

**ARISTOPHANES AND THE SUBURBS OF THE WORLD:  
THE GAME OF WEALTH AND POVERTY**

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INTRODUCTION: THE CASE UNDER STUDY, OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

'The Rabbit can taste a Cherry only if the Bird has taken it down the Tree': with this Senegalese proverb the actor, dramatist and director Mandiaye N'Diaye, on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2008, paid his debt to Marco Martinelli and Ermanna Montanari of Teatro delle Albe (Ravenna, Italy).<sup>1</sup> In this case, the cherry is Aristophanes' comedy which Mandiaye / the Rabbit has 'tasted' over the past twenty years with his 'teachers/ Birds', Marco and Ermanna—after a long journey between Africa and Romagna (the Italian region where Ravenna lies, on the Adriatic sea). In 1988 the Senegalese Mandiaye left his native village, Diol Kadd (a suburb of the city of Thies, Senegal), to 'seek his fortune' and find a job in Italy: the meeting with Martinelli and Montanari was a momentous one. On that July day in 2008 Marco and Ermanna were seated in the audience applauding the production that Mandiaye created in Senegal, wrote and directed and brought to Italy: the double title in his native language (Wolof) and Italian is *Leebu Nawet ak Noor. Il gioco della Ricchezza e della Povertà* (in English *The Game of Wealth and Poverty*).

The 'game' was played for three nights (25<sup>th</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> July 2008) in a theatre festival properly named *Da vicino nessuno è 'normale'* (i.e. In a close encounter nobody is 'normal'). The name derives from the significant characteristics of the environment where the festival takes place: the park of a former psychiatric hospital named Paolo Pini, closed and abandoned many years ago. It lies on the outskirts, just at the city limits of Milan, one of the greatest industrial and financial centres of Northern Italy, which has suffered the increasing economic difficulties of the past decades. This particular suburb today has many scars which recall the past: dismantled factories and old gas tanks pierce the skyline along with the shopping centres and the buildings of a technical university (*Politecnico*).

A similar situation may be found on the outskirts of most major Italian cities, or in other marginal zones where it is now customary for theatre productions and other events to take place, among factories or abandoned buildings. If theatre in the past has been concentrated mostly in historical districts, an opposite trend is now growing all around Italy: culture is de-centralized, as more and more suburban buildings are transformed into theatres in order to host productions on tour or to create events for their specific site. Beyond the challenge of converting the buildings lies the biggest problem, how to respond to—or, more often, to create—the cultural needs of potential audiences, as those outskirts are often richly populated, but culturally poor. Their inhabitants seldom go to the theatre, or to artistic events, as their difficult economic conditions do not allow them to; they do not even think about entering, if nobody invites them in. Therefore, as we shall soon see, the latest, and greatest, challenge for many local authorities, cultural associations and artists seems to be how to attract not only spectators, but also performers—mostly among young people—in those very outskirts.

This is the background for the specific Senegalese production (*The Game of Wealth and Poverty*) and these issues shape this article: in my opinion it is a relevant fact that a production conceived in Romagna and born in Senegal was staged in this particular place, the industrial outskirts of Milan. *The Game of Poverty and Wealth* deserves special attention for many reasons: the complex twenty-year history that lies behind it, which includes many other productions; the ties that bind the two sites where the Senegalese production was born and where it took place, in a culturally poor and

challenging situation; the people who work in it, the double citizenship of its creator, and its hybrid nature.<sup>2</sup> Before considering the Senegalese production, I shall briefly survey the poetic and historical background and the social and political contexts in Africa and Italy where it was conceived and staged. I shall also include an account of some previous African productions that are comparable in some aspects to this one. Then I shall recall the twenty-year experience of the author in the Italian group of Teatro delle Albe and the nature of the scripts. These are both 'appropriations' and 'actualizations', i.e. conscious and deliberate translations of ancient texts in modern contexts. One of their productions, *All'inferno!* (1996) is especially worth examining in close comparison to *The Game of Wealth and Poverty*, in order to point out both the debts and similarities among the two cases and the different outcomes and new meanings of the latter. I shall compare the two productions not only from my point of view as a classicist and scholar (specifically interested in Aristophanes and a teacher of ancient Drama in a University), but from the point of view of a practitioner with first-hand experience both as dramaturg and spectator. After the analysis of both productions (1996 and 2008) I shall survey a comparable 2009 production that was staged on the outskirts of two Italian cities, Venice and Rome.

Besides the social and geographical conditions there is at least one artistic factor that links all the different places and productions mentioned in this paper: an ancient drama. The comedy which inspires the Senegalese production, and many others, shares a few features with African cultures, as I shall demonstrate; but it is not an African text, it is Greek: *Ploutos*, the latest among Aristophanes' extant comedies (388 B.C.E.). For centuries it has been popular for its symbolic theme and allegorical plot: two Athenian citizens meet the blind god of wealth—named Ploutos—and have him cured; he recovers and is able to see again, to distinguish good and bad men and to allot his gifts with more justice, even if the plan does not appear to be so successful on the long run...

In Italy *Ploutos* appears to have lost popularity in the modern age. In the past few decades it has been rarely staged, mostly in schools or universities or in other contexts notably as part of financial conferences or economic debates: for instance, some parts of the comedy were staged on 19 April 2007 by Teresa Pomodoro and her troupe (at Spazio *No'hma*, Milan) during a meeting between bank managers and company administrators entitled 'Economics and Development', followed by an interesting debate. Another example is the 'heavily adapted' and personal version of *Ploutos* conceived by Franco Belli, Professor of Economics at the University of Siena and playwright: his idea combines Aristophanes' script with other modern texts and includes Karl Marx as a character, who recites parts of his own works. This production, named *Plutocrazia* (Ploutocracy), was written and directed by ArchivioZeta and first staged in 2006 in a consciously symbolic place, well connected with the wealth and poverty themes of Aristophanic comedy: the Crypt-Library of the Economics Department, Richard M. Goodwin, at the University of Siena (see [www.archiviozeta.eu/](http://www.archiviozeta.eu/)).

In the last few years, however, this comedy has not only come out of the universities and gained a larger audience in Italy, but apparently precisely because of its economic theme seems to have become increasingly popular and appealing both in other industrial countries—regularly threatened by economic crises—and in the so-called 'post-colonial' world, where often great natural resources are barely accessible to most of the native population, and where wealth is distributed among very few, while the larger majority remains very poor. In such social, geographic and economic conditions, Aristophanic comedies are currently appreciated by an increasing audience. This is particularly so with *Ploutos*, which deals with problems such as wealth, supplies and resources. Current economic conditions offer a possible reason why they are

adapted and staged more and more frequently, especially in the suburbs of the world and in other economically stressed contexts.

