

What thoughts and feelings did this visa incident invoke in you and your colleagues?

Firstly, the visa incident got at us in different ways and at different stages. We had started rehearsing for SANDSCAPE since October 2016. So much work, time, energy and resources. We applied for the visa in January 2017 and with all then necessary documents, including a Letter of reference from the Goethe institute which the Munich office, headquarters was sponsoring our trip. At the embassy during the visa application, we were even asked not to pay. We were attended to for free because of the relationship between the Goethe headquarters and the consulate. a few days after the application we got the passports back with rejection letters which Vera must have given you. Those letters were written in German and it was difficult for us to interpret. Later we got to know about the questions about our family and economic rootings.

For me, it was a normal feeling and questions which embassies could ask. I was certain that once we submit the documents to show and answer their questions we would be granted visas but after we submitted the issue kept on taking longer. No resolution. I personally submitted those documents and I was sure we gathered everything required. Only to our surprise that we were rejected again. The woman at the embassy Mrs Angerer stated that our people from the group are Young artists with no good job, not married, they don't have kids etc. This answer made me broken and sad. How can our cultural participation and exchange be determined through such parameters? I felt the embassy was being wicked. I had an existing visa which expires March 10 2017 that I could Use but I had to apply again with my company so as to get another which would serve the period of both festivals.

We later sent several emails and asked questions from the embassy but they were adamant. They insisted that we would not be given the visas. For me company, it was a very difficult, traumatic and disheartening moment. After we submitted the documents the second time, they had hope that everything would be sorted out but when I broke the final news to them that we cannot travel to Germany as the embassy refused again. It disturbed them emotionally and psychologically because we had rehearsed so much, spent plenty money and time I to giving the best performance at the festivals. We looked forward to meeting New people, watch new shows and exchange ideas. All these were dreams which was shattered. It never came true. It never saw the light of Day. I was supposed to be in Frankfurt to continue with my next generation workspace but because my company members were down I couldn't summon the courage to travel anymore. I got tired and frustrated.

Also unlike before where the Goethe institute Lagos would stand up for young artistes, the former director Marc Andre schmachtel would do that but the new director Mr Alfons Hug is a difficult man and he has no time for young theatre artistes. We tried talking to him to speak to the embassy for us but he didn't care about us and our work. We miss Marc Andre. He also even though he's in Munich tried to help us but he could only do a little from there. We had to face our problems in Lagos alone. This issue almost made my artistes loose hope about getting our works showcased on international platforms. Why would we be judged by the sins of others? Why should young artistes suffer because of the economic situation of the country. I have travelled all over Europe and Africa as well as some of my company members who have been to Germany and other places. Our art is what matters to us. It was so painful because it meant all our work, vision, creativity and innovation means nothing to the consulate authorities. in our company most of our works lampoon and talk about socio political issues and the failure of the Nigerian government to develop its people and the country. Our reviews are online of the different works. We never expected to be slapped by the German embassy.

This was just an unfair, unjust, and thoughtless attitude. Our other friends from south Africa at magnet theater also attended a festival Hellwach in Hamm and they got Visas. South Africa is presently violent and has economic issues. Why were the south Africans not rejected visas?

The embassy made us feel worthless. But however, we have moved on and this has helped us birth newer works. We realized that they only made us stronger than we were before. Now we are capable of handling such issues, we would try and try again until we are accepted someday. We will contain to create beautiful works not caring if we have visas or not. Our passion is more about the theatre we create and the lives we empower and develop. Our company's goal is to find platforms for young people to empower, explore, develop themselves giving them avenues to become masters of their fate.

How would you describe the proceedings of the (German) authorities?

The proceedings of the authorities was not fair and favourable. Everyone ought to be given a fighting chance but the embassy in this case didn't give us a chance to express or defend ourselves. We somehow have a discussion relationship with the German cultural attache in Lagos. They know our work and what we stand for. We have ideas of projects for funding we have discussed and I am sure they made their research about us. They know we are authentic, they know we only want to travel and come back to improve on the things we have learnt abroad. Their attitude towards the situation was not to scrutinize but to reject basically. Just to reject.

And what would you like to change in the practice of International Cultural Exchange if you could?

What I would like to change is the way African theatre companies are being presented and invited. I would want that long before the whole festival process starts, All Foreign affairs commission and German embassies in the different African countries be informed that the festival is inviting them just so that dial minute visa rejections are not happening. So far, the international cultural programs in Germany have been nice, interesting and accommodating but they can do more by making sure that they government who sometimes sponsor their festivals also make it a point of duty to facilitate visas and easy access for companies from Africa attending these festivals. Fair cooperation is the word. They need to be more sensitive towards us and help create better relationship atmosphere.

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