Theatre and Representation in Berlin: Understanding Gender from an Intercultural Perspective[1]

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Introduction

It is now common knowledge that in different cultures women have experienced various forms of oppression which have been rigorously debated under the umbrella term of feminism, or its sub-categories: third world feminism, African feminism, African American feminism, and Western feminism. Within the African and African American context, discourses about female oppression have generally been looked upon as 'the double-double quarrel' (cf. Nfah-Abbenyi 1999:284) and intersectionality[3] to mention these two. As far as the 'the double-double quarrel' is concerned, women are secluded and could be described as suffocating within the confines of patriarchal, colonial, and postcolonial hegemonic structures. The concept of intersectionality argues that women's voices are stifled since they are subjected to prejudicial injustices based on their gender, class, and race mainly being the outcome of social constructions. Over time, women across the globe have organised themselves into national, transnational, and transcultural groups that have conscientized the communities on the need for structures that do not support patriarchal hegemony, precarious violence against women and the general oppression of women based on gendered

[3] Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review* , Jul., 1991, Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul., 1991), pp. 1241-1299. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039 accessed 28 May 2022.

conceptualisations. The aim of this article is to illustrate, using a summer 2013 intervention theatre seminar and workshop at Humboldt University Berlin, that contemporary perceptions and understanding of gender are still subjective. The essay further demonstrates how effective a transnational effort was in unmasking not only gender prejudices, but also racism. Expatiating more on the assumption of persistent subjectivation of individuals based on their gender, the article allows us to investigate how sexism intersects with racial concerns in the context of the workshop. Gender inequality and racism, as they were discussed during the intervention theatre workshop, unmasked persistent binarization of people based on these social constructions and showed existing power structures. Theatrical performances from the workshop illustrated that the intersection of gender and race and how it affected people needed voice to empower the voiceless.

Intersectionality

Centring on gender, violence against women is not categorised based on its severity but rather on its impact on victims. Without seeking to delve into the diverse and often conflicting debates, ideologies, and practices about feminism in the Western, African, Asian and the Middle East contexts, since each of them has its own specific authentic narrative agenda, focus is more on a transnational engagement with the topic of gender prejudices. Transnationality in a feminist context requires acknowledging different cultures of the world whilst embracing such diversity to uplift borders when engaging with categories of prejudice associated with gender. The paramount aim of this transnational thought is to engage gender topics by not limiting them to specific cultural and/or ethnic individual backgrounds, but by engaging with the topic as a universal human concern. Underscoring such cultural diversity could be an empowering ground on which feminisms in the listed regions could find a solid base for critically understanding specifically gender and racial prejudices. It could also serve as a strategy for questioning whether individuals who canvass for equality based on gender, sexuality and race in Western, Asian, and African contexts are strictly white, or coloured, or both. I argue that shared experience, together with authentic engagement with academic disciplines that focus on the history, culture, society, and politics of minority groups, advertently or inadvertently, becomes a political act or political activism which, in my opinion, concretely obliterates perceiving one only on dichotomous binaries as white, black, heterosexual, LGBTIQ, man or woman, but rather as humans from different backgrounds.

In a bit to understand how discrimination functions against an individual based on the colour of their skin and how such discrimination intersects with gender and class, we need to clarify the concept of intersectionality. According to Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality is about multi-layered discrimination

experienced mainly by black women who, she states, are not engaged in contemporary feminist and anti-racist discourses. She accentuates that,

> I use the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimension of Black women's employment experiences. My objective there was to illustrate that many of the experiences that Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. I build on those observations here by exploring the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color.[4]

Relying on Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as the intersection of racism and sexism in the identity politics of black women as they are marginalised in a strictly American background, I engage with the intersection of gender and racism in the German metropolitan context of Berlin.

An Intervention theatre workshop in Berlin

From 15-19 July 2013, I organised a workshop at the Humboldt University in Berlin on the topic 'Intervention Theatre for Gender Awareness'. The goal of the workshop was to employ intervention theatre in a participatory workshop environment as a tool to discuss and understand the cultural and the social philosophies behind gender, in a bid to encourage awareness and equality. The main objectives were not only to employ the medium to entertain the Berlin public, but also to seek an understanding of how gender is performed in Western and African communities in a bid to reflect on how the perceptions of gender have evolved over time. Through non-formal theatrical method, creativity was to be awakened, yet critical thinking and critical consciousness were to be actively engaged by workshop participants to create awareness about social and cultural life of Berlin, especially when the topic of gender were to be engaged. Critical questions were to be posed using Paulo Freire's 'problem-posing pedagogy' to explore the causes, structures, manifestation of gender inequality and why it was important to associate racism and classism to the topic of gender. The expected results of the workshop were to stimulate the community to the need of appreciating gender roles void of subjective perceptions. Besides the topic of gender and its prejudicial ramifications of race and class, intercultural and

