"The cultural capital of postmigrants is enormous"
Postmigration in theatre as label and lens

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Postmigration: Label, lens, selling point?

The term 'postmigrant theatre' emerged from theatrical practice developed by a group of artists and cultural producers in Berlin in the mid-2000s, who aimed to counter a lack of space in German theatre for nuanced narratives of Germany as a country of immigration and for theatre practitioners with a so-called "background of migration".[1] As Kijan Espahangizi puts it, the terms 'postmigrant', 'postmigration' and 'postmigratory' are "not the newest invention of a cultural studies in which the production of new theories has run wild […] It developed at the point at which this experiential reality, despite all the hurdles, began to step out of the shadows of the dominant cultural discourse and into its privileged institutions, i.e. the editorial rooms, artistic institutions and universities" (2016: unpaged).[2] The term stages within itself a nexus of competing, and often paradoxical, positions or social pressures: a proximity to, and difference from, discourses of postcolonialism;[3] a tension between repeating and challenging a reductive and

1 The term "Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund" ("people with a background of migration") is the official term used in demographic censuses carried out in Germany to refer to individuals who were not born with German citizenship or who have at least one parent who was not born with German citizenship (*Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge 2017).* The definition used by the Office for Statistics altered in 2016. The new definition replaces that used in the 2011 census which encompassed all foreign residents of Germany, as well as those who themselves migrated, or who have at least one parent who migrated, *after* 1955 to the geographical area currently occupied by the Federal Republic of Germany (ibid.).

2 Note on translation: where existent translations from the German were available these have been used and are cited as such; where this was not possible all translations from German-language sources are my own.

3 The degree to which the power relations occasioned by large-scale post-war labour migration to Germany can be considered analogous to those in contexts where large-scale postwar migration took place from former colonies to the former imperial centres of France and Britain has of course

marginalising framing of those with personal or family histories of migration; a usage as normative descriptor versus transformative lens.[4] Circulating beyond the theatrical sphere into broader public discourse, it has since been taken up as a term within the social sciences in Germany and in an interdisciplinary study in Denmark (cf. Schramm/Moslund/Petersen et al. 2019).[5] Such work stresses an understanding of the term as a lens which can "release conventional migration research from the position of exception which it has occupied until now and establish it as societal analysis" (Yildiz 2014: 22). At the same time, it does seem to be the success of the term in the cultural field – referred to in one interview as the "the triumphal march of the term 'postmigration'" (Foroutan 2017) – as much as its ethos, which has led to its adoption in the work of social scientists in Germany.

While the perspective identified in the theatrical field has been taken up in the social sciences (cf. Römhild 2015: 46, 2017: 73), the theatrical work itself has often been left behind. Yet 'postmigrant theatre', as an experimental artistic practice concerned with roles, bodies, and as an organisational process in itself, has a lot to offer the social sciences as a practice of knowledge construction. Particularly notable in this regard is the ambivalence with which the term 'postmigrant' is regarded by theatre practitioners often associated with it. Despite the term's enthusiastic adoption in the public sphere and the social sciences, in the theatrical sphere, the social actors (directors, artistic directors, actors, dramaturges, viewers, reviewers) who engage it might often be said to do so in a manner which displays a degree of distance: pointing to it, rather than identifying as it. The author and playwright Deniz Utlu, for example, "understands the postmigrant theatre as a kind of label under which political theatre is made by 'theatre-practitioners of colour'" (Sharifi 2013: 104). This distance or ambivalence might seem surprising

been much debated (see, for example, Steyerl/Rodríguez 2003). Turkish migration to the FRG, for example, is not a direct result of Germany's colonial past and Turkey itself was previously the centre of the Ottoman Empire. However, the role of Orientalism, a mode of thought arising out of French and British colonial encounters in the Middle East, in the perception of Turkish-German subjects and their cultural production has been the subject of much analysis (ibid.). The role of Turkish-German artists as "cultural brokers" and "native informants" analogous to postcolonial writers is frequently broached, for example, see Mani 2007: 35-36.

