

KAAI THEATER

Laila Soliman

Zig Zig

30/9 > 1/10/2016 – 20:30 – Kaaistudio's

theater • 1h30 • in English and Arabic (surtitled in English and Arabic)

EXTRA Join us for a **post-performance talk** with Laila Soliman, on **30/9**.

RE:MAKE

How are we to 'remake' society at the dawn of the 21st century? On 1/10 **Liesbet Stevens** gives a first RE:MAKE TALK at 7 PM: *on Gender Stereotypes as A Challenge for Law and Society*.

CREDITS

directed by

Laila Soliman

performed by

Nadia Amin (tonight replaced by Habiba Makhlouf), Mona Hala, Reem Hegab, Zainab Magdy, Nancy Mounir

producer, acting coach & lighting designer

Ruud Gielens

historical researcher

Katharine Halls

director's assistants

Hakeem Abdelnaeem, Habiba Makhlouf

costume designer

Lina Aly

technical manager

Omar Madkour

translator (English)

Katharine Halls

translator (German)

Anne Simmering, Ebtihal Shedid

production Manager

Ebtihal Shedid

production

SHISH / Brussels - Cairo

co-production

Embassy of Switzerland in Egypt Office for International Cooperation / Cairo

HAU / Berlin

Forum Freies Theater/ Düsseldorf

BIT Teatergarasjen / Bergen

Zürcher Theater Spektakel / Zürich

D-CAF / Cairo

Kaaithheater / Brussels

in cooperation with

15/3 Studios / Cairo

Goethe-Institut / Cairo

co-production

House on Fire

supported by the

Cultural Programme of the European Union.



RE:MAKE

How are we to 'remake' society at the dawn of the 21st century? This is the central question at the beginning of this season, and it forms the leitmotif throughout the 2016-2017 programme at the Kaaithheater. In times of climate change, migration, international terrorism, extreme privatization, increasing inequality and fast-paced globalization, our society has become so complex that this question is increasingly difficult to answer. But it is precisely due to the challenge of these crises that the call for alternatives resounds ever louder. Where is our (political) imagination and how are we practically moving towards a different future? Which road will we take? Where do we want to go?

'Business as usual' is no longer an option. The dangers of realizing political utopias and of 'total engineering' are well known, but at the same time the need for inspiring political-utopian ideas has never been greater. What are the current impulses for new ideals of social engineering, for new utopias? Where is the necessary imagination born and what role might art and culture play? Who is taking concrete initiatives to start establishing that new society?

RE:MAKE is a series of talks and debates that bring both concrete practice and new ideas to the fore.

On **1/10 at 19h** Liesbeth Stevens talks about gender stereotypes as a challenge for law and society. Stereotypical attitudes to women and men and to gender are still commonplace in our society. The judicial world is also not immune to them. Where are these apparent? What are their effects? And how can they be counteracted?

- Liesbet Stevens is Assistant Director of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men. She also teaches sexual law at KULeuven.

SAVE THE DATE

On **Monday 17/10** the American moral philosopher **Susan Neiman** seeks to chart a middle course between blind utopianism and cynical realism in her talk *On Grown-Up Idealism*.

>> kaaitheater.be/remake

ZIG ZIG

nl/ De Britse soldaten vielen het huis binnen in de namiddag, tegen vier uur. Mijn schoonmoeder vroeg hen: “Zullen we jullie wat ganzen brengen?”, maar zij antwoordden “Zig zig.”

Tijdens de Britse bezetting van Egypte – honderd jaar geleden – vallen soldaten Nazlat al-Shobak binnen, een klein dorpje in de buurt van Gizeh. De dorpelingen beschuldigen de militairen van extreem wangedrag en de zaak komt voor een militaire rechtbank. Tussen de getuigen bevinden zich een twaalftal vrouwen die verkracht werden.

De Egyptische theatermaakster Laila Soliman vond de transcripties in Britse nationale archieven. *Zig Zig* is een documentaire theatervoorstelling die vertrekt van de transcripties van die moedige getuigenissen. Vier actrices brengen dit historische materiaal tot leven en linken het met hun persoonlijke ervaringen en de hedendaagse verkrachtingscultuur. Is er, een eeuw later, wel echt iets veranderd?

- Laila Soliman is schrijfster, regisseuse en dramaturge. Ze woont en werkt in Caïro en studeerde aan de Duitse school en de Amerikaanse Universiteit in Cairo en aan DasArts in Amsterdam. Ze was eerder te gast in het Kaaitheater met *Whims of Freedom* (2015).

fr/ L'après-midi, vers quatre heures, les soldats britanniques sont entrés dans la maison. Ma belle-mère leur a demandé : « Voulez-vous qu'on vous apporte des oies ? », mais ils ont répondu « Zig zig. »

Pendant l'occupation britannique de l'Égypte – il y a cent ans – des soldats ont fait irruption à Nazlat al-Shobak, un petit village dans les environs de Gizeh. Les villageois ont accusé les militaires d'inconduite extrême et l'affaire a comparu devant un tribunal militaire. Parmi les témoins se retrouvait une douzaine de femmes ayant été violées.

