

The Roving Educator

16. Books, Bands and Pictures – the Intercultural Vision

By Tina Jerman

We are sitting together with our team in our office of EXILE Culture Coordination planning Denis's coming reading trip. No one can remember exactly if it is the 32nd or the 34th. Denis, the old number juggler and engineer, would certainly be able to work out how many people in how many towns he has spoken to in these 17 years.

I telephone Denis, we joke about the weather; snow is lying on the ground here and the temperature in Cape Town is 30 degrees. We discuss details. "Would it be nice for you to relax on the first day in Germany with a cosy meal with my housemates, maybe with roast lamb and beans? Can we fit in a question session at a university in the Netherlands? When do you want to celebrate your birthday with your son and his family in London?"

Everything that seemed complicated runs wonderfully smoothly, steadily, trustingly; in between we discuss the current political situation in South Africa or in the world, with plenty of humour and cordiality, with my colleagues too, who were still teenagers when Denis made his first tour in Germany and are the age of his grandchildren.

I don't know any more how many hours and days of our lives we two have talked to each other, on the phone or at my home in Essen, often a base for his tours; in the evenings, on the days off, with women friends, about God and the world in the truest sense of the word, about the next lecture, about politics, a friend, a book, a film, with a last glass of wine and a little snack – or often before the morning coffee with the left-over thoughts from the day before, which have followed new routes overnight of their own accord. Decoding together, deciphering and developing from such different points of

view, from Denis's scientific-analytical and my art historical – artistic perspective – this has shone a new light on many themes, events and developments.

In this way a deep friendship grew between us. Denis grew very close to my heart. I learned a lot from him; for example, he often advised me when I worked for the Northrhine-Westphalia state government as the One World Commissioner. Denis is not 'objective' in the process, giving pieces of advice, but always starts from my intentions. Our solidarity and harmonious emotional wave-length developed during these joint ponderings. Denis is a wonderful teacher because he is so much more than an expert in his field. He sees a thing from different perspectives, makes connections, for example on the theme of justice in the distribution of resources, and securing peace. He is extraordinarily flexible in his thinking, even when we had different opinions sometimes, as on the subject of HIV/AIDS, whose consequences were underestimated by the ANC and therefore also by Denis and others in South Africa for a long time. Denis's positions were also disputed sometimes in the solidarity movement. For example, on the question of how the basic needs of the population can be satisfied. In the early 2000s Denis, as adviser in the Ministry for Water, took the view that even the poor inhabitants – apart from a free quota – should pay for the costs of water provision. That really annoyed some people in the German solidarity movement terribly. But it did not disturb our friendship.

We first met 17 years ago. A few months previously I had received a call from Edelgard Nkobi, Denis Goldberg's future second wife, asking if we in our EXILE-Cultural Coordination would be interested in working as literature agents for Denis. In preparing for a meeting with him I had met Edelgard beforehand on an unforgettable afternoon at a restaurant on the shore of Lake Baldeney in Essen. She had got to know Denis at an interview in London – the man whom she knew from GDR newspapers of the sixties. They had printed his picture on South African wanted posters. Edelgard clearly admired the freedom fighter. Our meeting was unforgettable because in Edelgard I encountered a woman who could recount a wealth of remarkable experiences in her GDR homeland and later in Africa: for example, her education as a journalist and her work for the GDR news agency

ADN, or her meeting and marriage with Zenzo Nkobi, the photographer son of the ANC Treasurer General, Thomas Nkobi. She got to know Zenzo when she was a student in Leipzig and had followed him in 1975, with her two little girls, to different countries and ANC missions in Africa, to report as a journalist about political developments.

The meeting with Edelgard had been organized by Sabine Kebir whom we had worked with. The political scientist and North Africa expert was, along with Edelgard and Brigitte Haage-Husseini, one of a trio of women who had married African men in the GDR. At the time this was not to be taken for granted for these three highly educated and self-confident GDR citizens; they could easily become Stasi suspects while simply pursuing their marital interests.