#### THE BACKGROUND: AFRICAN ARISTOPHANES AND ACTUALIZATIONS

If one looks carefully at the twentieth-century international scene, particularly in recent decades, it becomes clear that Aristophanes' presence in Senegal is not in itself an exception. Outside Europe many classical texts and authors—from ancient Greece to Shakespeare—have ceased to be merely a part of the colonial heritage, or of Western culture, as they are rediscovered in many ways by different people with new approaches and growing freedom.<sup>3</sup> They offer a shared and rich mine for artists, who seek inspiration in their own local culture in order to bring classics back to life as new hybrid texts. Ancient dramas, in particular, as part of a new global 'cultural capital', can be translated into different languages and cultures, adapted to local contexts, revisited by storytellers (called *griots* in Senegal), playwrights, and directors, some of them students in universities or schools (still an important vehicle for classics in many countries), some professionals, often independent, exiled or imprisoned, clandestine, dissidents, refugees.

Many choose Aristophanes' comedy as a way to express their claims for freedom, social justice and equal opportunities, because of its recurrent themes. These include the dream of peace, the accusations against corruption and bad politics, the demonstration of social and sexual inequalities. These find parallels in the current problems of post-colonialism, rapid social and political change, the rise and fall of local governments and economic powers, ethnic and racial conflicts. *Birds* (414 B.C.E.), for instance, has frequently been rewritten and staged in Africa, sometimes with ideological drifts towards anarchism or vitalism, but also as a poetic metaphor to express individual or collective desires, political ideas, and responses to the growing anxieties of a difficult development, as recent studies testify.<sup>4</sup>

The very nature of Aristophanes' humour and language—so rich in verbal inflections, puns and aggressive jokes about local celebrities and actual situations—in various ways inspires multilingual and multicultural adaptations. Most stagings of his comedies in South Africa since the Seventies—such as those described by Betine van Zyl Smit—are multilingual and hybrid, as they adapt the text to fit the specific context and speak to a multicultural and multi-ethnic audience. When ethnically diverse actors reflect the cultural mixture of everyday life, and the set of comedy moves from ancient Athens to modern ghettos or urban slums, where people speak 'eleven official languages, plus urban dialects that combine elements from more than one language', the playwrights can freely use language 'to include or exclude parts of the audience and to comment on linguistic aspects of the power dynamics in the country.'<sup>5</sup>

Many African productions of Aristophanes are basically in English—the usual language of communication in South African theatre, according to van Zyl Smit—but still deeply cross-cultural: for example, an English adaptation of *Ploutos* staged at the Saheti school in Johannesburg (6–11 March 2006) was, according to the available information, part of a live education program which included the visit of 'People's Poet' Mzwakhe Mbuli and other activities; the script was set in the present day at Sandton Square, and the South African flavour was evident in the colourful costumes and the elaborate masks, specially made for the production; the actors, musicians and dancers involved came from different groups or bands and were inspired by various styles of performance and music. Another recurrent feature in most African adaptations is a cultural and religious syncretism: the original text combines with local history, tribal rites, traditional tales, different religions or animistic faiths (which often live alongside Islam, in intercultural and cross-cultural contexts, as happens in Diol Kadd).

In fact, most adaptations of ancient drama are in English, or in the European languages of former colonizers, especially when they aim at reaching northern and western audiences; some productions in local languages, like the Senegalese *Ploutos*, are staged in Europe too. In all cases, even if the adaptation is good, some spectators may feel a sense of displacement as a side effect of the 'translation' between their culture and the text staged, depending on many factors such as their native language and the country they live in. There is certainly a great distance between ancient Greek culture—which European and especially Mediterranean people feel somehow as their own—and the final destination of the journey, i.e. the foreign culture to which the text is adapted. However, if one looks further, the sense of displacement is not only justified but desirable, when the mix of different cultures produces a 'creative' hybrid with interesting features. Intercultural adaptations often combine different conventions of time and space, as we can see by comparing any European, American or African production, and this process goes even further in the so-called 'actualizations'. This last category is highly flexible and open enough to include many different operations. In this respect quite good examples of actualizations are, in my opinion, the Senegalese production under discussion by Mandiaye N'Diaye and his 'models', i.e. the Aristophanic adaptations written and directed by Marco Martinelli.

Both directors, as happens in most actualizations, definitively give up what they consider an 'impossible dream' (which, however, is still pursued today by many people—scholars, directors and spectators—at least in Italy), that is staging the 'original version' of a classical text. This dream is indeed impossible to fulfil, due to the distance and the different theatrical, historical and social context in which each modern audience member lives. A more profitable approach to classical texts, leads Martinelli and his friends to speak about the contemporary world by choosing either modern or ancient texts provided that they share a common quality. As Calvino argues in his clever short paper *Perchè leggere i classici*, (Why read classics?) (Calvino, 1995), classics are able to survive ages of ephemeral reality without getting older, and moreover they can adapt to different places, each time acquiring new forms and meanings, so that we can still hear their voices speak over the background noise (*rumore di fondo*).

To fill the gap between us and the Greeks is impossible, and maybe not even desirable: but it is at least possible somehow to reduce the distance, to bring a text back to life and closer to the modern audience, or vice versa. A good actualization, like any artistic creation, should therefore realize a delicate balance between old and new, respect and freedom. This mixture can be sometimes be found when Greek tragedies are adapted and staged, but appears especially suitable for ancient comedies, which are notoriously based on current facts of Athenian life and thus require some adaptation and rewriting, without which the audience would not understand what is the point, nor laugh.<sup>6</sup>

It is a tradition of comedy, moreover, to change and subvert a text, if necessary, as we can guess from Aristophanes' words and especially from his *Clouds*. As the comedy was not successful at the first performance, in 423 BCE, the author changed the text, in order to adapt it to the audience's tastes; only the later version, currently called *Clouds II*, has survived. Despite the conservative attitudes which are still strong in Italy nowadays, directors such as Marco Martinelli or Mandiaye N'Diaye choose to talk about the present through the past. They are justified, in terms of their artistic inspiration and intent, when they change the original text, play with words, adopt new names for places and original characters, and give them other clothes and features: in this way, I believe, Greek comedy can survive and find new targets for its original personal abuse (*onomasti komoidein*).<sup>7</sup> Particularly valuable is their way of transposing

ancient terms or characters by looking for an equivalent in the contemporary world, as close as possible to the ancient ones.<sup>8</sup> The very title of the Senegalese production, for instance, creates an effective parallel between Ploutos and Penia—the two Greek personifications of Wealth and Poverty—and their equivalents: the Senegalese god of Rain and thus Wealth (Nawet), and Poverty (Noor).

For this and other distinctive features of multiculturalism and hybridization this production deserves special attention among recent adaptations of *Ploutos*, especially those staged in the suburbs. *The game of Wealth and Poverty* is part of a several-year project meant to be a bridge between Italy and Africa, it is conceived and created by an African actor and director who lives in both countries and has been taking part for twenty years in a strong intercultural experience (which could be defined as a Romagnolo-Senegalese hybrid). Now he brings back its fruits to his native village in Africa, in order to produce a show there, with the aid of his Italian friends and contacts.