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[4] Ibid, p. 1244.

interdisciplinary communication that resulted in gender networking was to be one of the expected results. Following the classical methodology of most intervention theatre workshops, data collection, data analysis, prioritization of data, story creation, improvisation, performance and post-performance discussions, was to be followed. The play, later discussed in detail, created from this initiative was entitled by the participants as *Wait a Minute!* One open air performance was scheduled as the last event on the entire workshop programme, but seeing the impact of the first show, the participants suggested that several performances be done. Consequently, three open-air performances were enacted with the first on the premises of *MensaNord* (North refectory) Humboldt University, the second embodying two Invisible theatre shows on Tram M10 which rides in the directions of *Warschauerstrasse* (Warsaw Street) and *NordBahnhof* (North train station) and a final one at the *Mauerpark* (Berlin Wall Park), Prenzlauer Berg.

The participants of the workshop included students, mainly from the Departments of African and Gender Studies. Not dwelling on the question whether they were feminists and anti-racist activists, is to highlight that coming from the mentioned Departments and electively signing up for a seminar entitled, 'Introduction to Intervention Theatre Theory and Practice', and its accompanying workshop on Intervention theatre and gender awareness was more than just working to complete a course in the university. In my opinion, such an academic commitment erases any racial, gender, and class hierarchies, but rather highlights such a move as a political act. Political act is understood in this context not as an attempt to automatically overhaul existing policies about an unacceptable situation of prejudice, but rather to commence by creating awareness about some existing social problems; gender imbalances, racism and sexism being our concern. A seminar which introduced the students to Intervention Theatre aimed to analyse gender from an intercultural perspective in a participatory discussion format. The intercultural dimension of the workshop was the presence of African women from a Non-Governmental Education based in Berlin, namely African Women and Youth Organisation (AWYO). Further an education and gender specialist from Zimbabwe, who at that time was working on a German Research Foundation project at Humboldt joined the workshop during which she offered information on the notion of gender relations in the Shona cultural landscape. At the level of discussions and prioritization of problems of gender and race, we saw how different the Zimbabwean patriarchy was from other patriarchies of the world. From the discussions, it was clear that patriarchy has impacted on both men and women in predominantly similar ways and in some socio-economic

contexts worsened by what bell hooks terms ''imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy''[5].

Referring to Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality, it is worthy to mention that both the students from Humboldt University and the guest participants from AWYO came from different cultural backgrounds. Although the burden of patriarchy on its victims is similar, the participants nevertheless recounted from personal experiences and from observations of their societies that discrimination based on gender specifically in a western metropolis like Berlin, intersected with race, sexuality, and class concerns. The participants underlined that although they had all experienced one form of prejudice or the other as women, men, gay, lesbian, and transgender persons, prejudice was more impactful if such persons were non-Germans; African, Ukrainian, and Romanian people were cited as few examples. The impact of such multi-layered discriminatory experiences aptly becomes physically and psychologically cumbersome on an individual and best illustrates Makuchi's 'double-double quarrel' classification.

Theoretical background of the workshop

Therefore, the foundation of a participatory workshop as the one introduced above was built on the reading and discussion of chapters from Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) and Augusto Boal's 'Poetics of the Oppressed' from his *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2000*)*. During the workshop we considered ourselves as humans, as Freire (2000: 43-69) opines, on the path to seeking humanization in a society that is still fractured, sometimes subtly, by prejudices against individuals based on their gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion. Although Freire's ideologies are developed from the experiences of oppressed peasants in a Brazilian context, he however constantly alludes to a liberating education that results in the freedom of humankind i.e., the people. Humanisation according to Freire is the vocation of the people. He emphasises that, being a people's vocation, humanisation is often thwarted and distorted by 'injustice, exploitation' by those who perform discriminatory acts, who he terms 'oppressors' (44). The path to a liberating education is achieved when dialogue, action and reflection become major elements in this kind of pedagogy. Dialogue and critical discussions were initiated during the workshop to encourage critical consciousness. This process was aimed at allowing the participants list possible elements that might provoke sexist, racist and classist behaviour from society. The participants saw the listed categories as socially constructed and profoundly animated by hegemonic structures. The stance which they took required them to communicate their views as urgent political and social voices against these forms