4 My points in these opening paragraphs draw on and extend the discussion of the term in Stewart 2017.

5 'Postmigration' as a conceptual term is also simultaneously gaining currency within French Studies, but the usage there seems to be more influenced by usage of the term in studies by Elleke Boehmer (2005) and Ahmed Gamal (2013) of English-language postcolonial literature written in the British context, than by developments in Germany. The introduction to Kathryn Klepping-er and Laura Reeck's edited volume *Post-Migratory Cultures in Postcolonial France*, for example, highlights the influence of Boehmer and Gamal (2018: 8), but makes no mention of the popular take-up of the term in Germany. For a comparative discussion of German and French-language literature "of postmigration", see Geiser 2015.

given the effective work the term has done in terms of creating visibility for the theatrical productions and performances which sit behind it and in terms of the funding, commissioning and organisational practices that create space for those productions. However, writing on the branding of writers of Arabic origin in the French publishing industry as "beur" authors, Kathryn Kleppinger highlights the potential inherent in branding in racialised contexts to increase visibility in ways which enable these authors' success, but also to label such authors in a restrictive manner which enacts a kind of symbolic violence: to become a kind of "indelible mark" (2015: 16). Similarly, the ambivalence shown towards the term 'postmigrant theatre' by some of the very practitioners associated with it indicates a need for care in valorising the term whether as lens or as label, particularly as the term's usage moves into circulation in the academic context.

In this chapter then, my aim is to take one step back from the more celebratory – and certainly compelling and productive – discussion of the term as lens and return to the term also as label. In doing so I draw on the explicit analogies to postcolonialism present in the term's construction by making use of insights from anglophone and francophone postcolonial studies which take a critical perspective on the 'brand value' of postcolonialism. Following earlier critiques by figures such as Arif Dirlik (1994), these studies have positioned postcolonialism as an "index of resistance, a perceived imperative to rewrite the social text of continuing imperial dominance" (Huggan 2001: ix), but highlighted that the term also "functions as a sales-tag in the context of today's globalised commodity culture" (ibid.). As Raphael Dalleo puts it, on one hand, having established itself successfully, during the late 1990s-2000s postcolonial studies "was […] characterized by anxiety about the field's institutionalisation and the extent to which the proliferation of postcolonial studies programs, courses, university positions and anthologies undermines the field's self-conception of marginality and critique" (2016: 4). On the other hand, work which addressed that anxiety, such as Graham Huggan's influential *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), was able to "engage with commodification and institutionalisation not only as processes contaminating intellectuals' political purity, but as an enabling condition for any potentially oppositional political project constructed within the context of capitalism" (Dalleo 2016: 5).

This work, continued by scholars such as Richard Watts (2005), Sarah Brouillette (2007), Sandra Ponzanesi (2014), Caroline Koegler (2018) and Madhu Krishnan (2019), to name just a few (cf. Dalleo 2016: 7), has led to insights with regard to the material ways in which labelling, branding and marketing both shape and enable the reception of cultural products which offer a non-normative perspective on questions of nationhood, empire, race, ethnicity, history, and identification. As such these scholars "have also popularised terms such as marketing, branding, the market, or market forces – terms that have their roots in business studies – which suggests a significant extension of postcolonial studies' materialist

framework" (Koegler 2018: 1). Discussing the French context, Kathryn Kleppinger, for example, suggests via a detailed examination of the media framing of authorship that "authors of North African heritage have likely received more attention from scholars and journalists due to the 'beur' label's marketing appeal. Their stories of growing up within France's largest immigrant population have created a recognizable and newsworthy brand, one that touches upon questions regarding French identity in the contemporary era." (2015: 16). In this chapter I suggest transferring this attention to the framing of cultural production to discussions of 'postmigration', but at the same time I suggest ways of deepening this approach by bringing in reference to recent work by Anamik Saha (2018) on cultural industries in the UK context. Saha compellingly explores what he terms "the rationalizing/racializing logic of capital" in those industries, i.e. the ways in which seemingly neutral processes of rationalisation in the cultural industries can have racialising outcomes. If there is an interest in establishing postmigration as a lens for "societal analysis" (Yildiz 2014: 22), here I want to suggest that returning to the 'postmigrant' in 'postmigrant theatre' as a label in the context of branding highlights the importance of retaining attention to the workings of capital in the analysis carried out under this name.