The Senegalese version of *Ploutos* has a significant subtitle: *A day in Diol Kadd, a little village in the heart of the Senegalese savannah*. This localization is meant to be taken literally: even those who do not see the production in Africa, but in Milan, experience a sort of a displacement and exotic feeling. The audience enters the theatrical space by passing through the gates of the old and abandoned park mentioned above. It is a symbolic and disturbing place, a kind of Underworld full of dismantled bungalows, ghosts of the former psychiatric hospital, and memories of the past. The spectators are allowed in, as a small crowd, walking through the trees, following the sound of drums in the distance. By a kind of magic they find themselves at once in the heart of Senegal, or at least this is their impression. The closest parallel I can find is with the prologue of *Edipo Re* (*Oedipus the King*, 1967), a film inspired by Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and directed by the Italian poet and dramatist Pier Paolo Pasolini. Early in the film, an analogue leap through space and time is marked first by the archaic sounds of drums and flutes, then by pictures, so that all of a sudden the spectator is transferred from the film's first location—the modern Italian countryside—to the second, an arid African desert which recalls ancient Greece.<sup>9</sup>

In the present production, too, the spectators leave everyday reality by passing through the gates of the park: they do not see anything at first, but are just drawn by the sound, and proceed through the trees with a sense of suspense and curiosity. All around there is nothing, just a thick humidity that Milan shares with Africa and is part of the location and of the atmosphere. Suddenly they find a bare patch hidden among the trees, apparently untouched. There lies a simple circle of benches, under festoons of coloured lights, as in a village feast: a piece of Africa in Milan. There the audience is welcomed by a group of Senegalese men and women dressed in a mix of traditional costumes and modern clothes. Many spectators are hesitating and puzzled by questions: what are we supposed to do? who are these people and what are they doing here? Some of them live in Italy; others have come a long way from Diol Kadd, Senegal. They are all involved in a great project which includes this production and much more. Let us go back in time to where, and when, the whole story began.

#### THE ALBE 'METHOD' AND *ALL'INFERNO!*

In Ravenna, Italy, 1988, the young theatre company Teatro delle Albe started a project named *Ruh. Romagna più Africa uguale. Commedia nera* (literally Ruh. Romagna plus Africa equal. A black comedy: See the Italian text in Martinelli, 2006). They were inspired by a scientific theory: according to the geologist Franco Ricci Lucchi, the Italian region named Romagna could be a piece of Africa which floated North to the Adriatic sea with the continental drift.<sup>10</sup> This theory stimulated the poetic interpretation of the Albe group and became the central idea of their productions; more generally, it

gave a new identity to their theatre as a whole, as they saw the massive arrival of African immigrants in Italy, in recent years, as somehow a coming back, a rejoining.

They hired some African artists, who had just come to Italy as immigrants and were working on the beaches of Romagna. Among these were Mandiaye N'Diaye and Mor Awa Niang who, as *griots* (traditional Senegalese storytellers-dancers-actors-musicians who find parallels in many countries on the Mediterranean sea) soon became ideal members of the troupe. Since the first production, *Ruh*, they have worked with the Albe group for twenty years in many productions: among them *I ventidue infortuni di Mor Arlecchino* is a modern African version of an old story based on the Italian theatre tradition, featuring the most popular mask of the ancient *commedia dell'arte* (the comic servant named Arlecchino or Truffaldino, poor and hungry and dressed in rags of many colours). Others productions are based on *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry. *Mighty mighty Ubu* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2005) was created with young actors from the slums and the outskirts of the city. The latest Senegalese adaptation, *Ubu Buur*, was first staged in Diol Kadd, then went on tour around Europe in 2007 and 2008. The theatre company published a very effective and interesting book on the whole experience and rehearsals in Senegal, entitled *Suburbia* (Martinelli and Montanari, 2008, eds). In these years, the Albe group not only acquired new members, but gradually changed its constitution and became definitively an African/ Italian company, or rather a Senegalese / Romagnolo hybrid, with the artistic *métissage* as a distinctive mark (for this concept, the history and the poetic principles of the Albe company, see Picarazzi, 2000). Other recurrent features of all productions are the tight relationships between text, troupe and territory, and the special attention dedicated to children and young people. I shall briefly recall these aspects, before considering the two main productions, in order to understand the work done by Martinelli and Mandiaye N'Diaye.

Marco Martinelli feels a special attraction towards Aristophanes and since the Nineties has periodically adapted his texts (his first experiments were *Birds* and *All'inferno!*). His latest adaptation from Ancient Greek Comedy is named *Pace!* (Peace!): it is the first production of a great project, significantly made for the poorest suburbs of a city, named *Arrevuoto* (Upside Down in the Neapolitan dialect. See Giovannelli and Martinelli, 2008 in Italian and Treu, 2007b in English). For three years, Martinelli and his troupe worked mostly with young people from Scampia, a slum in the outskirts of Naples (with a high percentage of unemployment, crime and social risk factors, according to the statistics and to recent journalistic reports such as the book and movie entitled *Gomorra*).<sup>11</sup> Here the Albe group started a theatre workshop which created an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Peace* (in Italian and Neapolitan dialect) and in a few months brought it on stage, in the re-opened theatre of Scampia. As usual, they aimed at promoting theatre as a social mission, involving the inhabitants of suburbs through the youngsters and their families, who are at a constant risk of marginalization and crime. The great success of this production confirms once more the results that the Albe method—significantly called *non scuola* (non-school)—has achieved in other suburbs of the world, from Ravenna to Chicago: they work with young people on texts and productions by including their typical forms of expression, slang, music, and so on. Every young participant makes a contribution to the text, and the production, in a collective and almost 'natural' work that freely combines reality and fiction, where every piece finds its place, moving from an initial festive and vital anarchy (*chàos*) to a joyful and creative order (*kòsmos*).

We can find traces of this method in all their productions, in order to explain why Aristophanes and Jarry, in particular, play a major role in Martinelli's theatrical theory and practice: it is basically a process of deconstructing reality and creating a *messa in vita* (brought to life: a new word, created by Martinelli, to indicate the opposite of

*messinscena / mise en scène* (brought to the stage) see Montanino, 2006: 16ff.). Theatre and poetry, according to the same director, allow him, his actors and audience—and each of us—to put on stage personal experiences and bring them to a higher level. That is why these modern actors never forget who they are, but transform their everyday life into a symbolic experience. They can speak both as characters and actors, just like the first actors of ancient comedies. The *protagonistès* keeps going into and out of dramatic fiction and—as in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*—can at the same time wear his characters' clothes and those of Euripides' heroes. At the same time he can also mention 'the Chorus' or 'the spectators', who are clearly outside the fiction (*Ach.* 416, 442–44). Actors can address the audience about real facts, or even speak on behalf of the author. Moreover, in the community theatre of Athens, the audience members could surely recognize the members of the cast. Under the actor's garments, as if they were transparent, the audience can ideally see the body of chorus members and actors: their real nature is constantly visible, not only in the *parabasis*, but whenever an interpreter speaks as a character and an actor (or chorus member) at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