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[5] bell, hooks, 'Understanding Patriarchy',
http://imaginenoborders.org/pdf/zines/UnderstandingPatriarchy.pdf, accessed 17 May 2020.

of prejudice in the German society in general and Berlin in particular. In presenting their views on the issues raised, they all acted as a group that set out to attempt to seek answers to questions which Freire, through his encounter with similar situations in his hometown, had earlier posed to Brazilian peasants and workers who were in dire need of a pedagogy of liberation:

> This lesson and this apprenticeship must come, however, from the oppressed themselves and from those who are truly in solidarity with them. As individuals or as peoples, by fighting for the restoration of their humanity they will be attempting the restoration of true generosity. Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. And this fight, because of the purpose given to it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors' violence, lovelessness even when clothed in false generosity (45).

The path to humanization in our context is probably to question why normal terms such as man, woman, transgender, black, white, are infused with socially denigratory conceptualisations that have become rooted in discriminatory behaviour. Since the theme of workshop was gender, an intersectional reading of gender was therefore necessary to engage racism and classism as the last two often came up in the discussion sessions. But to be able to engage in subsequent discussion of racism in Berlin, it is perhaps necessary to offer a brief historical overview of German attitude towards immigrants.

German State's attitude towards immigrants

Today's German society does not strictly fit into what Freire describes as marked by a condescendingly strict opposition between the oppressor and the oppressed. However, cases of prejudice based on ethnic, racial, and gender differences still exist. To facilitate the discussion of the 2013 theatre workshop, I will now offer a historical background to ethnic and racial relations in Germany, with mainly immigrant populations in mind.

The current rise of nationalist groups and hate crimes against foreigners mainly provoked by the influx of immigrants from conflict zones like Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Libya invites a retrospective glance at different German governments' attitudes towards foreigners across time and how these could have ignited disdain for immigrants among common German people. The history of negative attitudes towards immigrants in Germany, as Harald Bauder

suggests, could be attributed to the search for a 'German national identity defined in ethnic terms' (2008: 96) ranging from 'the imperial Wilhelmine Era (1890-1918), the Weimar Republic (1919 1933), the Third Reich (1933-1945), and the Federal Republic of Germany (Brubaker 1992, quoted in Bauder 2008). In these German governments, foreigners tended to be categorised predominantly according to their skin colour, culture, religion, and race, and were therefore treated as less human through what could be referred to as panoptic gazes. Such panoptic gazes encompass what Ashcroft et al have described as 'the social and psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalises another group ... by which imperial discourse creates its 'others' [which] corresponds to the focus of desire or power in relation to which the subject is produced, the other is the excluded or 'mastered' subject created by the discourse of power (2013: 188). These social and psychological ways have created binary distinctions whether in colonial times and postcolonial dislocations and continue to reformulate interactions in the context of 'hierarchization of human types' (219). In the thinking of Aschroft et al, without the hierarchization of humans in terms of where they come from, what they look like and how they behave all embodied in racism, sexism, classism etc., these categories of discriminations would not exist as social constructions. With Ashcroft et al in mind, the quest for a German national identity during the eras cited above interconnects with the consolidation of power. Such consolidation, with regards to relations with foreigners from other European countries and from Africa could be judged as imperialistic in approach.

Peter O'Brien (1988) chronicles the treatment of non-Germans, especially the deliberate displacement and discrimination against Polish, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Jewish immigrants, from the rule of Frederick the Great to the Third Reich. He identifies notorious programmes and policies such as the 'Germanization program of 1777 (112), the 1889-1899 *Polenpolik* (114), the 1908 Expropriation Act, the pursuit for *Lebensraum* (112), the Imperial Association Law (1908), and the Nuremberg laws of 1935 (113). Post-WWII-Germany's attempt to break from such a past again ushered in The Alien Laws of 1965 and the Work permit Decrees of 1959 and 1971 which were not only aimed at reducing the number of guest workers but also at complicating their integration into the German society at the time. However, the German immigration policy began to improve because

> many factors frustrated state power in the (nineteen) seventies. First, Aliens enjoy certain protections against maltreatment – often considerable protection. An ever expanding number of foreigners gain the security of the unlimited residence permit or residence entitlement as migration ages... Aliens not protected by these more secure permits, can always fight injustices in the courts (O'Brien, 1988: 120).

