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Mauritania and EU Sign Joint Declaration on Immigration Amid Concerns



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Editor's Note

Dear readers:

The Key Newspaper staff would like to wish you Ramadan Mubarak. The Key Newspaper will no longer be a monthly newspaper. Starting in April 2024, the Key Newspaper will become a bimonthly newspaper (issued every two months). The next issue, issue 29, will be published in May 2024.

In Ramadan last year, a civil war in Sudan broke out. More than 13,000 people have been killed and more than 30,000 people injured, in addition to numerous accounts of destruction, ethnic cleansing, and sexual assaults. Sudan faces a major famine if things do not change soon.

We would also like to remind our readers that more than 150 days have passed since the Israel war on Gaza began in October last year, more than 150 days of relentless bombardment and starvation of more than 2 million people, half of whom are children. At least more than 30,000 people were killed and 72,000 people injured. More than 100 journalists were killed. Moreover, over 70,000 homes have been destroyed completely and 290,000 houses have been destroyed partially.

As we transition to a bimonthly publication schedule, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a blessed Ramadan to our readers. We also urge everyone to remember the ongoing crises in Sudan and Gaza, where thousands have lost their lives and many more continue to suffer. It is crucial for the international community to take action to address these humanitarian emergencies and prevent further loss of life and devastation.

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Palestine: The Story of a People's Unyielding Spirit

Palestine is considered the heart of the Arab world, the center of its nodes, the direction of its sights, and the cradle of monotheistic religions. It holds a major historical role and is the meeting point of civilizations. It is a beautiful, beautiful country and one of the most important places on earth in terms of strategic, touristic,

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SPECIAL INTERVIEW:

Acting Against All Odds: The Story of Aly Deyde

By: Varha Abd Selam
M.A. in Mass Communication

Aly Deyde is an aspiring actor currently studying in the UAE to obtain a BA in acting. I have known Aly for years and he is one of the most dedicated people I have ever known. Aly is a theater actor who started his career in Mauritania. He was eventually able to win a scholarship to study acting at Sharjah Performing Arts Academy. He will be graduating this year.

I sat down virtually with Ali to ask him about his journey as a Mauritanian actor in the UAE.

(Parts of this interview were translated and it was edited for brevity and clarity)

Would you please introduce yourself to our readers?

My name's Aly Deyda Moussa. I am Mauritanian, of course, and I've been working as an actor for almost 12 years now. I started my own company Shourouq Theatrical Band, after I quit Nouakchott University. I then founded Samir International Monodrama Festival. I named it after a friend of mine called Samir. Later I got a scholarship to study at Sharjah Performing Arts Academy. I'll be graduating in the next three months.

How and when did your passion for acting start?

I started what later would be called acting in 2008, back then it wasn't really acting I was just doing it for fun with my friends. We were students at al-Jadida High School and we had a club called Al-Ataa Club for Cultural Prosperity. We started by doing small sketches for a few people to make them laugh on special occasions and stuff like that. After that, I started doing it [acting] almost every time there was an occasion, like a celebration or something. And that's when people started to recognize me [as an actor]. Before that, I was a really shy guy, I never liked talking in front of people or delivering a speech in front of them. I was a lonely guy, always sitting on the side. It was the theatre that gave me confidence. I started reading books and participating in festivals and stuff, trying to learn what theatre and being an actor really mean. And I fell in love with it and continued doing it. In 2014 or 15, I went to Egypt to attend a festival and participate in a workshop and from then love started.

As a young artist in Mauritania was it hard becoming a theatre actor?

Well yes, it was hard. It was a struggle for many reasons. In Mauritania, there are no institutions or universities where you can study art. So you'll always be an amateur and unable to evolve. You can't progress, you can't do something that can actually compete outside of Mauritania. The second reason was family issues. The way Mauritanians see it is that you are from this family so you can't do that because of your family and so on. You don't have the freedom to do what you think you are good at. Another reason is the government. There are currently no stages, cinemas, or theaters. The theater is never looked at as something that could develop the country. The government is not aware of how other countries have changed thanks to the arts when they gave it priority. In Mauritania, artists have no space to do their art.