#### PLOUTOS IS BACK!

All these practices—*contaminatio* in style, revitalizing in languages—involve the actors in the creative process and encourage actors to bring out their own life experience and background. These are common features in the Albe productions, but we focus on the one cited above as a symbolic 'father' of the present Senegalese adaptation: *All'Inferno! Affresco da Aristofane* (To Hell! A fresco from Aristophanes), first staged in 1996. The main actors of that production were Mandiaye N'Diaye, Mor Awa Niang (who also appears in the Senegalese version of *Ploutos*, 2008), El Hadij Niang, and some Italian actors from different parts of Italy (the show was co-produced by Ravenna Teatro, KismetOpera from Bari, in South Italy, Tam Teatro Musica from Padova in the North, and others). Onstage, each of them speaks in his or her own mother tongue or dialect (every region or town or village, in Italy, has its own language, often very different from the national 'official' one). The original structure of Ancient Attic Comedy—in itself a mixture of different sections—is enlarged and enriched by the members of the troupe, in order to 'give life' to a polychromic mosaic of scenes, lights and colours (the 'fresco' mentioned in the subtitle). The variety of languages, forms and contents, too, is a strong original mark of Aristophanes' comedy; but this heterogeneous stylistic tone is amplified by Martinelli's adaptation and by the different personalities involved, who actively contribute by taking advantage of their origin, experience and culture.<sup>13</sup>

Martinelli's text, moreover, is deeply miscellaneous in structure: it is based on Aristophanes' *Ploutos*, but it includes parts of other comedies by the same author, including *Clouds* and *Knights*. The latter, for instance, inspires a funny duel of verbal abuse 'to the last insult' between two male actors—heirs of the Sausage Maker and Paphlagon—both hanging from the seats of a merry-go-round, suspended at a convenient distance, and supported by two aggressive women in business suits (a modern version of the original Chorus of *Knights*). The entire scene is spoken in the native language of the South Italian region of Puglia, hardly understandable outside that specific zone even for an Italian-speaking audience, but very effective and rich in powerful sounds and gestures.<sup>14</sup>

Such an example can demonstrate how Martinelli's production, like Mandiaye N'Diaye's, uses different languages according to the specific needs of the situation, role or character involved. In the Senegalese production this technique creates an even greater multilingualism: most dialogues among the village inhabitants are almost entirely in Wolof (the native language in Diol Kadd), but some key-words are spoken in

French (the language of the colonizers) or in Italian, in order to be clearly understandable to the present audience. There is also a more specific use of foreign languages to mark linguistically some characters as aliens to the community, a variant on Aristophanes' technique in some comedies<sup>15</sup>.

In this production two African actors play two strangers who speak French and Italian respectively, as the other side of multiculturalism. The first character is a special correspondent of a French news channel: he seems to be a young African born in France, a symbol of the French presence in its former colony, still strong in the cultural and economic life of Senegal. The TV correspondent does not understand the local language well, nor the Senegalese costumes (as indeed few Italian spectators do!). Therefore he needs an interpreter: this function is performed by an anonymous storyteller who apparently lives in Italy, but who speaks Wolof as well as Italian. He translates into current Italian—mostly in comic terms, familiar and slang forms—many sentences and key-words just uttered in Wolof by the actors, as a sort of human subtitle, or more precisely a conduit between Italian and Senegalese culture, because he has a strong personality and frequently adds to the translation his remarks and comments, mostly mocking and ironical, as a sign of distance, scepticism and suspicion.

As Martinelli did in *All'Inferno!*, N'Diaye does not take anything for granted in Aristophanes' plot: both directors carefully adapt *Ploutos* to their present context (yesterday's Italy or today's Africa). As in Aristophanes, and in most adaptations, the starting point is usually a difficult economic situation. Poverty troubles ancient and modern characters equally, particularly in some areas of the world or some sections of the population. In this regard it is worth recalling *All'Inferno!*, set in the Northern Italy of the Nineties, where the main characters, master and servant, came as immigrants looking for a job and happened to be hired in a strange motorway service station named *InferNord* (a pun on the words North and Hell). This symbolic place has disturbing parallels with the Underworld, but also with the real hell where clandestines live and work in Italy, in those days and even more today, when they suffer the same oppression, imposition and harassment experienced by the two characters onstage. This kind of displacement and relocation, between Underworld and Upper World, is familiar to many modern fans of Ancient Attic Comedy: Aristophanes uses similar devices in other comedies, such as *Frogs* (405 B.C.E.).<sup>16</sup> In this comedy too, the journey of Dionysus and his servant Xantias to the Underworld can be seen not as an escape towards a Nowhere (the Greek *Utopia*), but rather as an allegory of a reality which mirrors that of the audience: yesterday the city of Athens, today mostly the suburbs of the world, where *Ploutos* is often staged, rather than the financial or residential districts of any large city.

If the Underworld of *Frogs* shares many features with Athens, clearly seen through a looking-glass, *All'Inferno!* is set in a fictive place, a sort of upside-down reality or parallel world: apparently weird, but not more absurd than ours, if we look carefully. In the 1996 production Martinelli and other actors—dressed as waiters or stewards—greeted the audience at the theatre entrance with the symbolic offer of a special bread (*focaccia* in Italian): the same food, according to an ancient tradition, was given to the dead for the last journey to the Underworld. It is meant to be a clear sign that the actors, and the audience too, are about to start a metaphoric descent to Hell. In this last aspect the interpretation of Martinelli seems particularly close to the most complex and perhaps neglected aspect of Aristophanic humour which, in my opinion, was deeply affected by the difficult age he was living in: besides pure laughter, he hides in his comedies a dark side of pessimism and restlessness, gloom, sadness and even despair. The escape from such grim reality, typical of his plays, can also be seen as



just an illusion: the flight is short, and the comedy as a whole forces the spectators to look inside themselves and face the awful truth in the end.

Martinelli and his group emphasized this aspect of Aristophanic comedy, but at the same time aimed at bringing on stage the typical vitality of his comic heroes: that joyful, abusive, and grotesque humour that Martinelli finds in Aristophanes, Artaud and Jarry—his favourite authors and the most frequently staged by his company—or, more recently, in the late Austrian playwright Werner Schwab.<sup>17</sup> The influence of these authors has been clear in all his directing, writing and teaching work, and in every collective, intense and consistent project of the Teatro delle Albe for the last twenty years, with special attention to contemporary Italy and to social problems that continues to the present moment. For these reasons, in particular, the 1996 production seems somehow prophetic now, over twelve years later, when (at the time of writing) we look at the present Italian situation, especially the increasing immigration trends and the growing cultural and religious conflicts. In this context, the Senegalese 2008 production—which is a son, or younger brother, of that production—is a significant step towards a future integration and peaceful co-habitation in the name of theatre.