Sabine Kebir has described this development wonderfully in her novel *A Bovary from Brandenburg*; the little town of Brandenburg had a partnership with a small communist-governed French town, and on a visit to the GDR women in mini-skirts and men smoking Gauloises, smiling happily, descended from the coach before her 16-year-old eyes. Immediately her interest in the big wide world was awakened and she straight away started French lessons in the town with the old Jewish librarian, a survivor of the Nazi regime. Secretly. Like the main character in her novel, Sabine Kebir in real life left the GDR with her husband Sadek, the Algerian artist and storyteller, and worked for ten years, until 1988, as a political scientist at Oran University.

At the beginning of the nineties the Kebirs were part of the core of artists and experts with whom we in EXILE-Culture Coordination wanted to bring the people in Germany closer to the day-to-day life, culture and political developments in the countries of the south. Since our formation in 1982, our aim has been to use theatre, music, literature, photography and pictorial art as media to show the living conditions of the people there and of the migrants who live among us, their cares and needs, but also their visions and potential, and thus to make globalisation understandable.

At the beginning of the eighties the protests against the Apartheid regime had unleashed a broad movement in Europe. The campaigns of the Anti-Apartheid Movements reached a broad public; campaigns like 'Don't Buy South African fruit' with actions in shops and

supermarkets, organized by the Protestant Women's Organization in Germany. The absolute high point was a concert in 1988 in London's Wembley Stadium. It has become famous as the Free Nelson Mandela Concert, legendary for the support of the best known artists of the time. (18) The concert was broadcast in 63 countries and watched by 600 million people all over the world. The music critic and BBC commentator Robin Denselow wrote later of the concert: "It was the biggest and most spectacular pop-political event of all time, a more political version of Live Aid with the aim of raising consciousness rather than just money." (19) The initiators of this huge success believed like us that art and politics are not exclusive, but that art can make a valuable and lasting contribution towards a more just world, more worthy of human beings. At the time I did not yet know that along with the music producer Tony Hollingsworth, the then spokesman for the ANC, Denis Goldberg, had been involved in the preparations for this mega event.

After his release from a 22-year prison sentence in the high security prison in Pretoria, South Africa, Denis had at long last gone back to his family, who were now living in London, and had soon afterwards taken up activity in the ANC office. He became the spokesman of one of the most important ANC outpost at the time, informed people in many countries about the crimes of the Apartheid state and mobilised resistance against it.

My first professional contact with the culture of South Africa was a memorable concert by the choir Ladysmith Black Mambazo. In 1980 we had put on the festival 'Little man – what can you do?!' along with the WDR [public broadcasters] in Duisburg and invited musicians from different emancipationist political movements. I remember, as well as their melodic and stirring songs, their fascinating dance movements at the microphone, which extraordinarily strengthened the stereo effect of their voices.

Through the organization of tours by musicians like Ladysmith Black Mambazo, including ones to neighbouring European countries, a network of promoters developed, and that was the basis for the formation of the EXILE-Culture Coordination.

South Africa was, along with Latin America, a central focus of our work. Looking for sources of finance, in 1985 we landed in Brussels at the European Commission. At the time we still did not know

anything about the secret negotiations which would lead in that year to Denis Goldberg's release. On the way back we stopped off in Maastricht to see an exhibition from South Africa. *The Hidden Camera* showed photos of unimaginable cruelty in the daily life of South Africa. All the photos had been banned by the censors and smuggled out of the country to alert the public. It was unusual at the time for us in Germany to see the exhibition in the historic town hall in the town centre. It was a spur to us to make our development-political cultural and educational work more professional and to lobby for it. With my little son in tow I visited the office of the Dutch Anti-Apartheid movement in Amsterdam and soon the exhibition was able to be shown in many German towns, accompanied by wide media coverage.

