



Lunatic asylum in Lumumbashi

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We arrived at night from Sunday to Monday in Congo. Who are we? Basically, in us there was nothing apart from rude expectations and a fear of failure. We got out of the plane paralyzed so to speak. It was sultry and humid (in spite of the fact that it was the end of January), as if we had just got into a sauna. The guide, rushing over at once, explained, that on weekends here it is always like that: The population dances on open dance floors in the cities and villages and give their body heat to the atmosphere ... Then follows another hopeless week with work...

We came with an Austrian cultural delegation: four curator, three artists, two filmmakers and one ethnologist. In reality we were taken (as promising authors) at the last moment, instead of a curator, who changed his mind and left for Dallas. We did not know the other delegates and felt like rebels. The guide talked exclusively with us. That intensified the embarrassment. (Later it turned out that he took us for the leaders because of the missing hand baggage.)

The airport building was deserted, there were bloody bandages lying everywhere. They drove us to sad and somber thoughts. In the middle of the hall, where we reclaimed our luggage, stood a stuffed leopard. The guide said, that this was a gift of the former dictator Mobutu. And that president Kabila did not want to remove the stuffed animal.

We knew that many Congolese imagined Mobutu Sese Seko as a leopard, who had seized hold of the country and did not leave it out of his claws for thirty years. He warmed his belly on this land, cramming it full with the flesh and blood of the Congolese. The guide confirmed this. Besides he said, that in the end the leopard died from prostate-cancer. As he spoke these words, he laughed maliciously.

We drove to Kinshasa in a special minibus that was reserved for our delegation. In the radio an intensive drum-rhythm was playing. All this took place shortly before the assassination of Kabila. At night Congo's capital looked very unfriendly. Some people and a few dogs were sitting around campfires at the roadside. Weak streetlamps flooded the waste area, where alternately villas and shack were standing, with yellow light. Their windows were closed. From time to time we saw long administrative buildings with French signs resembling barracks. After a while the bus stopped in front of the "Charles Aznavour" hotel.

In our room there was a gloomy chandelier made of plastic and a big old mirror on the wall. A colour reproduction and us were reflected in the mirror: two elephants taking each other with their trunks. Underneath the mirror stood a huge bed without a blanket. The curtains were closed. We inspected the toilet and then the bed carefully (because of our permanent feeling of disgust and our fear of catching something.) It seemed relatively humid. And smelt of cinnamon. Then we lay down before we fell asleep we remembered Lawrence of Arabia.

Next morning we had pink yogurt and brown bread with butter for breakfast. The guide appeared and said, that this was German bred and yogurt from Belgium. He said: "For breakfast we eat round flat dough-cakes made with maize and drink water with ananassyrup". Then we went to the museum.

It was a museum of contemporary art: installations, objects, paintings... Everything looked just like in the West, just a hundred times poorer. The pictures were extremely good: Social scenes from Congolese everyday life, political subjects, many depictions of Lumumba and Kabila. We remembered one work called "Lumumba on the radio": The giant silhouette of the pained prime minister, who had a speech on radio and the tiny figures of the



white colonials, running away in fear in different directions, away from the threatening gesticulating speaker.

The guide said:

- They killed him, because he wanted independence for his black people. Nobody knows what they did with him, but it must be something terrible. He looked at us. He had tears in his eyes. He wiped them away with a handkerchief. Later we remembered, that we had not seen a handkerchief for a very long time. Nowadays everyone uses tissue.

In the evening we went to a restaurant. There - in a long dusky hall - was a huge chandelier, under which some couples were dancing. We sat down at a big round table and observed the people dancing. The women were mainly plump, but healthy and appetizing and the men made one think about their big and undoubtedly tremendous cocks. All that could turn out to be fiction.

Suddenly a scarred corpulent guy came to our table and started to speak English with a clear Russian accent. It turned out that he was a businessman from St.Petersburg dealing in precious stones and that he had been living in Kinshasa for a year. Within a minute he sat down at our table. On his ring finger shone a huge diamond and before he started talking about other things he told us, that this was a precious Congolese stone. We knew already that here diamonds are extracted.

- These diamonds are as transparent and huge, as the sweat of the Congolese laborers. But they bring misfortune. - said the guide smirking maliciously. He avoided looking into the businessman's eyes.

- The Petersburgers recommended the trout. However, we could not eat normally because he was incessantly talking and forced us to consent. He started to speak Russian and shortly all Austrians turned away from him demonstratively.

- You know, - he said, - this restaurant reminds me of the "Budapest" in Moscow ... That was a nice restaurant, in Sowjet times.... By the way, there was also an extraordinary strange chandelier ... And do you know what happened to that chandelier?..

He was a naturally born Scheherzad. He even gesticulated like her. And this anecdote was probably one of his favorite fairytales.

