

Interview for the Catalogue of 'Live Ammo', MOCA Taipei, March 2011

[not edited]

1-Live Ammo: How is the image/ sound in your work related to the reality?

Ella Raidel: 'SUBVERSES - China in Mozambique' is a documentary film and I try to witness a process, which is going on right now in Africa, the investments by the Chinese. Some may say: China is taking over Africa.

When I was the first time in Mozambique I saw busloads of Chinese in red worker uniforms and when I was asking the locals, who they are, they told me, these are prisoners from China working on the construction sites in Mozambique. I was intrigued by the fact that you need Chinese prisoners to work in a country where labor is so cheap. That's why I went back to research on this topic. But if you ask me how is the image related to reality, I have to say, that there is not only one reality, but each of the them, Chinese or the Africans live in their realities and have different point of views on the investments of the Chinese. I tried to give both sides a voice in my film. And more than that I didn't want to do that only through interviews but through the artistic expression of people: I wanted to give them their own voice. That's why I choose poetry slam, which is just now quite popular in Mozambique and Africa.

One day after I just shot some interviews on a construction site, some of the poets ask me to make a video of them as well. They chose the location and setup and I was surprised when one of them, Slam poet Mestre Tchaka, brought me to his poor neighborhood, where he lives, put on a workers helmet and a military shirt and start to perform 'Africa', a poem he wrote about the unfair exploitation of Africa. From that moment on it was clear to me that there can be a relation between these poems and the reality outside on the Chinese construction site. With the other poets it was the same, they chose the location and the poem.

From the Chinese side I also received a very strong voice. On one of my last days of the shooting I received a phone call from a Chinese working for the construction company that he wanted to give me something. When we met, he handed me over a four pages long article he wrote in English about the methods of the Chinese investing in Africa. He wrote about the bribery of the bureaucratic officials, the corruption, the racism on the construction sites and the exploitation of Africa, nothing new, but now in the hands of the Chinese. I was very surprised that he had the courage to write this and offer it to me for my film, which I used then as a voice-over.

For the sound I asked a musician from Mozambique, Matchume Zango, to compose music for the film. He extracted sounds from my video footage and distorted them to beats. The Chinese motif derives, for example, from a cell phone from one of the Chinese in Maputo. So there is also a relation to reality in sound. Sound and image - how real can they be- of course they are both somehow manipulated by the author.

2- Live Ammo: In your film, you are the outsider, how can you perceive your position?

Ella Raidel: I am interested in Chinese topics, probably because I lived several years in Taiwan. So it was quite easy for me to talk to the Chinese in Mozambique. We became friends. They opened the doors for me and let me in. And again, I wanted the contribution of local artists in my film, because I didn't want to be limited to my outsider view. If it comes to shooting documentaries in Africa you always run danger of having a colonial view, an exotic perspective, but in turn, people in Africa also have filmmakers, cameras, opinion and art and they can express themselves. That's why the International Filmfestival Rotterdam invited for the 'Raiding Africa' project several African Filmmakers to China to make their films there. African artists also get to Europe or Asia to do their work there- and vice verses.

3- Live Ammo: The commentary (slam poetry) is forming a meta-narrative of your documentary? How can you make use of them?

Ella Raidel: Voice and all related to it Poetry Slam, Rap, Hip Hop is strong in Africa. The poets from Pl'art d'Alma, the group I worked with, are very strong performers. They meet once per month in the German Cultural Center for the 'Night of Poesia', a night of the 'open microphone', where they can

perform their poetry. More than performing poetry it means to them to have a chance for free expression, because media is censored in Mozambique, and people are scared about expressing their opinion free - especially on political topics. For example the strike was a big issue, when I was there. It is allowed to have a strike and complain about unfair condition, but the police will shoot the demonstrators. Poetry, Poetry Slam, gives them a way to express, what they think. I called my film SUBVERSES, because, their poetry or verses are running like a subtext through the film. They talk about life and death in Mozambique, not directly about the Chinese, but again that's how these realities collide.

4- Live Ammo: Can you talk about the reality effect of the documentary?

Documentary films are always manipulated products. How real can you get? It's a reality within a film reality. Reality in film is always an abstraction, a personal view. Even you put a life camera on a spot, it doesn't prove anything about reality. What I can show is just a fragment of reality.