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An African *Ploutos*, a community theatre, a 'democratic' experiment? (Diol Kadd, Senegal, 2008)

What could 'democratic' possibly mean in Classics, and specifically in theatre and performance studies? Classical theatre seems to become today more and more available to wider and less privileged audiences: its influence spreads from town centres to suburbs, from rich areas to poor outskirts, from 'official' theatres to fringe and even non-theatrical places, such as industries, hospitals, schools, cultural and community centres. Second, a 'democratic turn' could involve, beside the audience, the actual members of a theatre company: who are today most chorus members, actors, playwrights, directors? Can a company aim at a 'democratic' model? What contribution can members give depending on their social position, education, needs? Third, the 'democratic' content of texts: the 'demos' of ancient Athens could in many ways reflect itself in tragedies and comedies. Is such an identification still possible today? How could it affect our ways of perceiving, re-writing and staging an ancient text?

In this regard I can testify the experience of a small community with a large participation in theatre, the Takkuligey Project at Diol Kadd, Senegal, where dramas such as Aristophanes' *Ploutos* are adapted and played by the whole village: in the show *The Game of Wealth and Poverty* (2008), the author and director, Mandiaye Ndiaye, freely adapts the aristophanic plot in order to create a choral performance (in Wolof, Italian and French) with a strong African identity, which combines the traditional oral performances of typical Senegalese storytellers (*griots*) with ritual elements such as the "sabàr circle", an ancient rite of mimical dance which resembles a fight between groups of men and women. The music is played with traditional drums (*sabàr*) currently used by Wolof people for life cycle events, wrestling matches, women association meeting (*tur*), with different performances specific for each event. Aristophanic Comedy – which speaks of hunger, anger, greed, lack of job and forced migration – seems to fit perfectly the current situation of Senegal and other suburbs of the world: it is thus more and more frequently chosen as a subject for theatre productions that are also part of social projects. Some of the most relevant, with a tight connection to the African *Ploutos*, are created in Ravenna and other communities by the Italian theatre company Teatro delle Albe, where Mandiaye has been working for twenty years (see the English website www.teatrodellealbe.com, in particular, for two examples of 'democratic' projects: *Punta Corsara-Arrevuoto* in Scampia – a poor and dangerous suburb of Naples – which started with an adaptation from Aristophanes' *Peace*, and *Trittico Mazara* named after Mazara del Vallo – a multicultural *casbah* in Southern Sicily – where the Greek bronze statue of a dancing Satyr, found in the sea nearby by local fishermen, inspired an adaptation from Sophocles' *The Trackers*, written and staged by Marco Martinelli and Alessandro Renda with seventy kids). These projects, and the Diol Kadd association, produce many economical and social benefits, beyond the stage (see the website www.diolkadd.org). An impossible dream seems to come true, just as the aristophanic ideas, and appears specially encouraging: a community theatre, a 'democratic' experiment, a social mission, a hope for the hopeless.