Ulrich Spies 1982 (quoted in O'Brien 1988) states that in 1978, all immigrants who appealed the non-extension of their residence permits in Berlin in court won (120). Being a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the

European Union (EU), Germany was obliged to revise some of the policies that affected the immigrant population (120-121). O' Brien notes: '[a]n ever-expanding number of foreigners gain the security of the unlimited residence permit or residence entitlement as migration ages, simply because they have been in Germany for many years (120). A final factor, which according to O'Brien contributed to the German government's positive attitude towards immigrants, is 'the Germany-transformed argument' (110). Apart from this, the government also faced pressure from various directions including, churches, pro-democratic political wings, individual activists from within the country itself in the 1970s and the 1980s.

Despite the positive change in attitude towards immigrants demonstrated above, certain episodes of discrimination especially against African immigrants still point to a deep-rooted disdain for immigrants. In their book, *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960*, Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft challenge the peril faced by Cameroonians, then colonial subjects of German Kamerun, from the beginning of German colonisation of the territory in 1884 to the end of WW1. The book engages with the often derogatory marginalisation of blacks in German communities. While Africans were employed in Germany to exhibit the exotic face of German colonisation, black males were often pursued and executed if they engaged in love relationships with German women. Tobias Nagl describes this practice as living in 'racial shame' (2005: 135). A well-known example of the consequences of living in 'racial shame' was the execution by guillotine of Jonas Alexander Ndoki by Nazi officials in Hamburg in the early 1940s. A possible justification for prohibiting interracial marriages or relationships, Tina N. Campt explains, could be found in 19th century German colonial policies on the issue:

> [s]cientific conceptions for the negative genetic consequences of racial mixture were already an element of nineteenth-century German colonial policies on the issue of *Rassenmischehe* or racially mixed marriages between white colonial settlers and indigenous colonial peoples. (2005: 90)

While immigrants from different European and African countries were fighting for integration into the German society, women, LGBTIQ individuals were also canvassing for equality. When it comes to gender inequality, patriarchal masculinity and heteronormative thinking are mainly responsibility for its proliferation. Gender inequality and how it especially intersects with race and class is also echoed in the works of a Ghanaian-German poet, scholar, and anti-racist activist May Ayim. Ayim's scholarly and poetry work have inspired other research on black experience in Germany and Afro-German movements. With reference to May Ayim's mix of poetry with her private life, Marion Gerlind attests that '[m]uch of Germany's institutionalized racism was intertwined with

her life, which she made public through her poetry… [and] exposed German colonialism and racism, which is still pervasive'[6] and which her poem 'afro-german 1' critiques. On the level of gender, Ayim clearly emphasises gender and racial violence in her 1992 poem 'autumn in Germany' thus:

> … again and again
> human bones
> of jews and blacks
> of the weak and the sick
> of sinti and roma and
> poles of lesbians and
> gays of and of
> and of and of
> and and…[7]

Focusing on her life, Ayim's works explore how those considered foreigners continue to suffer from the 'double, double crossing' of racism, sexism, and classism. To contribute to already existing artistic and activist efforts to curb inequality, intervention theatre is discussed here as another engaging method of conscientizing community on the issue.

Fig.1.Theatre games as a process of transforming the body

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[6] Marion Gerlind, 'May Ayim's Legacy in World Language Study', *FLANC Newsletter*, Spring 2012, http://www.gerlindinstitute.org/resources/articles/Ayim_FLANC.pdf, accessed 17 May 2020.

[7] Ibid.