In 1992 the Protestant Church Day took place in the Ruhr region, and EXILE, along with the Dusseldorf cultural centre ZAKK, got the task of inviting artists from South Africa. We were to show how the art scene there came to grips with the current political situation. The apartheid system was on the verge of collapse. On my first visit to South Africa in preparation for this festival I was surprised at the wide ranging and committed way in which artists and intellectuals there were discussing and reflecting on the everyday life of the apartheid state and possible options in a liberated land. Round about the Market Theatre in Johannesburg artists of all colours were working together, almost like a laboratory of the future; and also in the Hillbrow quarter, where we were staying, the officially strict separation of black and white could no longer be maintained.

There, in a panel discussion with Nadine Gordimer, among others, about the current political excessive use of violence, I got to know journalist Birgit Morgenrath. She asked me about my impressions and since then we have been united both by a close friendship and by our common commitment to the beautiful land at the Cape and the intensive cooperation in the production of Denis's autobiography, Peter Heller's film 'Comrade Denis' (20) and this book. The festival *Sol'buyisa – We will bring it back* on the Church Day, with more than 40 performances, concerts and readings in the towns of the Ruhr region, presented the everyday life in South Africa, sometimes with moving seriousness but also with the absurdly comic follies which the misdirected Apartheid system produced.

Today, when Denis has been inscribed in the Golden Books of many German towns and honoured by the award of the Cross of the Federal Order of Merit as a contemporary witness, for his unwavering activity in educational work and as a bridge-builder between Germany and South Africa, it seems impossible to understand that many meetings about South Africa and other countries of the south used to be held only in the back rooms of culture.

Only the experiences of many people in the One World initiatives, church parishes, trade unions, schools and institutions of further education, the exhibitions, theatre performances, films or readings booked by EXILE (and other agencies) over many years have led to the situation where culture and meeting with artists have become an important part of our work, for example with Global Learning, and one worth promoting: world-wide inter-culturality as part and medium of non-racist, humane globalisation.

Back to the beginning of the story: so in 1995 Denis Goldberg, Edelgard Nkobi, Dodo Schulz and I met together for the first time. In a café in Dusseldorf-Oberkassel we discussed for four exciting hours in what form we wanted to work together. Dodo who, being a teacher, had mainly built up cooperation in the educational field, quickly developed an idea about what contribution Denis could make in the fields of anti-racism and human rights. The atmosphere was familiar, cordial and full of humour. Eating together, we talked about our favourite dishes and preferences, we landed on art, and of course the history of South Africa. We told each other anecdotes about our children and simply had a good time together. Only in the last minutes did we decide to try out whether our cooperation would actually work with a reading tour of Mandela's autobiography.

But in fact I had no doubts. Dodo and I were so fascinated by Denis's wide knowledge, his different approaches to topics, his sparkling and convincing ideas. He would draw other people too under his spell. And Edelgard had succeeded once again in bringing people together and sending them on a joint journey. Dodo and I speculated afterwards about the relationship of the two to each other, but the way in which Denis took Edelgard's arm as they left the restaurant said it all to us women. Later, when Denis charmingly argued that it would make sense 'on grounds of cost' for him to stay

more often in Dusseldorf (where Edelgard lived), we simply took both of them from then on to our hearts and into our circle of friends.

And so we started the pilot project, a tour by Denis with extracts from Nelson Mandela's autobiography, 'The Long Walk to Freedom.' Thematic focal points would be the situation in the new South Africa and the historic stations in the South African freedom struggle, in which Denis too had played an important role.

Another central question in our conversations was how, after the end of Apartheid, the solidarity work could be reawakened and activists could be mobilised for the urgently necessary work of reconstruction in South Africa. South Africa was faced with the hard task of opening up and improving infrastructure and public services, like schools and hospitals, which essentially had been orientated to meet the demands of the white ten per cent, for the remaining 90 per cent. How would the generation who had taken part in the struggle and never benefited from the privilege of a school or professional education, let alone of attending a higher education institution, be in the position of satisfying the needs of the whole population and governing the country? What happened to the people who had been traumatised in a way which for us was scarcely imaginable as result of the policy of racial segregation and its brutal implementation over several generations?

