Therefore, firstly, the historical truth of the horon can only be revealed and comprehended in its relation with the actual choreographic truth, which alienates the horon from its historical context and is an altogether different thing in this case. Secondly, it can be possible to interpret these relations with reference to the overlap between the process of the problematization of dance since antiquity, and the long and complex history of the problematization of sexuality as a whole.

Undoubtedly, *d'après une histoire vraie* is no imitation of the horon dance Rizzo saw in Istanbul in 2004. This is a piece in which the 'raw (movement) material' is profoundly analyzed, examined, manipulated and transformed down to its tiniest details, as a result of which a powerful feeling of male brotherhood arises out of the community created on stage through choreographic strategies. The horon in general has been subjected to a multilayered domestication both as a consequence of its being reconstructed through a western approach using the choreographic and compositional elements of western art of dance as exemplified by *d'après une histoire vraie*, and in its actual, contemporary practice where it is now impossible for the horon to refer to its archaic Dionysian meaning. Performed only by male dancers and defining the male gender as perfect, the horon in *d'après une histoire vraie* is civilized and domesticated, revealing a certain historical evolution in the way its revolt and resistance is already repressed and cancelled within its own boundaries. In another sense this piece can be seen as a colonial nostalgia for an *eloquentia in falling and touching* according to western choreography.

Conclusion

As the discussion of the two works in this article reveals, we can claim that the Istanbul Theatre Festival is poised to host local and international productions with a humanistic perspective, those which have a concern, which continuously reexamine previous works realized in the field of performing arts, and those which address issues related with actual politics and the contemporary human condition and take up subjects such as otherization, racism and violence depending on the sociopolitical conjuncture in Turkey and the world for years to come as long as the festival exists. The role of theatre and dance criticism here is to try to uncover the immanent truths in these works of art beyond the artists' consciousness and intentions while trying to understand and introduce the works.

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⁸ <http://www.lassociationfragile.com/christian-rizzo/choregraphe/spectacles/histoire-eng.pdf> (accessed 05 October 2017).

⁹ Ancient Greek dance, the oldest form of the horon.

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