La créatrice égyptienne de théâtre Laila Soliman a retrouvé la transcription dans des archives nationales britanniques. *Zig Zig* est un spectacle de théâtre documentaire partant des transcriptions de ces témoignages courageux. Quatre actrices donnent vie à ce matériau historique et le relie à leurs expériences personnelles et à la culture contemporaine du viol. Un siècle plus tard, y a-t-il vraiment quelque chose qui ait changé ?

- Laila Soliman est auteure, metteuse en scène et dramaturge. Elle vit et travaille au Caire et elle a étudié au German School et à l'université américain de Caire et à DasArts à Amsterdam. Elle a été précédemment à l'affiche du Kaaitheater avec *Whims of Freedom* (2015).

en/ The British soldiers entered the house in the afternoon, about 4pm. My mother-in-law asked the soldiers: "Shall we get you some geese?," but they replied "Zig zig."

During the British occupation of Egypt a hundred years ago, soldiers invaded Nazlat al-Shobak, a small village near Giza. A court of inquiry was convened to investigate the villagers' allegations that the army had looted and burned Nazlat al-Shobak, terrorized its residents and executed five village notables. Among the witnesses were twelve women who were raped.

Over the next few months, the nationalist movement took up these women's stories in their slogans and pamphlets. Yet they were quickly swept aside by the political discourse of independence, and before long, history had forgotten them entirely.

The Egyptian theatre maker Laila Soliman found the transcripts in British national archives. *Zig Zig* is a documentary theatre performance that takes the transcripts of these courageous witnesses as its starting point. Four actresses bring this historical material to life and link it to their personal experiences and to the contemporary culture of rape. A century on, has anything really changed?

- Laila Soliman is a playwright, director and dramaturge. She lives and works in Cairo. She studied at the German School and the American University in Cairo and at DasArts in Amsterdam. She has previously appeared at the Kaaitheater with *Whims of Freedom* (2015).

SONGS

Yamama Hilwa (Pretty dove) – 1919 (not confirmed)

Lyricist: Muhammad Yunis al-Qadi

Composer: Dawud Husni

Wallahi Tistahil Ya 'Albi (Serves you right, my heart) – 1920

Lyricist: Amin Sidqi

Composer: Sayyid Darwish

Ten million soldiers to the war have gone – 1915

An American anti-war song influential within the pacifist movement that existed in the United States prior to its entering World War I.

Lyricist: Alfred Bryan

Composer: Al Piantadosi

Mademoiselle from Armentières (Hinky Dinky Parlez-Vous)

One of a family of drinking/marching songs popular amongst British and American soldiers during WW I. Opinions as to their origins vary, and different versions abound, but almost all sets of lyrics have in common a vulgarly told tale of a sexual encounter, consensual or otherwise, between a young woman and a soldier on a break from the front lines.

>> www.zigzig.info

Egyptian theatre director Laila Soliman on *Zig Zig* and drawing from historical archives

Soha Elsirgany, Ahram Online, Tuesday 9 Aug 2016.

Directed by Laila Soliman, *Zig Zig* retells the story of 12 Egyptian women who were raped by British soldiers in 1919. Since Egyptian sources held no complete transcript of the events, the play takes the 1919 archives from the British Foreign Office as the material voicing the women's stories. The stories of these women are little known to the public, yet this revisiting of history is not new to Soliman. Her works are recurrently drawings from archival material framed on stage into poignant theatrical pieces. An established Egyptian director on the rise since her first play in 2004 (*The Retreating World*), Soliman extensively studied theatre. She produced a number of important plays across the years, including '*Horba, Images of Alienation* in 2006, *Lessons in Revolting* in 2011, and in the same year a documentary theatre series titled *No Time for Art* on military and police violence. Soliman speaks to Ahram Online about *Zig Zig*, which debuted in April at DCAF Festival.

With over a decade of experience, how would you say your subject matter has changed over time?

My first play was about the siege of Iraq, so from the beginning my plays have been socially and politically aware. The shift was in form, from fiction to documentary. I had already taken that direction since 2009, then [Egypt's 2011] revolution sort of pushed it forward.

Your previous play *Whims of Freedom* (2014) was also drawn from archives of the 1919 revolution. How did *Zig Zig* emerge from that?