The shadows left by National Socialism in Germany after 1945 are still to be felt, so how would South Africa develop, and in what direction? The whole world had followed spellbound the release of Nelson Mandela, certainly one of the most moving moments of the 20th century. The peaceful conduct of the elections in 1994 surprised and calmed the world public as well as the people in many countries who had helped to support the struggle against Apartheid.

In England, as an answer to these questions, Denis had founded a charity organisation in 1995. Community H.E.A.R.T. stood and still stands for the support of self-help projects in the fields of health, education and reconstruction. For historical reasons the relations between South Africa and Great Britain had always been closer than those to Germany. So there was great resonance there for this initiative and many projects were able to be supported or helped on their way, such as Rape Crisis, a women's project in Western Cape, or a Maths and Science Bus, which could provide schools in the rural areas of

Gauteng with science teaching. We decided to collect contributions towards this clear concept during Denis's reading tours and set up our own organisation in Germany, Community Heart e.V., based in Essen. Since then the organisation has been able to support many self-help projects in southern Africa with several hundred thousand Euros.

The work with our British sister organization developed as an intercultural learning process: for example, in the case of their 'One Million Books and ten pence' campaign, through which books in English were collected for schools and universities and, with the 'ten pence', shipped to South Africa. Over the years the BBC and the Co-Op supermarket chain participated in it. And so almost three million books have been sent on the journey to South Africa.

Unlike in Germany, in London South African plays like the South African Brecht adaptation *The Good Women from Sharpeville* could be performed on a six-week run. A critical theatre from South Africa motivated the committed scene at the time and interested the public, even reaching the features sections in the newspapers. Even the well known TV charity Red Nose Day helped with contributions. The large trade union UNISON (similar to the German trade union ver.di) brought that about. The union has also provided the organisation with an office and infrastructure in Manchester for many years, and Denis has for a long time been an Honorary President. British NGOs could, on the other hand, expect little from the state. This is different from the situation in Northrhine-Westphalia, where the state government, together with the One World Network, founded in 1992, developed four years later the One World Promoters' Programme and thus encouraged a strong network to conduct the development-political educational work.

A little incident makes the difference between the political circumstances in the two countries clear: in 1996 a pupil at the Protestant Grammar School in Siegen wrote a letter to 'Dear Comrade Johannes Rau' to ask him for information about South Africa. The pupils were working at the time on a production of the musical *Sarafina*, written by Mbongeni Ngema and Hugh Masekela at the end of the eighties. The musical describes the life of the black schoolgirl Sarafina between protest and brutal police violence in the seventies in Soweto. This query from Christian, a Young Socialist, to the comrade and President of North Rhine Westphalia state with the understandable

desire for an explanation of the cruel events, was passed on by Klaus Brueckner, head of the State Chancellery to the EXILE-Culture Coordination. Denis Goldberg, who happened by chance to be on a reading tour, travelled at once to Siegen and attempted to bring the unimaginable close for the young people. At the end Denis also obtained the performance rights for the school, and afterwards Community H.E.A.R.T. received the takings from the performances.

This meeting in Siegen was one of many readings to young people. Dodo Schulz had created a particular profile for the work with children and young people. Through projects like 'School goes Ethno' or 'School Pool One World' we created a network of schools and youth facilities to which we regularly sent pedagogically trained experts and artists to promote global learning. Since 2007 there is also the project 'Gesichter-Afrikas.de' (Faces of Africa) an internet platform which offers information about the countries and themes of sub-Saharan Africa. By this means African artists and experts like historian Lutz van Dijk or Denis Goldberg himself are supplied to accompany global learning with contemporary witnesses to events.

Perhaps Denis is particularly popular with young people because he belongs to the generation of their grandparents. Roman Frister, the Polish holocaust survivor, later living in Israel as a journalist and author of the gripping book *The Cap or the Price of Life* (21), once described in an interview how he had his grandchildren to thank for his success, because of their tenacious probing and inquiring, wanting to understand absolutely everything. Clearly children want their parents to be not victims, but heroes, says Frister, and this desire also influences how children perceive their parents. Denis is an unpretentious hero, a 'grandfather' who knows no taboos and has a clear answer to every question, as distinct as necessary and as humorous as possible.