So in order for me to become a role model actor to other rising actors and artists in Mauritania I participated in festivals in all of the Arab world. I didn't want to just stop



there, I just didn't want to become the stereotypical actor who would go around the Arab world and come back to imitate what was done in those countries in Mauritania. Many artists do this.

I want to create my own method [in acting]. In order for me to do that, I need to study the other methods. I went to the academy, and applied for it, to [the methods of] study Antoine Tchekhov, Uta Hagen, Tadashi Suzuki, Meyerhold, Laban, Eugenio Barba, and so on. All of these methods and schools will help me create my own acting method. And that's the reason I'm studying. When I come back, I'll have learned the basics of theater and acting. Then one day, I will create my own school, not in the physical sense, but rather my own method, my own way, my own acting style. I want to have my own footprint in Mauritanian theater. The people who will come after me, maybe after a hundred years, will know me not as an amateur, they'll know me as an acting graduate who built a good acting method in Mauritania, and I will be recognized internationally as a professional actor, with a degree in acting.

Something I wanted to add is that acting in Mauritania is still looked at superficially the minute you stand on the stage and there are n stages in the technical sense they're all just ground really and whenever someone plays any role in front of people he is called a theatre actor so this undermining of theatre in Mauritania is what's impacting it till now, and the actors who had studied or trained abroad had no power to change anything and that is caused by different reasons, not their fault as they are only individuals as I said before it's about the gov institutions and the holistic view to push the development of a country.

You mentioned family as one of the struggles and one of the reasons why you pursued a degree abroad, how did you (if you did) change your family's perception of acting?

I come from a conservative family. My father is an Imam

and my mother is a very religious woman. Our entire family is a very well-known religious family overall and I respect that. Initially, they [my family] were against me becoming an actor and being in the spotlight. They thought it was inappropriate. They didn't believe it was a respectable thing to do. Personally, I don't believe there is anything wrong with art. I don't believe it's inappropriate, I know it is because of the difference between my generation, and theirs. Eventually, they became more accepting of it when they saw I was serious about it and that I did it respectfully, not as a way to ask for charity. I was doing it because I am an artist and it is my passion and my study major. I believe it is a way I can use to benefit my country, and myself.

It took them a few years to accept it and to let me pursue my passion. However, gratefully I have an open-minded father who is educated and he'd always told me that as long as I am not going against my religion, then I should do what I want. Therefore, I was able to pursue my dream. And every two or three months I come back home to see them. I know what I do is seen as pointless in Mauritania, but it is not pointless to me and I believe it is valuable. So they [my family] believed in my dream because I believed in myself.

In your opinion, how long has theatre been in Mauritania, and how do you think it can be improved?

There's no doubt that Mauritanian theater has come a long way, and that's thanks to the believers in Mauritanian art and its ability to progress. Even if those believers weren't professionals technically. There are no "professional actors" in Mauritania, and I can say that as someone who worked at Mauritanian theater and knows the "behind the scenes".

This is what makes the Mauritanian theater chaotic and at a standstill to this day. For it [theater in Mauritania] to advance, it needs a lot of intensive efforts from both artists

and the people working in the government.

We need at least one academy teaching arts and training centers and theaters and cinemas... etc. It's still a long way to go but it's certainly possible if it is well thought out and the professionals are included in the decision-making process. We need to propose a strategic plan to advance the artistic movement that might last anywhere from 15 to 20 years. We can implement such a plan and every five years, an evaluation must be carried out to evaluate and design the next stage of the plan. This is exactly what it is being done in the UAE where I study as this academy is the first of its kind in the UAE. I think if something like this is also done in Mauritania the Mauritanian theater will be able to catch up with the global theater in a few years. If we continue looking down on our artists and confining the art in a few families, our theater will go nowhere. This is my personal opinion, but I won't deny it did come a long way regardless.

You've mentioned the social stigmatization of theatre and its actors, how do you think is the best approach to change that?