We were already working on the documentary performance *Whims of Freedom*, [when] we found the documents on the Nazlet El-Shobak investigations. It was quite late to fully ingenerate them in the performance we were working on. I felt they deserved to be better framed and be the subject of a separate play.

What draws you to the past to create contemporary performances?

I'm interested in this idea of alternative history writing; history should not be only one narrative, a nationalist narrative decided on by the government. Looking for ways to rewrite history was also triggered further by the revolution. Of course nobody has the whole truth, but at least there should be multiple narratives, and that of the individual citizen shouldn't be undermined or left out. Another point was that women are often not equally represented. And so it's not just about an alternative to the nationalist narrative, but to the patriarchal narrative as well.

While it is based on facts, a large part of the women's stories is left to the imagination, and sometimes you even share your own questions in the play. What were some considerations you had in mind while presenting the script?

I think that's a subjective interpretation, I don't think it was left to the imagination. I think we were pointing to the gaps and trying to work with these gaps. There were many more versions or directions that would have gone into interpretations. Like if I had translated the text for example, or used certain costumes, or by trying to re-enact certain scenes it would have went into interpretation, but I tried to leave it as open as possible, to leave it to the audience.

The play draws links between the historical material, the women's personal experiences and today's rape culture. Perhaps the play not only tries to bridge times, but also social classes (between the village women of 1919, and contemporary women in 2016)?

I don't know if I was trying to bridge classes, but rather I was trying to break the stereotypes, and suggest that what we know about the past is not always real, and maybe peasant women from that time were more outspoken than we imagine them to be. Bridging the times serves to show that things are not black and white. Even the British soldiers, as bad as they were, did attempt to be more subjective and conduct open investigations.

As the actresses read out the archived interrogations of the women, several times they put the women's credibility in doubt, if one follows the script alone. Yet the whole performance leads us to be on the women's side and believe them. How did you frame this when working on the play?

The mechanism of the conducting interrogations uses well-known patterns. There are people who are trained in how to break the people being questioned. Sometimes of course you can see contradictions and inconsistency in the story. I see the clear mechanism they are using, and how the woman might be confused, or inclined to lie about one thing or another.

The interrogation also uses certain words, like 'violated' when referring to 'rape'.

The choice of words matter and how the question is phrased is all part of that mechanism. This was the only recorded case we found where the women speak out. All over the world it's very common that rape happens as a part of negligence in how the soldiers conduct themselves, or as politically organised. Of course it's not something usually documented. You will never have the absolute answer to whether it was organised or not.

The play begins with an actress talking about a nightmare. Was that the only part that was scripted?

That was actually a dream the actress herself had, which she wrote and shared in the play.

In *Zig Zig* there are songs from the era of the incident, both in Arabic and English, as well as contemporary dance segments. Was the decision to include these means of expression a way to make it more artistically accessible?

I wanted to [present a contrast between the voice of the text] with another [voice of] emotions. It is also about emotional interpretation. These songs are all related to the period. There are always both content choices and emotional choices, so I chose them based on the significance of the song historically, as well as the emotional aspect they could convey.

You've previously described yourself as being 'most interested in an independent, socially and politically aware theatre.' How would you position your work in this context?

Independent is a state of living. Maybe if I were somewhere else, I wouldn't mind working in state theatre. I don't know if it's so much of a choice, or maybe it's a character trait.

What do you hope to find or hope to present to the audience by retelling these scenes from history?

I'm a theatre maker, so I work on the material that interests me in hopes that it will interest the audience as well. I believe that theatre has a different power of communicating with audience members in a direct and hopefully deeper way. I hope reflecting on the past gives us opportunity to reflect on the present.

more theater in English

Tiago Rodrigues *Antony and Cleopatra*

Who is not familiar with the legend? Shakespeare made a tragedy of it and Mankiewicz turned it into a masterful, insanely expensive Hollywood film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. In his version, Tiago Rodrigues does not opt for the monumentality of the legend but goes for a refined distillation by two exceptional dancers.

Kaaistudio's • 13>15/10

Ivo Dimchev *Operville*

Three singers/performers create a succession of intriguing tableaux vivants. Ivo Dimchev's stream of consciousness simultaneously appears on the rear wall. He harnesses the power of the voice, extreme theatricality and a whole arsenal of temperament, and goes in search of what opera is and can be.

Kaaitheater • 14/10

Ruud Gielens, Rachid Benzine & Hiam Abbass *In the Eyes of Heaven*

A prostitute from North Africa during the Arab Spring immerses you in the everyday routine of customers coming and going – including a local governor, an American journalist and a religious leader. The text was written by Rachid Benzine, Europe's great champion of enlightened Islam for the Palestinian film actress Hiam Abbass. Ruud Gielens opted for a sober but intense staging.

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