- This story happened in nineteen eighties if my memory serves me right, - he started making a noisy gulp of his "Heineken". - Directly above the "Budapest", in the same building, was an office, something like an insurance company. And you have to know, that there they carried out major renovations ... Can you imagine the mess ... And when the renovation were in full swing, they started to bring down the parquet and found a metal block with screws in the floor ... The workers found it themselves in a happy hour ... A small rusty sheet of metal, solidly screwed on the ground ... Naturally when they saw this thing, they decided that it was a treasure, buried in the ground. Can you imagine that? The proletarians thought, that this was an old and rich house and that before the revolution bourgeois were living here. And when the Bolsheviks came to power the bourgeois buried their objects of value under the parquet and disappeared. Maybe they simply died or were put to the wall in 1937. And the gold and jewels stayed under the parquet ... So they decided this, at least the proletarians, because at that time every pioneer has read "Twelve chairs" by Ilf and Petrov ...

He grinned and expected us to do the same. We laughed obediently.

- Well, - he went on, - the proletarians discussed it and decided to wait till the end of the shift and then, without witnesses dug up the treasure. Without supervisors, guards, bosses... And so they did: In the evening they drank a little bit of vodka and then they started to unscrew the screws. They unscrewed the first, the second, the third and when they unscrewed the fourth ... What do you think happened?..

- He made a pause and stared at us triumphantly. His narcotic eyes, resembling cloves of garlic were gleaming.

- When they unscrewed the fourth screw the chandelier in the "Budapest" tumbled down... It fell down like a German missile ... Directly on the people dancing!... And I'm not making this up: One guy died right there, - he finished his story with a disgusting smile. - What a treasure... That was the end. It seemed that he expected kisses from us. Or a bottle of champagne.

We were smiling too, not knowing ourselves why.

But ... In this very moment, how astonishing this might sound ... Near us something hit the floor, landed with a thump and then we heard despairing voices. We turned around and paralyzed: The giant yellow chandelier had



tumbled down on the people dancing and buried some of them. Everybody dashed to the scene of crime, just the Russian stayed sitting at his place and moved his unrusty ring ...

- Oh my god ...- he cooed leaning back.

We too rushed to the tumbled down chandelier. The sight was awful. Under the sharp metal hooks, the steel scrolls and the splinters of glass, a badly injured person crawled. One woman was lying there without any movement, her face streaming with blood and her legs were spread indecently. Another one was crying wistfully. The undernourished waiter moaned monotonously, as if he was praying to idols. The Austrians stood as though rooted to the spot.

Soon soldiers came in, armed to the teeth, and arrested everyone.

The next day we had to give witness at a local duty room. It smelled sourly of bitter sweat. (That is the smell of rooted repression, a heritage of colonial poser and the barbaric remnants, - commented the guide.) A big guy with bloodshot eyes looked at us like we were obvious liars. We were scared. Basically, we did not have to say anything. We did not want to tell the mystic fairytale about the "Budapest". Unexpectedly they took our fingerprints. Later it turned out, that from the Austrian delegation that we had to undergo this procedure. The guy from St. Petersburg was nowhere to be seen.

The same evening (near our hotel) two ragged young Congolese stopped us and asked us to show our pockets. We obeyed hysterically. They took our money and our keys from our Viennese flat. Luckily our passports were still with the police.

- That is not too bad, - said the guide on the next day. - Things like that happen here. The people want to eat.

The next day we went to Lumumbashi.

Kinshasa we did not really get to know. The city left us with the impression of a rural funeral service with an orchestra. In Lumumbashi we were supposed to visit the psychiatric clinic, where a famous museum of art by the mentally ill is situated. The same guide accompanied us. He was a small muscular type with totally fossilized fingernails that reminded us of shells. He always wore the same jacket and therefore looked very ecological. He permanently rustled French newspapers, mainly the "Liberation". From time to time he tried to speak about politics with the Austrian.

He permanently rustled French newspapers, mainly the "Liberation". From time to time he tried to speak about politics with the Austrian. He did not like the European heads of government. He deeply despised president Chirac, who strove for power for a long time and copied Tony Blair with ears that stick out. Besides he said, that president Kabila never supported capitalism and that he does not wish that western banks and investors seize possession of Congo and therefore he set them against each other. The guide also noted, that these small political intrigues can't satisfy president Kabila, but that he is bound by hands and feet to the corrupt neighbouring regimes, the western businesspeople and the Congolese elite.

He asked us, what our views on maoisms are.

We said that we like the term cultural revolution.

- Yes,- he said, - cultural revolution is a very complicated category It conflicts on the one hand with confuzionism and on the other with western liberalism ... However, I think that a cultural revolution legitimates incest, polygamy and social robbery ... I think that a cultural revolution redefines emotions....

