



AFRICA IN MOVIMENTO / AFRICA ON THE MOVE

MACERATA 17 -20/09/2014

TITLE: WILLIAM ON THE MOVE: PERFORMING SOUTH SUDAN AT THE LONDON GLOBE

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ABSTRACT:

A deceptively straightforward production of one of Shakespeare's later, and lesser known, plays caused quite a stir at the London 'Globe to Globe Festival: Shakespeare in 37 Languages', itself part of the nationwide Cultural Olympiad, the cultural events running alongside the Games in 2012. The South Sudan Theatre Company's (SSTC's) *Cymbeline*, performed in Juba Arabic, had critics and audience in raptures. Played as an up-front comedy, part of its appeal was determined by the company being showcased as representative of the world's newest nation-state, South Sudan; a country which had emerged out of two lengthy, violent civil wars (1955-1972, 1983-2005), a complex six-year peace process after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, and a virtually unanimous vote for independence in 2011. In fact, most promotional material related to this recent history, rather than The Bard.

In these notes on the SSTC's *Cymbeline* I will work towards a preliminary reading of the London performance against the context of both country and company. Largely based on my attendance of the show and various interviews with company members, I will focus on how the South Sudanese nation was performed (rather ambiguously) through Shakespeare. After an introduction to the concept of 'national imaginaries', I will move to the politics of context – particularly the emergence of the SSTC in relation to (South) Sudanese theatre history – before discussing selected aspects of the production.

AUTHOR'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Christine Matzke teaches English and African literature at the University of Bayreuth. Recent publications include a chapter on Hamlet in Africa (2014), and the co-edited *Life is a Thriller: Investigating African Crime Fiction (2012)* (with Anja Oed). She specialises on theatre in Eritrea.