The role of intervention theatre

According to Augusto Boal, theatrical intervention dates to 5th Century Greece's worship of Dionysius, a ritual which have often been cited as the origin of theatre. Thespis, whom Boal describes as the 'Unruly protagonist' intervened to comment on his society during the singing of the Dithyramb. His attempt is esteemed audacious in the sense that Thespis did not only separate himself, in the process creating the first actor, from the choreographed Greek Dithyrambic chorus to recount the exploits of Dionysius and of his life in a dialogical manner, he, according to Boal, also commented on the society with Solon the Athenian statesman and lawmaker sitting in the audience (2000 xiii). Thespis had intervened in the society, but the mask, the character and the stage blocked the performer's involvement with the spectators, a hindrance which Bertolt Brecht attempted to resolve with his *Verfremdungseffekt*. Yet within this distancing theatre technic, the spectator was still alienated in the entire performance encounter. This brief historical account is mentioned to illustrate how intervention theatre developed and how the process justifies its role of creating both awareness and conscientization as seen in Boal's use of theatre of the oppressed. On its interventionist role, Fadi Skeiker emphasizes that such theatre is 'not primarily for aesthetic entertainment, but to serve a social purpose, especially among those doing the theatre and secondarily for its audience' (2015: 116). Reflecting both on the role of Thespis and Brecht with theatre and society in mind, Boal's Spect-Actor creation which is a prerequisite for the impact of participatory theatre to be felt, allows the spectator to invade the stage, the character, by employing his body and voice in a systematic transformation process (xxi). The process of transformation in a strict intervention theatre workshop begins with relevant relaxation exercises, theatre games (see fig. 1 above) aimed at 'making the body expressive' (126). An effective transformation process of course depends on the experience of the facilitator, also the joker, the resource person, and the coordinator. In Boal's reading, the participating students and guests became spect-actors through their participation in workshop activities. The experiences of discrimination shared during the workshop were then developed via critical discussions and reflection through a 'problem-posing education' model (see fig 2 below).

Fig. 2. Critical discussions and reflections

The will to transform the society beginning with a problem-posing pattern gradually develops to creating awareness and conscientization with voice as a powerful tool. Voice becomes important not only through the discussion phase, but also through the play which is improvised, rehearsed and performed in public places. This turn aptly defends the role of the theatre facilitator's intervention in the community who, according to Tim Prentki, '…seek[s] to work with those who are best situated to bring about change' (2009: 182). This could be through community initiative and the use of actors from within the community, for example the Kenyan Kamiriithu experience in the 1970s which resulted in the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will marry when I want)* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii; or actors from outside the community. Although the concept of intervention and how it is materialised in intervention theatre has received critique about it supposed bottom-top approach since it is generally sponsored by donors who then dictate the agenda, the workshop I did with the students could, to a larger extent, be regarded as bottom-up in the sense that the students extended the topic of gender to race and class questions which they integrated in the scenes, setting, dialogue and conflicts of their choice. Their engagement with these topics was to a larger extent more on how their participation in such an initiative will also be useful for their community, in addition to its being a university requirement. During the post-workshop discussion on July 19, participants mentioned how much they had learnt from the workshop. For them, intervention theatre is a subtle, yet poignant method 'to confront people with things that they do not want to think about… to irritate'. The participants' assessment dwelt on the topics of sexual harassment, racism etc. that were raised in the play. Admitting that the workshop was indeed productive and inspirational, some of the participants

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announced their intention of using intervention theatre in their respective awareness and conscientization programmes.

Wait a Minute!

Wait a Minute! is set on two venues namely a *Wohnungsbesichtigung* (flat viewing) and on the *U-Bahn* (Subway). At the former venue, we encounter four categories of people who are in search of a new apartment. Here the audience is introduced to a single mother of five, a University Professor and his wife, a lesbian couple (one of them is black) and a young female unemployed writer who is receiving unemployment benefits, i.e., *Hartz IV* from the state. The landlord makes not only provocative but also assaultive sexual moves towards the single mother of five but cynically rejects her application for the apartment because although she has no husband she has 'many' children. This could be interpreted as an attack on her moral standing. His apartment, he insinuates, is not structured to accommodate children, let alone five of them. Regarding the lesbian couple, he bursts out in derisive laughter when they approach him with questions about the apartment. This disparaging laughter that is filled with disgust, immediately translates into prejudice especially when the couple informs him that they are, indeed, moving into the apartment together. Well, he is definitely not interested in their case as he does not make any enquiries about their financial standing. The young female writer, who does not earn a regular income will, as depicted in the landlord's attitude, not be able to meet up with the monthly rents. Besides, the apartment is not carved out for individuals living on unemployment benefit as the German society on some occasions generally grades people supported by *Hartz IV* at the bottom of the social ladder. As it turns out, the apartment is given to the Professor and his wife which shows the landlord's preference for the upper middle-class couple. The second sequence of the play takes place on the Sub-way which incidentally is boarded by the entire flat viewing group. On the sub-way, a woman is sexually harassed but no one intervenes to save the distraught victim from her perpetrator. However, a passenger on the sub-way plays the role of a sexual harasser on the individual who has just harassed a woman. The perpetrator is disgusted, backs off from the situation and leaves the train. The question that this scene provokes is why people on the subway, and by extension Berlin, did not intervene to save the harassed lady? Further, why individuals should be sexually harassed in the first place and worst still in public spaces is one of the questions that the participants wanted to highlight in their play and consequently present to the public.