We could not get more out of him.

About the incident in the restaurant he spoke in the following way: The chandelier was produced in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam. For sure you know, what the talmudists are doing there ...

After that the Austrian avoided him like an anti-semite.

We had to visit the collection of the lunatic asylum. But before that the director, a sweet pygmy with grey hair, a white coat and with a golden ring on his little finger suggested making a tour of the hospital rooms. He was black like smoke, but his eyes shone and moved like squirrels.



In the first room were just schizophrenics, five by number. Every bed was carefully hidden behind a screen and at the table by the window two male nurses did their duty. The men were lying in their beds stretched out with closed eyes. All together exuded a airless martian silence.

In the second room - if you believe the director's words - were people who suffered from different manias. At this midday hour they were all sleeping like babies in their beds.

Unexpectedly our guide found his voice. He put a question, which was probably on everybody's tongue.

- Why do they sleep at midday?

- Because we have a new order, explained the director. - Already for some years we experimented with sleep. Sleep is one of the most important regulators and indicators of the life-activity of man, his ability to work and his psychic health. The Zulu-schamans and European witches knew that. We also work with it. In the last two months our patients slept three times a day for three and a quarter of hours. We work with a theory of sleep, which goes back to the investigations of Leonardo da Vinci. You know probably, that he practiced a very unconventional sleeping regime: He slept every three hours for fifteen minutes.

We went further. We visited a room with mixed neurotics, who were also sleeping like bewizarded prostitutes.

Then we went to the second floor. There was a spacious dining hall, a playing room, a television space and showers. There was also a day room for relatives and friends of the patients.

At this moment in the visitor's room there were two people. We took them for mother and son, and the sick one was undoubtedly the son. They were sitting at one of the tables destined for the meeting. On the table stood a dirty bowl, which the son had probably emptied. His mother presumably has brought him something to eat. The son was tall and un-gainly, he had a giant stooped upperpart of his body, immoderately long legs, which were clumsily put aside. He wore soft slippers and on his shoulders was a endlessly grey pyjama. His face was like a frozen mask of ugliness: an absolutely unbearable larva of a disgusting and unhappy zombie. His hair was shoved off and left open a deep purple dent at the porting. This was not a scar but a big chip covered with skin, which sometimes tightened sometimes fall off, depending on the breathing. It was difficult to look at that.

It was even more unbearable to look at his mother: not because of her repulsing outward appearance. We have never seen such a tormenting affection, such an intensive and torturing spiritual glowing, directed only on one object: on the poor idiot. Although nothing showed that he appreciated it. Or even notice.

We fell into a deep depression. Or was it just senseless melancholy?

We knew ourselves a long time ago, that we like to ask stupid rhetorical questions, but nevertheless could hold it back this time: what for? What for did this old woman had to suffer?

This scene that baffled our delegation - judging by their faces - ended. People soon learn to look beyond first impressions. Some of them would have for sure liked to go out into the fresh air. But it was time to visit the museum.

The collection turned out to be really great. The interesting thing was, that this was not at all art by the mentally ill. Rather - as our guide said - it was art from farmers and miners, who got pencils and paper put into their hands. And who were locked into a terrible madhouse.

In the evening, after the visit, the guide came nearer to us in the stuffy cafeteria and whispered:

- Did you read the novel by Ken Kesey "One flew over the cuckoonest"? Did you see the film with Jack Nicholson based on this book?

We nodded affirmatively.

- Well, a liberating gesture is necessary. Like always. Therefore, I suggest we set free these apparent-insane, - said the guide. Tonight. Otherwise they will sleep through their whole animal-life.

This thought, did not leave us in peace the whole day, was in the end displayed. The guide had the courage to display his thoughts. And we did not have the courage.

- How should we free them? - we whispered, paralyzed.

- I had already stolen the key of this home full of suffering, - smirked the guide and clattered with something in his pockets. - We will simply surprise them and lead them into the garden. I need you to wake up those guinea-pigs, I won't manage alone.



This was undoubtedly a crazy idea.

Around 2am we climbed over the fence and were in the hospital's garden. Burning plants touched our hands and left bloody cuts. The crickets chirped as if they wanted to hand us over to the police. We moved with slowing down panic. The guide opened the door of the clinic with a silent click.

Strange: from outside we could not see any light in the hospital. But when we stepped in, glaring electric light beamed into our eyes. It was so unexpected that we needed a minute to recover and then an incredible view waited our gaze.

