



LABORATOIRE POISON
Adeline Rosenstein · Maison Ravage

[General presentation]

Documentary investigation in the representation and repression of organized resistance, in four episodes.

At times, minorities have refused to surrender to the violence done to them by an oppressive system. When a group organizes clandestinely, it contends with the possibility of betrayal. In this situation, friendship is directly threatened.

Whose weaknesses can be forgiven?

Who are lofty speeches meant for?

Is it possible to criticize resistance movements without condescension?

And when reality becomes theatrical, what becomes of the impulse to censor it?

In Laboratoire Poison 1, the first part of this documentary investigation, these questions arise from documents that stress the aporias of “strategic collaboration”. Laboratoires Poison 2, 3, and 4 follow resistance fighters who participated in the struggle for independence in countries formerly colonized by France (Poison 2), Belgium (Poison 3), and Portugal (Antipoison or Poison 4).

As methods of repression have circulated across empires, so have the images of liberation struggles that we inherit today. Theater is able to criticize, to reframe, and to actualize these images because it refuses to perform expertise and engages them on level terms.

[LABORATOIRE POISON 4 OR ANTIPOISON – Presentation]

For radical women who participate in the revolutionary struggle, the intimate, the political, and the quotidian are deeply interlocked.

How can we speak to this complex net of relationships when we tell the stories of their actions and militancy, paying close attention to the ways in which they value each of these dimensions of life?

There are only a few narratives of resistance in collective memory, and even fewer feature revolutionary women as active characters. *ANTIPOISON* responds to this erasure, by staging their stories. It complements, revisits, and throws a new light on *Laboratoire Poison*; the two plays are meant to be staged successively.

Because Adeline Rosenstein’s work of research and creation is serial, *ANTIPOISON* furthers and concludes the previous instantiations of *Laboratoire Poison*. The play is a counterexample, it intends to deepen the analysis while also adding nuance. Where do the actions undertaken by revolutionary women fit in the story of the PAIGC and the fight against Portuguese colonialism in Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau? When we revisit the story of the independence movement ‘this time around’, how will we center their silenced narratives?

[Statement of Intent]

The project started in 2015, when sociologist Jean-Michel Chaumont shared with me a series of documents published in his most recent book, *Survivre à tout prix? Essai sur l'honneur, la résistance, et le salut de nos âmes* (Paris, 2017). These documents are the focus of *Laboratoire Poison 1*. In them, Belgian communist Résistance fighters share their experience of being imprisoned, tortured, and pressured to inform the Nazi soldiers in concentration camps during World War II. Some of the prisoners refused to comply, an act of resistance which put an end to the numerous betrayals that caused the July 1943 SS raid on prominent Belgian communist figures („*la razzia de Juillet 1943*“), and which allowed the underground Communist Party to rebuild. After the war, the party was purged but the informants were hidden from the public eye as to protect the party's prestige and reputation. The heroic acts of those who refused to collaborate were also kept quiet. This silencing caused a number of individuals, traitors and disillusioned heroes alike, to choose geographical and/or political exile, leaving for Africa or turning to Maoism. The South seemingly offered “a second chance” for those on the losing side in post-war Belgium.

LABORATOIRE POISON is an observation site. In this experimental setting, we reflect on the role of faces, looks, sound and lighting effects, or any given detail in shaping how we react to betrayal: with forgiveness, or with inflexibility.

Adeline Rosenstein

[Form and aesthetics]

The project is an in-depth study of the “gestures” and “routine” of repression, which foregrounds the use of choreography as a language. We will stage episodes from the writings of the Résistance fighters as silent scenes, with separate foley and commentary. In the following chapters of the investigation, the grammar of gestures produced in *LABORATOIRE POISON 1* is questioned and transformed in the context of three other liberation struggles. With the help of historians, scholars, and witnesses, we create “choreographies that schematize” to reflect on political homonyms and “*homogestes*” (“homogestures”). What does “liberation” mean in different historical contexts? What does it mean to see the same gestures, like that of the informant surrounded by enemy soldiers, reappear in separate and distinct situations? What invariance and what transformations?

