

OBITUARY: NOEMI STEUER (15.01.1957–14.07.2020)

■ VEIT ARLT AND NATALIE TARR



Noemi leaves a big gap at the Center for African Studies here in Basel, a gap we have already been aware of for more than a year before she passed. She fought and ultimately lost her battle against a very aggressive illness that robbed her of all energy. Yes, it really did, Noemi did not even feel like coming for a Rhine swim with us anymore this year, it was so bad. But while she was around, Noemi was a constant source of inspiration to us all, she had ready advice and in a very pragmatic, sometimes drily humorous kind of way she often made us aware of glitches in thinking, analyzing, conceptualizing.

FROM THEATRE AND FILM...

Noemi knew early on that she wanted to study acting in Zürich. She was not yet of legal age when she faked her parents' signature in order to apply for the school. She was admitted, at age 17 – a true victory for, then as much as now, the entry exams to the acting academy in Zürich continue to be quite tough. She embarked upon a very successful career and played on various theater stages – Bonn, Mannheim, Basel – and has eternalized herself in one German *Tatort* episode in 1998. Her biggest success, which is remembered by the film aficionado community with enthusiasm, is her role as Helga Aufschrey in the highly successful movie series *Die zweite Heimat* of 1992.

Noemi Steuer as Helga Aufschrey in the 1992 TV series *Die Zweite Heimat* (image: WDR).



... TO THE ACADEMY ...

She ended her acting career at the height of her success when she was not quite 30 years old and went back to school. After earning her Bachelor in Afrikanistik in Köln, she studied social anthropology in Basel. For both her MA and her PhD she looked at discourses on HIV and AIDS in Mali. Her PhD was published in 2012 with transcript Verlag. Together with her husband, the director Clemens Bechtel, she produced and directed a movie in 2010 commissioned by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration with Malian actors in Bamako on the pitfalls and realities of migration to Switzerland, the country “où on fabrique l'argent”.

But this is only one of numerous projects Noemi engaged in during her studies and afterwards. Only recently, in 2017, Noemi could successfully wrap up the SNF funded project *Construire son avenir* with the publication of the collective volume *Dealing with Elusive Futures*, edited by herself, Elísio Macamo, and Michelle Engeler. Together with the associated SNF-Agora project *Longing for the Future*, these activities encompassed a number of side projects such as an audio-visual walk and exhibition at the Museum der Kulturen that Noemi conceptualized with Clemens.

... AND PHILANTHROPY

Noemi was also founding president of the foundation Oumou Dilly, which supports young scholars from Africa doing a PhD or a postdoc. The foundation co-organizes and supports the biennial CODESRIA-CASB summer school in African studies held in Dakar. This interest in youth, education, and life trajectories gave rise to the project IDEAS (International Digital Exchanges between Africa and Switzerland), which she initiated

together with Joschka Philipps and Elísio Macamo in 2019 and which links faculty and students in Conakry, Bamako, and Basel in a joint two semesters' course.

Noemi's last scholarly publication appeared posthumously in the journal *Human Affairs*. In *'Murdered Mozarts.'* *Narrative of a Previous Malian Student Generation in the Era of the Crumbling State*, Noemi examines the life histories of a generation who during their student days in the 1980s protested against the military junta in Mali. As committed patriots who construct their identities with a prominent reference to the State, they narratively repair their damaged identities and political visions and, on a symbolic level, their damaged country.

Noemi is dearly missed by us all. We miss our talks and walks, our lunches, our regular Rhine swims and Noemi's concern for her academic family. May she rest peacefully.

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Participants and faculty of the first CODESRIA-CASB summer school in African studies, held in Dakar (image : CODESRIA 2013).