The action took place directly in the vestibule, which was presumably the largest room of the building. Thirty sick men were situated in chairs stood in a half-circle around a big zinc-table, which resembled an operation- or anatomic-table. The patients did not sit in the chairs as usual, but stood on their heads. Yes, all in the same pose: Their heads on the seats, their backs on the backrest and the legs towards the table. Everybody was stark naked, with exactly recognizable genitals and pale-purple soles of the feet, contrasting with the brown-shiny bodies. On the table twitched and turned a frizzy-haired African beauty, who was not the smallest, with a strained bottom, heavy hanging breasts and a uniquely slim waist. Her hips sunk. Her flanks, buttocks and calves, as well as her back muscles, shoulders and breasts trembled slightly and blew out, as if somebody put her little animals under her skin, which wanted to get out now. (Of as if somebody was sitting inside her, and tickled her with numerous little fingers at different places.) It was fantastic.

In the next moment we understood that the mentally ill remained not just like that without motion in their chairs. On closer examination (we really moved a little bit closer) it became visible, that eggs were squeezed into the fissures of the arses, moved into the direction of the electric light. These splendid white things, resembling diamonds or flower-buds, moved slightly, in all probability moved by the anus of the participants of this ritual. The wizard dancing on the table undoubtedly guided them. We heard how she clicked her tongue. Firstly silent, then louder and louder, more and more insistent, till the click turned into an intensive trill of a bird or frog, which burst near the ear. And the eggs in the arses moved and hopped in the time to this strange noise. A strange excitement grabbed hold of us, as if somebody was pouring thick and fragrant rosewater into our throats. Balsam-honey flew at the same time through the corners of our eyes and nostrils. We panted and something started to draw together in our rectum. That brought at the same time pleasure and suffering, like it is proper for all sublime. Then we understood that we were present at the unimaginable and that we were trivial and that it was unclear why we were worthy of this high honour: To be present at the creation of the impossible. But we were strangers ... And then the eagle-cry of the beauty exploded into a wild laughter and at the same moment the eggs burst in the indecent fissures of the mentally ill and flew out.

We have never seen a real volcanic eruption. On television doesn't count. Therefore we have no right to compare this event with a natural cataclysm.

The guide grinned next to us:

- I thought that this will be a "cuckoonest" but it turned out as "The story of the eye".

As always he was right.

In this very moment one of the patients turned a somersault and jumped up. We recognized the director of the clinic. In ecstasy he dashed towards us.

- Welcome! Dear friends! Welcome! - he cooed in intoxication.

But everything was already over. The beauty squatted, suppressing a sigh (and in deep exhaustion). In a state of shock we saw that she was peeing and that the piss flooded the damping zinc of the table.

Our guide mumbled something as an answer to the repeated invitations of the director. We understood that it was polite but not straight out. Why did he decide to retreat? One minute later we were outside the mad clinic. We were very excited and at the same time disappointed by our retreat.

- It was the right thing to do, - the guide did not wish to make any other comments about his decision.

Unfortunately, there was not enough time left to become friends with the guide - his name was Sawimba.

Tourism is speed, noblesse oblige ... In two days we had to be back in Austria urgently.

The last surprise in Congo was the vanishing of the ethnologist (a member of our delegation) shortly before take-



off. As Tschechow said: "If there is a weapon on the wall it must shoot." We were already at the check-in when one of the curators got excited and announced that the ethnologist had not returned from the toilet where he went to half an hour ago. Everybody had to search the toilet and the adjacent premises. Apart from bloody bandages we did not find anything.

President Laurent Kabila was shot under unclear circumstances by one of his bodyguards (or ministers) in Kinshasa two and a half weeks after our return to Vienna. He was the last of the left African leaders, who started in the 60's in the spirit of a liberation-guerilla. Particularly Che Guevara writes about the meetings with Kabila in his diaries. According to the words of the Argentinian, Kabila was too enthusiastic about women and cognac in this far times.

Kabila came to power in 1997. He and his insurgent army marched into Kinshasa with triumph, after a long war against the regime of Mobutu, which totally ruined the Congolese. Ruanda and Uganda supported Kabila in this war. After the overthrow of the horny leopard, smiling Kabila started a new politic. He thought that the West wants to strengthen his exploitative economic control over the mineral wealth of Congo and re-colonize the country. Therefore he spurned the World Bank and the IMF, who offered him their "friendly help". According to the western press, he behaved like an old Maoist. Many - even of his former allies - started to hate him and pulled back. He did not know how to play with the masses. Systematic war/ conflicts aroused at the border. The economic and moral situation became worse. Then Kabila was assassinated.

The last question we want to put to ourselves and to others is: Is the time of political killing over or not?

American secret services proclaim for a long time that it is over. As if the cyclic time of political killing was vacuumed into the black hole of non-being. At lest secret services would have us believe it ... But don't believe them.

We do not believe in it. Of course nobody tries to poison Castro nowadays. But that is not necessary anymore.

Everything shifted to the periphery by itself.