In this investigation, we are bound to “encounter” the work of left-wing European filmmakers in solidarity with and contemporary of the independence movements in Africa. René Vautier, Chris Marker, and Sarah Maldoror precede us and challenge us. Following their footsteps, we, too, want to reflect on the function of the avant-garde and of propaganda in the representation of liberation struggles in Africa.

When reality is overly theatrical, is censorship a solution?

In the process of decolonization, the new nation-states have sought to control heroic narratives. It makes it difficult, therefore, to deconstruct the images of liberation movements from a European standpoint. There is another significant obstacle to this critical project: colonial aesthetics continue to influence the representation of the decolonial struggle. New forms of performance are necessary to evade the pervasive influence of coloniality.

“Smile. Not exotic, Not terrorist.” Palestinian-American poet Rafeef Ziyadah repeats those words in “We Teach Life, Sir.” (2011) Too often, theater looks for costumes and staging ideas in clichés associated with exoticism and terrorism.

The theatrical dimension of the historical documents that we are working with reveals that, during war times, not all spectacle is fraught. Under the threat of retaliation, individuals have made use of the spectacle to claim their love, fidelity, and commitment, in what Heiner Muller has dismissively called the “theater of revolution”.

Rather than “censoring” the testimonies and archives that don’t conform to our aesthetic and moral ideals, we choose to believe in the critical capacities of theater itself. It is on stage that we want to examine our tendencies to dismiss the theatrical excesses of feeling, thought, and gesture that embarrass us. It can be tempting to censor the ideas that we set out to defend. How to resist this impulse? This poisonous question is tied to another: on the contrary, what does it mean for the translator to stand by their work, knowing that translation is also (and perhaps, essentially) an act of betrayal?

Sharing these ethical dilemmas makes sense inasmuch as we acknowledge that whatever solution we haphazardly reach, it will merely be the least bad. We will need a hefty dose of humor and self-parody to find a good compromise between objectivity, integrity, and the needs of the spectacle.
Adeline Rosenstein

[Adeline Rosenstein, Biography]

Adeline Rosenstein (1971) is a German director, actor, and playwright from Geneva, Switzerland. In Geneva, she completed clown training with Pierre Dubey and studied sociology and history of religion. She holds degrees in acting (1995) and direction (2002) from the bat-HFS-Ernst Busch in Berlin, where she lived for 12 years. After spending time in Buenos Aires and in Brussels, co-writing the comedy *Les Experts* (2006-2008) with Jean-Baptiste Chaumont, she chose to settle down in Belgium where she has been working as a playwright, translator, actor, director since 2008. She has also been and is still active in local neighborhood groups in Schaerbeek. She created the series *décriis-ravage*, a documentary project on the Palestinian question, at the Théâtre Océan Nord and the Théâtre La Balsamine in Brussels, and won the 2014 Prix de la Critique (Belgium) and the 2016 Prix SACD in the category “découvertes” (Belgium). In 2016, she performed the original work *Les Flasques* at the Actoral Festival and the Centre Dramatique National in Montpellier, which focused on digital pedagogy and universal basic income. From 2016 to 2021, she worked on the Laboratoire Poison trilogy with seasoned collaborators from *décriis-ravage* and young actors from ESACT.

In 2019, she wrote the comedy *Détester tout le monde*, an adaptation of the *Orestie* produced for a young audience by Thibaut Wenger’s theater company. That same year, she also wrote *Les Hostilités* for Léa Drouet. “When confronted with little-known historical events, activist theater may be its own worst enemy. Neither exclamation marks nor finger-pointing help achieve a better understanding of the past. Patience is key to elucidate and account for the complexities of “what might have happened before it got down to this”. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been active for more than a century already. Portugal colonized Angola and Mozambique five hundred years ago. We must deal with caution every step of the way if we are to clear dangerous and divisive words that can reopen old wounds instead of healing them.” Her work is particularly concerned with the translation of

Commenté [MOU1]: Je ne sais pas de quel festival il s'agit. Il faudrait peut-être le préciser ?

Commenté [AM2R1]: J'ai ajouté le pays du prix

historiographical issues to the theater stage: how can theater generate complexity, despite its use of shortcuts and clichés?