#### THE COMMUNITY ON STAGE AND THE SABÀR RITE.

Any comparison between Marco Martinelli's and Mandiaye N'Diaye's productions must include particular attention to an aspect which closely recalls the ancient drama: the choral dimension. The Greek chorus, in tragedy and comedy—especially when it has an active role in the play—is a notorious problem for playwrights and directors: it is no longer a feature of modern drama, and in contemporary stagings of Greek plays the chorus is sometimes reduced to one single performer, or set aside, while choral parts are often cut or suppressed in adaptations, as some recent studies testify.<sup>18</sup>

There are many economic and artistic reasons for this discrimination, but in very simple terms I can say that the chorus—originally a basic component of many poetic and dramatic *genres*—in modern productions seems condemned to extinction for its collective nature. The chorus is actually something more than a simultaneity of words and gestures: it is first of all a link, a tie between people, which finds a proper background and main *raison d'être* in collective experiences, such as those of the Athenian *polis*. An Aristophanic chorus is much more than a sum of individuals, as we may see from the extant comedies: the chorus members can often express a common point of view, and different opinions too, but they always reach a complete unity of feeling, in order to deeply affect the audience with the message expressed in the *parabasis*.<sup>19</sup>

Some directors and playwrights still believe that a chorus is a vital and necessary part of a production, when adapting and staging ancient texts, or in theatre in general: it is not easy today to reach this target, especially in western culture, which seems to have lost the 'choral attitude', i.e. the experience of communal activity, in theatre as in other aspects of everyday life. Something similar to such a collective experience can be felt perhaps in mass events such as religious feasts, pop concerts and sporting events (see for instance the ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games in July 2008, with a huge chorus of percussionists, dancers and mime artists).

The experience of a chorus can also be shared by a group of persons with a common passion: the members of a club, a parish or a brotherhood, but also a group such as the Teatro delle Albe—as they have been working together for many years—or a small community such as Diol Kadd, where the few inhabitants share everyday life and common projects, not only in theatre. The family ties and the social relationships are particularly important in this case, as they can determine the composition of a chorus and therefore the success of the production. On July 25<sup>th</sup> 2008, soon after the

performance in Milan, Mandiaye N'Diaye told me that he first tried to start a project in the suburbs of Dakar: he did not succeed because he was not introduced by any group, social or religious institution, or family and therefore, as a stranger, he could not enter the community and gain its confidence. In his native village, on the contrary, he is still considered as part of a family and a community, despite his having left Africa twenty years ago, when he was very young. Here, as happens with the Albe in Ravenna, the whole community becomes a chorus: the production involves not only actors and audience, but the entire village.<sup>20</sup>

I find important meeting points between the ancient Athens mirrored by Aristophanes and the two contemporary places which host the productions I am discussing. The ritual and collective dimension of a chorus—which a modern audience in Italy finds more and more difficult to experience—can survive in a fortunate exception such as Ravenna, or in the tradition of other countries such as Senegal. In the 2008 *Ploutos*, in particular, the choral dimension is the background of the entire production, but also its first cause and ultimate aim. The Diol Kadd community gathers together to play and represent itself, through Aristophanes. The Wolof language does not have a word for theatre—as the director tells the audience—so Mandiaye has sought a model for the production in a very ancient rite, performed by a double chorus of men and women, which can be found with similar features in other areas of Africa. 'The circle of the *sabàr* rite'—I translate from the Italian programme of the Senegalese production—'is a place where women can say all they want and omit what they do not want to reveal [...] It is a ceremony where women express their complaints, where, however, the dance could help define the relationship between sexes: drums have the power to pierce women and induce them to arouse men, with a sexual and verbal defiance at the same time'. The *sabàr* rite is based on verbal abuse, obscene and provocative gestures with a strong sexual component and an extraordinary feminine presence: it recalls similar rites which were frequent and popular in Aristophanes' Greece, such as the women-only celebration of Demeter portrayed in his *Thesmophoriazusae* (*Women at the Thesmophoria Festival*), or the well-known *gephurismòi* (mockeries from the bridge) which took place on the road to Eleusis and are evoked by the chorus of Initiates in Aristophanes' *Frogs*.<sup>21</sup>

These rites are not limited to Greece, of course: in his survey of ancient Egypt Herodotus describes the journey of a ship towards Bubastis (*Histories* II, 60), where the women on board cast insults and show their genitals to those standing on the river banks. Such rites—like the verbal duels studied by Victor Turner among Ndembus or the rain-making ceremony among the Barongas in South Eastern Africa—include the exhibition of genitals, the miming of sexual acts, obscene language and abuse with an apotropaic function.<sup>22</sup>

In the case of *The Game of Wealth and Poverty* a double fascination comes to the production from the echo of both an African tradition and Aristophanic comedies where similar rites are evoked and described. The ancient texts combine in quite a new way with Senegalese elements. The *sabàr* rite becomes the essential frame of the play, in time and space terms: every character is moving inside the rite circle., i.e. the dance square which is also a stage, delimited on the rear side by the musicians and drums, on the front side by the audience, on the left side by women and on the right side by men. The two groups sit apart, during the production, but at intervals they rise to face each other, physically and verbally, with insults and abuses, either as a whole chorus or as single members. The use of the chorus in these interludes between the episodes recalls in particular another Aristophanic comedy: in *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.E.) half a chorus of men and half of women face each other on stage at intervals, creating a sort of public plot, parallel and complementary to the private plot of characters played by

actors.<sup>23</sup>

In the Senegalese adaptation, faithful to the ancient conception of Greek drama, the chorus frequently speaks with the authority of the whole community and plays a role in the action. A special role, however, is given to some women who not only lead the chorus and represent it in episodes, but also dance, mime sexual acts and challenge men with provocative gestures, in musical interludes, and they get in response the same acts. They also dance at the compelling sound of drums, at their turn, and each time the dancer falls in a sort of *trance*, as the music gets frantic: the movements of head, arms and legs become perturbed and convulsive, in perfect unison with the drums.

This element also recalls another specific feature of Ancient Greek Comedy: the constant mixture of different media and expressive forms—words, gesture, music, dance—that was once a common background of rite and theatre, in ancient Athens as in many parts of the world. While today the verbal component has a preeminent role (especially in Western theatre) in Mandiaye's production the gesture, music and dance play altogether a major part, not only in the interludes of dance and music, but also in the episodes.

#### BEYOND THE STAGE, A PROJECT.

At this point, it is easy to understand why the plot adapted from *Ploutos* by Mandiaye N'Diaye does not involve just a few actors, as in Aristophanic comedy, but a whole community on stage. In this respect the production is significantly different from *All'inferno!*, whose pessimistic and individualistic spirit derived both from its set (a symbolic Hell) and its direct term of reference in reality (Northern Italy). In the 1996 production the characters of Master and Servant were alone in an hostile world. They met some characters just as poor, unlucky and desperate as they were; when they found the god Ploutos they saw in him a way of redemption and escape for themselves, however personal and illusory it might be in the end.