Well, there isn't a perfect way of doing it, but there are many ways that can make it work. Let's say for example, for the next ten years, we will have more than 100 international graduates. Let's say we will have 100 professional actors and 100 professional directors. Those directors, those actors, and those musicians who are now professionals will do professional work. And their work being professional will make people respect them and respect art more. But if we stay amateurs, nothing will really change.

This is one of the only ways I believe that can succeed if people go abroad and study and return then produce "real" work. Otherwise, it'll take us millions of years to progress. The fastest way is to have more professionals and more students of art and more graduates and specialists.

In your opinion, should artists do art for the sake of art? Or should artists be actively engaged in political and societal matters?

Well, this can't be answered by choosing one or the other. It's a matter of preference. I can't talk on behalf of the other artists, but I will talk about my own approach. The way I portray my characters and approach my work on the stage or in front of the



camera depends on the work I have at hand. So art that holds a message is preferable. What I've been doing here for the last four years is working on international performances.

For example, we had just finished working on *Animal Farm* [in school], written by George Orwell, and I was playing Benjamin the Donkey. This is a political play about the Soviet Union. So the message was political, but the way I portrayed Benjamin, was more of me as Ali, and the way I want to see that wise, clingy, smart, donkey. So I don't advise any artists to choose one way or the other. I would do art for the sake of art or I will do it for the sake of a message as well. It's whatever that comes from the people.

However, if you are writing [a play] yourself, it would be better if you have a message to convey. So that's basically what I do as Ali, as an artist. My message for the moment is international. But when I graduate and come back home, I will be focusing on my society and my people.

How come you've chosen theatre over TV or cinema?

I like this question and I've answered it many times before. There's a difference between the two. The difference between the two is why I prefer the theater. When you're standing on stage people can hear your heavy breathing, they can see your hard work, they can see your sweat, they can smell you, and you can smell them. On a stage, the relationship between you and your audience is a vertical one. The audience gives you reactions that you can work with and react to.

Unlike TV, or cinema, where you only interact with the camera. You can do as many retakes as the director asks to get what he wants. Then the footage is taken to another room where you are not present where the director and the editor can edit it as much as they like. While in theater, where you only get to make mistakes in the rehearsals. In Mauritania, we used to rehearse every 6 months for a new production and here in school, to graduate, we must produce a play every 6 weeks from a different genre every time. It is really such a joyful experience despite all the pain and tiredness.

The relationship between you and the audience sitting in front of you is special, as you can't make mistakes. It all comes down to your instincts as an actor. When you make a mistake on stage, you must learn how to overcome it

without the audience realizing it.

The relationship between you, the actor, the stage, and the audience is an incredible one. While in front of the camera, it's a triangle relationship, between you, the camera, and then comes the audience. You don't get to decide which takes to reach the audience, and you may not even like the ones that get used.

That's why I will always prefer theater over TV or cinema. It's just what I love. It is what I enjoy doing. My relationship with my audience is something alive, something that you can feel, something that you can touch, something that you can smell.

With a career in an industry that's notorious for being hard to break into, what would your next step be? For instance, are you planning on staying within the Arabic theater or are you interested in pursuing theater elsewhere?

First, I don't consider this a hard job to do. It's a passion, my passion. It's also my hobby at the same time. It's something that I love doing and I enjoy doing. I enjoy the pain and the hard parts. As for my plans after graduation, I have many on the table for the moment. But I can't speak about them in a newspaper at the moment. But I will be around. Whenever I'm called to go back to Mauritania to work on something, I will be there. However, currently, as an artist, my goal is to go internationally. For the moment that's all I can say.

Lastly, what advice would you give young and aspiring Mauritanian artists?

READ. To study is the advice I can give them. You need to study. You need to educate yourself. Go out there, and see the world. You need to take this seriously and please, take it seriously. If you really think that you love this, show that you love it, and the universe will reward you, and Allah will reward it back to you. Go and study and then come back. You will do better for yourself. You will do better for the people who love you. You will do better for the people that you love. That's all I can say. Go study and you will discover a lot.