The scene where the lesbian couple feature, together with the attitude of the landlord is important for this paper. The participant's creation of such a scene especially as it portrays a negative attitude from the landlord tells us that some people are still to accept and tolerate same sex relations not only in Berlin, but the

throughout the world. A recent development on the topic is from Dillon M. Clayton (2014) who states that Gay rights in Germany has gained grounds in the last three decades with laws protecting gay relationships, yet homophobic tendencies are still apparent. The students demonstrated in their play that the German public discourse on 'non-heteronormative' sexual practices was still problematic and impregnated with discriminative tendencies. Worst still, if such a relation had a black person involved. The black character, that is, the lesbian partner, in *Wait a Minute!* is denigrated because of her race, and her sexuality. First, the landlord speaks only to the white partner and ignores her black partner who incidentally does not speak German. The landlord's negative attitude does not speak to only the category of race, but also unveils his attitude towards one's sexuality. Otherwise, a polite statement from the landlord would have informed the couple on why they were not given the apartment. As mentioned earlier, their financial status was not a topic of interest for the landlord. Prejudice is reflected in the landlord's personality through his interaction with the single mother, gay couple, a black person, and unemployed people. We can draw from the landlord's attitude that these categories of people are nonconformist as far as getting accommodation and/or being tolerated by certain individuals are concerned. His attitude, I suppose, reflects a cross section of the German public discourse on gender equality, race, class, and sexuality. If one is worthy to be acknowledged and privileged in society such as the one portrayed, then one must be of high standing, like the professor in the play, perform heteronormative behaviour, be white, to be able enjoy certain privileges, getting accommodation being one of them.

Fig. 3. Rehearsing the landlord scene

Agency: voicing a standpoint

Given all the issues raised in *Wait a Minute!,* representation is a crucial element in intervention theatre. For whom such an initiative is meant tells us how relevant the topics discussed are to the participants and the audience. Tim Prentki's poetics of representation speaks of how 'theatrical communication as received and understood by the audience' (2009: 19) answers the question of how representation is materialised in a theatre forum such as the one under study. As Prentki posits, the poetics of representation does not put form over content and vice versa, but rather achieves a balance of aesthetic form and content while contributing to a profound understanding of the play by both the audience and the participants. It is in the search of such a balance that encouraged one of the participating students to insist on integrating agency, if not resistance, in *Wait a Minute*! The said student played the role of the single mother of five. Suspecting that the landlord will reject her bid for the flat, and as it turned out, based on her gender and motherhood, she insisted during one of the rehearsal sessions (see fig. 3 above) that the narrative should allow the character to speak back against discrimination and directly to the landlord. The discussions that ensued, whether we should include the mentioned scene, was based on the student's argument that she could definitely not join the circle of discriminated persons (fig. 4 below) who will eventually individually denounced racism, classism and sexism, without personally confronting the landlord.

Fig.4 The circle as theatre space

The concept of the circle as space is important in the sense that it was materialised through a combination of gestural and abstract means. Physically framed by the performers' bodies, the circle as depicted in fig. 4 above, communicated discrimination, rage, strength, resilience, and agency. Agency, as portrayed in the mother's confrontation with the Landlord, for instance, reflects a kind of 'writing back' which reminds us of the character on the U-Bahn who had earlier intervened to save a distraught woman from sexual harassment. The initiative to frame a circle, together with summoning up the courage to speak against assault, are what give marginalised voices and other concerned people, agency in the play. It is such voices that ultimately conscientize the oppressor. Of course, the landlord, also driven by some kind of 'hegemonic masculinities' (see Hearn 2004; Connell 1995), does not admit to the accusation levied against him by the mother of five, but coming to his senses runs after the already exiting victorious single mother with attempts to, probably, offer explanations for his behaviour. But the single mother had made her point and long left the stage, leaving the landlord in a dilemma. Representation does not only create awareness, as seen in this now transformed attitude of the landlord, but also result in socio-psychological transformation as in the case of both the mother and the landlord.