In *The Game of Wealth and Poverty*, the main characters are not at all alone: one of them—Dara, the master, comparable to the Aristophanic comic hero—decides to go and seek for the blind god of Wealth (Nawet/Ploutos) and cure his eyes; as he explains to others, he aims not only at improving his own lifestyle, or his family's property, but at saving the whole village from poverty. He wants everybody in the village to participate and help him, and so he keeps constantly facing, addressing and involving the community in the project. In the beginning the others do not trust him, they mock and abuse him, so he has to leave the scene alone with his servant: on their way back they are received with skepticism, even though they have actually found Nawet and he is following them to the village. The god is significantly a very big man, blind but very stubborn and skeptical too, at first: for a short time he tries to refuse any offer of cure and assistance from the two men, because he fears they would cheat him and take advantage on his powers, as has happened in the past.

After a while the comic hero succeeds in his project, the god is cured and recovers his sight, and the three main characters come back to stage dressed in shining new clothes and showing many material signs of wealth. This time they get everyone's attention, as they try to persuade the others that together they can pursue a more equal wealth distribution, in a collective instead of individual sense. Their aspect and words provoke a general enthusiasm. The only negative voice which tries to oppose the project—as in Aristophanes—is the personification of Poverty, called Penia in Greek and identified with Noor in Senegalese religion. In *All'inferno!* her role was played by a symbolic animal, typical of poor cultures, the she-ass Fari (Ermanna Montanari), while here Noor is played by a man with fake ass-ears and a white tunic. The original duel

between wealth and poverty of Aristophanes' *Ploutos* is freely adapted to fit actual problems and modern times: on the one hand, Noor praises a decent lifestyle acquired through honest hard work, on the other he tries to point out to everyone the risk of a too fast, easy or even unjust enrichment. According to the new models of the global economy worldwide, the words uttered by the original Aristophanic character become here a critique of ephemeral and dangerous wealth, described as a bunch of easy money, a rainfall of banknotes, a river of Coca Cola, a mountain of cigarettes.

Even if Noor at first loses the duel—he is abused, attacked and thrust out—later in the show it turns out that he is right: as every man and woman in the village wants to become rich, they start to fight each other and chase Nawet, asking him for money ('*l'argent!*', they shout at him, significantly in French!). Finally the angry and disappointed god leaves the village forever, and his benefactors are left alone and naked. The production has in a way a bitter end, and yet it is not a surprise for the audience: a leaflet written by the company is distributed at the entrance, and is read aloud before the production. The Sirens of easy wealth and fast economic development which attract poor people—the leaflet says—are often just empty promises; real wealth is still the privilege of a few fortunate ones, foreign banks, multinational business companies or enterprises which control the local economy of many countries; meanwhile, the life conditions of most people do not show a significant and enduring improvement, or even get worse.

The words of the leaflet, like the fears expressed by Poverty / Noor, call to mind the unequal wealth distribution in most African Countries, and all over the world. Moreover, as economic and environmental studies confirm, rapid and unpredictable development in highly populated countries such as China or India, if it is not balanced by adequate international agreements and cooperative politics, can irreversibly alter not only the global economy, but also the planet's natural system and climate, with the greatest dangers for the poorest part of the population. The rapid economic development of industrial countries, careless of its consequences, to date has brought the planet to a dangerous point. In the suburbs of the world too there should be a way to improve conditions and lifestyle, and Wealth should not necessarily mean consuming resources and destroying the environment.

Such an approach inspired the director Mandiaye N'Diaye—not only on stage but also in real life—as well as those who share his dream and take part in his Takkuligey Project (the term means 'to act together'). For decades the village of Diol Kadd has been steadily depopulated by economic crisis: most men went away to find a job in the city, as agriculture was not sufficient for their needs, and left their women, children and parents alone at home. To give the village a new hope, in 2002 Mandiaye created an association and since then he has been seeking funds in Italy, Senegal and around the world; but he has also asked his friends, mostly Italian institutions and artists, to join in and make contributions. In the past, many Italian writers, directors and artists have felt the fascination of Africa, where they often travelled and worked (for instance, the filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, mentioned above, filmed both *Edipo Re* and a modern version of the *Oresteia* in Africa), and modern directors choose African countries for social projects and workshops (the theatre director Marco Baliani, for instance, has worked with the 'lost children' in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya).<sup>24</sup> Among them, the writer and filmmaker Gianni Celati in 1997 visited Mali, Senegal and Mauritania with Jean Talon (his diaries of that poetic journey became a book, *Avventure in Africa*: see Celati, 1998). Celati joined the Takkuligey Project in 2003: with the participation of Mandiaye N'Diaye, Moussa Ka and other inhabitants of Diol Kadd, he wrote and directed the film *Diol Kadd. Recita in un villaggio del Senegal* (Diol Kadd. A performance in a Senegalese Village).

These contributors are cited by Mandiaye at the end of the show, together with other partners of the project: schools, institutions, municipalities (such as Ravenna, Bologna, Lecce). He mentions the great job they are all doing, not only in order to make this production possible, but also to improve the living conditions in Diol Kadd with the project called 3T. *Terra teatro turismo* (Land, theatre, tourism: see [www.diolkadd.org/](http://www.diolkadd.org/) for photos, interviews and information). In these years they helped to start cultivating a large piece of land, to build a new structure for a cooperative and 'responsible' tourism—for those who want to visit Africa and also help local economies—and of course to promote theatre by opening a school and producing shows such as a new Senegalese adaptation of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (*Ubu Buur*).<sup>25</sup>

The constant work of Diol Kadd inhabitants, volunteers, artists and institutions has recently made possible the launch of a new program, called *Bideew* (Stars): by 2010 it aims at promoting a theatre festival; improving the agricultural development; building hospitals, schools, and dormitories; financing with microcredit some economic activities which should help the village people to start an independent and enduring development and to keep on living without external aid (as the proverb says, 'do not give us fish, but teach us how to fish by ourselves'). In the real world, Mandiaye and the Diol Kadd people do not follow the way chosen by the characters of the Senegalese *Ploutos*, but quite the opposite.

For all these reasons this production is significant not only in an artistic sense, but as a sign of productive cooperation between Italy and Africa: a symbolic bridge over the Mediterranean—I cite Mandiaye's words—and also between Northern and Southern Italy. These last words make the Italian audience laugh, as the distance is more metaphoric than spatial, more cultural than territorial, and yet is still very strong. For many social and historical reasons Italy has always been torn in different parts, separated by real or metaphoric walls. To build a symbolic bridge, here, can often be tougher than elsewhere, especially now that Italy faces increases in immigration both larger and faster compared to other countries. In fact, the recent immigration flows seem to divide rather than join the different areas of Italy. For centuries the southern regions have been the most affected by social plagues such as extreme poverty and unemployment; today those very regions on the Mediterranean coasts are the front line of Europe. They try to solve many immediate problems, especially in the short term, caused by the arrivals of thousands of immigrants by sea, often in terrible and unhealthy conditions. Southern Italy does not have economic resources for these immigrants, nor space to house them, nor jobs to give them, except for the agricultural work. So most immigrants seek a job in the bigger cities and industrial zones of Northern Italy, and they must face problems such as language barriers, difficult working conditions, a shortage of mosques and other non-Catholic worship spaces, scarcity of schools for foreigners, insufficient assistance for children, expensive housing. Lower-class Italian workers share these problems, and they suffer, too, from competing with foreign workers, lack of security and confidence, and the sense of otherness caused by forced cohabitation with different cultures, lifestyles and religions, especially in the slums and outskirts of cities. In the past years there has been a rapid growth of crime and prostitution among immigrants, on one hand, but also intolerance, racism and violence by the indigenous population against immigrants on the other. This happens especially among the poorest and socially disadvantaged people, and in those 'borderline zones' where theatre, as I explained above, tries to promote integration and mutual confidence.