Our own children, Dodo's daughter Luisa and my son Janosch, have also felt this fascination. During many discussions and meetings of Community H.E.A.R.T. in our house, Denis has done handicrafts and drawings with them. At the same time as discussing with us, he passed on to the children 'by the way' impressions of the problems and developments in South Africa. And so Denis the teacher, a natural talent, left lasting traces in their later lives. Apart from that, he was a guest at Luisa's school several times, and her class, visiting a school

in Mpumalanga Province, took part in forming a school partnership (22) in South Africa. Through these meetings and through our journey to South Africa on the occasion of Denis's 70th birthday, Janosch was strengthened in his decision to study international politics. Again and again young people still tell us how Denis and other experts provided by EXILE have imperceptibly but lastingly stamped their lives.

'Ex-terrorist reads in primary school:' this is how a local newspaper announced a meeting with Denis in a primary school a few years ago. Sometimes you don't know whether to laugh or cry. At least the reading was favoured with some kind of publicity. But an idiosyncratic advertisement like that one is the exception. Many readings and lectures have in the meantime become the starting point for serious reports about South Africa. For example, Denis Goldberg was guest speaker at the closing discussion of the Global Media Forum of Deutsche Welle in Bonn in 2012. About 2000 experts from all over the world had come. Denis's listeners followed with great interest as, in simple but clear words, he described how the access to culture, education and the media was divided extremely unequally and unjustly in the world and how a future worth living must always be defined in connection with the economic conditions for the development of each person. Many journalists from, for example, Bangladesh, Ghana and Argentina, requested interviews with him on his contribution.

Art plays an increasingly big role in Denis's life. When he spoke at the conclusion of our wall painting project 'Farbe bekennen' ('Declare yourself') (23) at the world exhibition EXPO 2000 in Hanover, he, the engineer, even proposed an historical span from the first cave paintings 30,000 years ago to the public scene today which can still be creatively employed with the medium of art as a platform for orientation and understanding, for analysis, criticism and visions.

Denis has also fulfilled a long-standing wish in turning personally to pictorial art. He has now compiled a small private collection. At the core are pictures and sculptures which portray people – nothing else is to be expected. People in whom one can see how hard work in the fields is, people who read, write, make music, who are thoughtful, caring and happily dancing with each other.

As arranged by Denis, EXILE has for several years been supporting the Kronendal Music Academy (KMA), a project in Hout Bay,

where Denis lives. Black, white and 'Coloured' come together through music, whether jazz or classical. Children without the means receive free music tuition. Choirs or ensembles give concerts. We sometimes laugh to think that Denis is now doing EXILE's practical work in Hout Bay. The youth jazz band of the KMA completed a fantastic tour in Germany in 2012.

Dear Denis, Comrade, for me and all of us stay as you are for a long, long time, healthy and happy, chatting and laughing, thoughtful and wise, sympathetic, giving advice, or simply silently pondering. Life should stay wonderful for you!

(18) A selection of the artists: Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Sir Richard Attenborough, Whoopi Goldberg, Sting, Harry Belafonte, Stevie Wonder, Joe Cocker, Peter Gabriel, Simple Minds, Youssou N'Dour, Whitney Houston, Jessye Norman.

(19) Denselow Robin: *When the Music's Over: The Story of Political Pop*. London 1990, P. 276.

(20) See www.filmkraft.de

(21)Frister, Roman: 'Die Muetze oder Der Preis des Lebens: Ein Lebensbericht', Berlin 1998.

(22) A state partnership between the province of Mpumalanga in the north-east of South Africa and North Rhine Westphalia has existed since 2001.

(23) This was initiated by Farbfieber e.V (Colour Fever) in 1996 on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of Latin America. In 70 towns all over the world public, jointly produced wall paintings by artists from countries of the south and the north were created, paintings which portrayed the colonisation and its results.

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Foto EXILE Kultur Koordination