The Berlin public discourse and voice as 'protest'

To be able to make sense out of the reaction of some members of the Berlin public to the performances on Tram M10, *MensaNord* (North refectory) of Humboldt University and *Mauerpark* (Berlin Wall Park) in Prenzlauer Berg, I return to Bauder's introduction to 'Media Discourse and the New German Immigration law'. Making references to Brubaker 1992, Bade 2004 and Meier-Braun 2001, Bauder states that 'the German Media and general public seemed to increasingly depart from long-standing ethnic conception of German Identity… and embrace the notion of Germany as an immigration country…' (96). However, the students were openly astounded when one of the students recounted how a male passenger on Tram M10 reacted when she engaged in a conversation with him simply to have his feedback on the scene about sexual harassment, previously played on the Tram. Instead of referring to the topic of sexual harassment which women from all continents still experience, the passenger asked if she was referring to the black woman who was harassed with the following remark 'what! You mean one of the black ones?' The students were not only troubled, they were also frustrated by the categorization of humans in terms of race; why did the male passenger not enquire whether the student meant the lady/woman who was harassed instead of 'one of the black ones', the students questioned. The students mused over how they could successfully communicate gender issues to the public without race issues featuring. A second incident that almost left the participants totally stunned was a question posed by an audience member during the post-performance discussions at the *MensaNord*. With regards to the play, one of the

spectators asked the following question to the theatre group: *'wo leben die betroffenen'* roughly translated as 'where do the concerned or aggrieved/affected parties live'. Probably the lady's question might have been influenced by the cultural mix of the group who perhaps imagined that some humanitarian crises was happening and required urgent intervention. When she posed the question, she immediately settled on her lunch and did not make further enquiries to other issues raised in the play. Not really informed about the political undertone of this question, I however noticed that mostly the German students were uncomfortable and clearly confused as to why such a question was posed and on what bases. They were undoubtedly at loss for an answer but managed to respond with 'we all live in Berlin' to which the woman made an exclamation of shock. Both the Tram10 incident together with the just narrated one illustrate that the spectators' statements ran deeper into social and political meanings which their denotative implications simply could not deconstruct. Regarding the students' major concern about the lady's question, I have made several enquiries, in a bid to understand the possible pejorative undertone of *'betroffene'* or *aggrieved/affected parties*. The word was employed in the political discourses of the 1990s when immigration became a ubiquitous debate on the German political landscape. Perhaps *'betroffene'* was to allude to specific groups of immigrant population. This assertion, again, allows us to investigate the use of specific words with focus on Bauder's historical account of post WW2 West Germany's conceptualisation of people who were considered Germans and those who were not. Bauder states that specific post-war terminologies such as *'Vertriebene'* (expelled persons) and *'Heimatvertriebene' (*persons expelled from home) referring to German refugees who arrived West German from Eastern European Nations, were accepted as Germans (96). According to Bauder, lexica such as 'guest workers' *(Gastarbeiter)* and foreigners *(Ausländer)* and in this context, *betroffene*, all carry different political and economic connotations, yet being binary placement of immigrants from the rest of the society, without acknowledgement of what Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as the productive third space.

Although the workshop participants, including the students received positive feedback from the public with encouragement to proceed with open discussions of such topics via intervention theatre, the Berlin public could be said to be still in the process of familiarizing themselves with public performances to which they are required to make feedback. But experiencing the impact of such interventionist approach, it was the participating students who opted that several performances be enacted in a bid to receive varied opinions from the audience

Conclusion

This article has illustrated, through a theatre workshop, how the oppression of individuals based on their gender interconnects with the colour of their skin,

their sexuality, and their economic status. This form of intersectionality, which also comes across as multidimensional, makes the impact of discrimination complex and challenging to confront. Although the play, *Wait a Minute!*, spoke to the social conceptualisations of race, gender and class and how they relate to one another, some members of the Berlin public, indeed confirmed that an issue like sexual harassment could not be analysed without casting a glance at the physical appearance such as the skin colour of the person who was harassed. To the participants, this approach ignored the problem that was raised and that required immediate address. This difficulty has been demonstrated above in two audience members' reaction to the public performances of *Wait a Minute!* The inspiration drawn from the workshop, coupled with both encouraging and pejorative remarks from the public was indicative of how public opinion about social conceptualisations such as gender, race and class still vary. Dwelling on the seriousness of the themes raised, the students included an exclamation mark to the play's title, which besides communicating strong feelings, the mark materialised the agency that they built into the story and subsequently into their performance to make their voices against racial, gender, sexual prejudices, heard.

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