## UTOPIA, OR THE SUBURBS OF 'PARADISE'.

In this regard, among the current Italian versions of *Ploutos* that take place in the suburbs, I add as a last example a project still in progress which also aims at joining two 'fringe zones' usually excluded by official theatre: a slum of Rome, Italy's biggest city, and the industrial outskirts of Venice (that was once a cultural capital, now in danger of becoming a 'dead town' or a tourist trap). In 2007 the sleepy and conservative cultural landscape of Venice was remarkably shaken by the arrival from Rome of Maurizio Scaparro, the new artistic director of the Biennale International Theatre Festival. His main target is to involve young people in a national theatre which is deeply afflicted and felt as very 'old' regarding audience, managers and participants.<sup>26</sup>

Under Scaparro's directions, for the first time in Italy, Venice has begun to host a free international Theatre Campus. The productions on stage at the Venice Theatre Festival (November 2008–March 2009) are based on workshops led by professional directors or actors and attended by young people, mostly pupils of theatre schools (see the English site [www.labiennale.org/en/theatre/](http://www.labiennale.org/en/theatre/)). As a title for this festival Scaparro chose 'The Mediterranean' and he offered to his guest artists five great themes to work on: 'Shakespeare's Sea', 'Myths rediscovered', 'Once upon a Time', 'The *Lingua franca* ('pidgin') of the Mediterranean Ports', 'Sans Papiers' (clandestines). The last area is the most interesting to our subject, because its themes and key-words are *banlieues* (suburbs), immigration, frontiers, passports... Scaparro himself has always been very sensitive to these themes, and particularly to suburbs, in many productions during his long career, and most recently in a film currently in theatres, named *L'ultimo Pulcinella* (The last Pulcinella, 2008). The title comes from the main character, a modern version of Pulcinella, the popular mask of the Italian *commedia dell'Arte*: in Scaparro's film he travels once more on the same road that centuries ago brought Italian theatre companies (*comici dell'arte*), heirs of an old tradition (*teatro all'improvviso* or impromptu theatre), from Italy to the French royal court. The modern Pulcinella is not, like his ancestor, welcomed in the rich palace of Versailles but in the present-day outskirts: he moves from the dangerous slums of Naples to a *banlieue* of Paris. Both environments share the same harsh social problems—unemployment, crime, drug-dealing, immigration conflicts, violence, riots, and street fighting with policemen. Here, in these suburbs, theatre can be a form of social redemption, a hope for the hopeless, a way to rescue a life, especially among young people: this is the core message of Scaparro's film, of his Theatre Festival and of most productions of the present Biennale. They are thus conceived as pieces of life and history from the present and past of many suburbs of the world, in difficult situations and countries.<sup>27</sup>

One workshop in particular is led by a well-known Italian actor, Massimo Popolizio, at his first experience as a director after twenty-seven years of acting (in 2002 he played two versions of Dionysus, in Euripides' *Bacchae* and Aristophanes' *Frogs*, directed by Luca Ronconi, at the Greek Theatre of Syracuse<sup>28</sup>). Like Scaparro, Popolizio is from Rome, and very sensible of social problems and opportunities especially for young people in suburbs. He commissioned a production for Teatro Tor Bella Monaca, a new theatre opened in 2005 which was included in the circuit of the major theatre company of Rome (Teatro di Roma), along with other outskirts theatres (*teatri di cintura*), in order to improve cultural life and encourage theatre participation in the suburbs.<sup>29</sup>

Tor Bella Monaca is a huge, poor suburb of Rome, crowded in the Sixties with tall block of flats and uncomfortable buildings and still densely inhabited, mostly by young people and immigrants. In the Greater Rome municipality, this area has the highest percentages of social disease and crime, former convicts, persons on probation,

youngsters who very often leave school early and have drug problems. Local news agencies point out in particular the acts of young gangster street bands who menace and terrify schoolchildren, sometimes with racial aggression.

For these reasons, Popolizio has created a production specially made for young people of this suburb, choosing Aristophanes' *Ploutos* as the best text which fits the theatre space, the environment and its social conditions. He asked playwrights Stefano Ricci and Gianni Forte for a free adaptation in the local Roman dialect.<sup>30</sup> Popolizio and some professional actors worked in January and February 2009 with a group of almost fifty people, including students of theatre schools, a band of musicians aged 8–16 (called Banda Rustica), and other youngsters from Tor Bella Monaca. After the *première* in Rome, the production, named *Ploutos, o della ricchezza* (Ploutos, or Wealth) was hosted by the Biennale: not in Venice (too touristic and 'noble' a set for the purpose), but at Teatro Aurora in the industrial suburbs of Marghera, outside Venice. Here the theatre association Questa Nave has been working since 1989 with theatre workshops and productions, in order to promote a theatrical culture among workers and students.<sup>31</sup> Through them, perhaps, there is at least some hope of reaching inhabitants who never go to theatre and do not even know that there is a theatre nearby. Like the Diol Kadd project, this *Ploutos* too is meant to be a bridge, an ideal twinning between 'two suburbs, on the opposite coasts of an 'urban' Mediterranean sea' ([www.labiennale.org/it/](http://www.labiennale.org/it/)). Hopefully, given its success, the production could go on tour in other major theatres: from the suburbs to the City.

This last example, in my opinion, is another sign of the new trend I suggested about Aristophanes: his comedies—*Ploutos* in particular—are more and more often adapted and staged in the most disadvantaged suburbs of the world. The very choice of a specific site for each production is significant: it could be a slum of an industrial city, a dead town abandoned or left behind by civilization, in rich countries or in Africa, in Diol Kadd and elsewhere, where Aristophanes is more popular than ever. Although he lived in Athens, the centre of the ancient world, his plots fit perfectly the poorest places of the earth, in these desperate and chaotic times.

The motto of the Diol Kadd Project cited on its website is: 'The stranger allows us to be ourselves by making a stranger out of us' (E. Jabes). To see ourselves with the eyes of the Other, African or not, can be a good exercise just to start, for everyone. A project of cooperation between Africa and different parts of Italy—such as the one created in Diol Kadd—may seem to some absurd and idealistic, just like the crazy plots of the Aristophanic comedies. It could be just a *utopia* (non-place in Greek), i.e. something that can only be realized in fantasy, but not in reality.

And yet somebody is trying to make these dreams come true, with encouraging results. It might be a dream, but many believe that theatre can be a hope for the hopeless, that it can help to make their life a little better and to reduce those problems that are increasing in recent years, due to factors such as heavier immigration and worse unemployment; intolerance, ethnic and religious conflicts; crime and violence; leaving school early; the use of drugs and alcohol, especially among young people. For these reasons many spectators are thankful to Mandiaye and his friends, from Senegal and Italy. They hope they will succeed, and support them as much as they can, so that their project can live and grow. To believe in such an idea, and make it possible, can be just a small drop of hope in a huge ocean of despair; but it is however a good start, a best practice which should inspire others as well.

Many other artists keep on pursuing such a dream in their work, and that is perhaps the best heritage of the Greek comic author. Aristophanes encourages us to believe that everything is possible, to imagine peace (in wartime), wealth, justice and equal



rights for everyone (amid general poverty), power to women (in male-dominated societies), and much more. Aristophanes has always interpreted and transposed the desires and aspirations of his times, even the more absurd and difficult to realize, or simply to confess. If he could come back to life, today, maybe he would write many other 'unbelievable' stories: for instance, one about the son of an American woman and an immigrant from Kenya who becomes the President of the world's foremost industrial nation. In this regard, at least, he would see his comic fantasy come true: and this thought gives us some hope for a better future, in Diol Kadd and elsewhere.

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup>On hybridity and syncretism, particularly in Aristophanes' South-African productions, see van Zyl Smit (2008: 373–85).

<sup>3</sup>For theoretical background, case studies and bibliography see Goff (2005), Goff and Simpson (2007), Hardwick and Gillespie (2007) and Hardwick and Stray (2008). See also [www.postcolonialweb.org](http://www.postcolonialweb.org) last accessed 29 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup>See the works on classical reception cited in the bibliographical references, particularly Hall and Wrigley (2007: 117–34 and 232–46 respectively) for some recent adaptations of Aristophanic comedies in India and South Africa.

<sup>5</sup>van Zyl Smit (2008: 375). For an overview of Aristophanes performances in South Africa see also van Zyl Smit (2007: 232–46). On the reception of classics in post-colonial contexts see also the bibliographical references and particularly Hardwick and Gillespie (2007).

<sup>6</sup>On the cultural process of translation see Hardwick, 2000; on translating Aristophanic humour see especially J. Robson 2008: 168–82.

<sup>7</sup>For a close survey on personal abuse in Aristophanes see Treu, 1999; for the multilingualism in Aristophanes' comedies and its modern versions see Negri and Treu (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup>See the definitions of 'equivalent' in the basic vocabulary of reception studies (Hardwick 2003: 9).

<sup>9</sup>Pasolini was fascinated by Africa in his last years and filmed there a great part of *Edipo Re* and *Appunti per un'Orestide africana* (Notes for an African *Oresteia*, 1969–1973): see Treu, 2009: 74, 81, 90.

<sup>10</sup>See, in English, Montanino (2006: 9 ff.), Picarazzi (2000) and the English section 'Romagna Africana' at [www.teatrodellealbe.com/index2.htm](http://www.teatrodellealbe.com/index2.htm) last accessed 29 April 2009.

<sup>11</sup>On the Neapolitan situation and the crime organization see the Italian book by Roberto Saviano *Gomorra* ([www.robertosaviano.com/](http://www.robertosaviano.com/) last accessed 29 April 2009.) and the movie with the same title, directed by Matteo Garrone, 2008 ([www.mymovies.it/gomorra/](http://www.mymovies.it/gomorra/) last accessed 29 April 2009.)

<sup>12</sup>About this peculiar aspect of Aristophanes' comedy, and Martinelli's adaptations, see Treu 2007b: 259–66).

<sup>13</sup>For multilingualism in modern reception of classical drama and poetry see L. Hardwick, 2007.

<sup>14</sup>For more details on the show and pictures see, in Italian, Treu (2005: 93–100) and, in English, Treu (2007b).

<sup>15</sup>In some Aristophanic comedies the Attic dialect shared by actors and audience sometimes alternates with other Greek dialects spoken by foreign characters, such as the Megarian and Theban in *Acharnians*, or the Spartan women and men in *Lysistrata*. On these linguistic aspects, and some possible translations and transpositions on stage, see Negri and Treu (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup>For some recent Italian stagings of *Frogs* see Treu (2005: 89ff.), (2007b: 259–61) and Schironi (2007).

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<sup>17</sup> He is the author of *Sterminio* ('Massacre') which Martinelli staged in 2006.

<sup>18</sup> For Italy see Del Corno, 1989; Treu, 2007a, 2007b: 256–61 and 2009: 39–41.

<sup>19</sup> See for this aspect of Aristophanic chorus Treu 1999: 34ff.

<sup>20</sup> See the diary on the rehearsals of *Ubu Buur* in Senegal, with texts, videos and sketches, in Martinelli and Montanari (2008: 69–93). A comparable experience in Italy is Teatro Povero (Monticchiello, Siena), which stages a production every year involving the whole town. See Andrews, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> See Treu (1999: 193 ff.) and Hall and Wrigley (2007: 261).

<sup>22</sup> See Treu (1999: 141ff.)

<sup>23</sup> On the role of chorus and actors, in *Lysistrata* and other comedies, see Treu (1999: 31ff.).

<sup>24</sup> See above for Pasolini's movies *Edipo Re* ('Oedipus the King', 1967) and *Appunti per un'Orestide Africana* ('Notes for an African Oresteia', 1969–1973) and see Baliani (2005) about the show *Pinocchio Nero* ('Black Pinocchio') which developed from a theatre workshop with the children of Nairobi.

<sup>25</sup> On the making of this show, see the diary and video in Martinelli and Montanari (2008).

<sup>26</sup> See Treu (2007b) and Treu (2009: 22).

<sup>27</sup> See for instance the workshop on *Hamlet* (10<sup>th</sup> November, 2008) directed by Gabriele Vacis in Palestine, or the work of the director Roger Assaf who has been working for many years with young actors and musicians in Beirut, Lebanon.

<sup>28</sup> See both Treu (2007b) and Schironi (2007).

<sup>29</sup> See the reportage by Mathilde Gérard on Tor Bella Monaca slums and its theatre, in German ([www.cafebabel.com/ger/article/19487/am-rande-roms.html](http://www.cafebabel.com/ger/article/19487/am-rande-roms.html)<sup>20</sup> last accessed 29 April 2009.), the photo album with striking images by Chiara Lalli ([www.flickr.com/photos/chiaralalli/sets/72157607733984305/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/chiaralalli/sets/72157607733984305/) last accessed 29 April 2009.); for Tor Bella Monaca theatre information see [www.teatrotorbellamonaca.it/](http://www.teatrotorbellamonaca.it/) last accessed 29 April 2009, and [www.culturaroma.it/english/spaziperlacultura/34/schedabase.asp](http://www.culturaroma.it/english/spaziperlacultura/34/schedabase.asp) (in English, last accessed 29 April 2009.).

<sup>30</sup> See Ricci and Forte (2009).

<sup>31</sup> On the Venice production see [www.questanave.com](http://www.questanave.com) last accessed 29 April 2009, and Giovannelli (2009).