Branding and the Ballhaus

The term 'postmigrant theatre' first gained currency in Germany through its usage in two festivals curated by Shermin Langhoff; the "Beyond Belonging Festivals" which ran at the HAU theatre, Berlin, in 2006 and 2007. These festivals were supported by a network, kulturSPRÜNGE e.V., which had been founded by Shermin Langhoff, Tuncay Kulaoğlu, and Martina Priessner in 2003 with the intention of "supporting and making visible the artistic and cultural achievements of migrants and postmigrants, as well as initiating an exchange and dialogue between artists, political activists and academics about the topics of migration and urban culture" (Kultursprünge e.V. 2003).[6] The success of these festivals enabled the opening of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, a small-scale space in Berlin Kreuzberg, which was established as a longer-term home for the theatrical work trialled in Beyond Belonging. Langhoff herself then famously took up the role of artistic director of the Maxim Gorki theatre, Berlin, in 2013, while Kulaoğlu who had led the dramaturgical department of the Ballhaus in its initial years, stepped into the role of artistic director there from 2012-2014, a position he shared with the current artistic director, Wagner Carvalho.

6 Translation as provided on the website.

Langhoff, Kulaoğlu, and the team around them at the Ballhaus were hardly unaware of the ways in which capital circulates in the theatrical and broader cultural sphere. Indeed, it is their canny navigation and steering of that capital (both financial and symbolic) which did so much to put the Ballhaus and the postmigrant theatre practiced there on the map. In an interview in 2010, Kulaoğlu, who has been co-artistic director, curator, and dramaturge at the Ballhaus, made reference to this brand value, when he stated, "the cultural capital of postmigrants is enormous" (Kulaoğlu 2010: 159). In such comments we see the way in which a perceived 'lack of culture' projected on to migrants to Germany, and their children, through their association with the so-called 'undereducated classes'[7] is transformed into a perception of an abundance of culture and creativity. The specific reference to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital here draws attention to "a form of capital that is at first glance non-monetary but produces […] structures, practices of exchange, and forms of valuation that are analogous to those produced in the economy" (Koegler 2018: 17; summarizing Bourdieu). For Bourdieu,

> Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state […, e.g.] in the case of educational qualifications […]. Because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence […]." (Bourdieu 2004 [1983]: 17-18)

A lack of recognition of competence can be traced in the reception of earlier work by Turkish or Turkish-German theatre practitioners in the Federal Republic of Germany (cf. Boran 2004), and in conversations I have had with more established directors a 'lack' of theatrical culture in, for example, Turkey is something I have heard often erroneously referenced in explaining why they had not engaged with work for audiences or by artistic practitioners with a so-called "background of migration". The concept of cultural capital also makes its way into other interviews with the Ballhaus' core team, for instance in an interview with Barbara Kastner from the dramaturgical department: "The ambition is to give migrant artists from the second and third generation a form, to enable new stories from new perspectives. The Ballhaus thus draws on a cultural capital which has hardly been used in the theatre landscape" (Langhoff/Kulaoğlu/Kastner 2011: 399). Such strategic positioning by key figures within the Ballhaus' dramaturgical team and leader-

7 'Bildungsferne Schichten' is the term often used in Germany.

ship thus works to counter assumptions that have previously governed the lack of engagement with migration and migrantised audiences and artists on the part of the German theatrical establishment. In turn it highlights the importance for scholars following the work of postmigrant theatre of carefully considering systems of "exchange as shaped by materialisation beyond the (strictly) material, i.e. (symbolic) currency flows, valorisation and devalorisation, strategic niche-claiming, and identity performances; by commodification, marketing, branding, and consumption practices" (Koegler 2018: 11). Indeed, the navigation of such systems of exchange can be seen as integral to the politics of the artistic work under consideration, while the critical reception and documentation of this theatrical work itself forms a part of these systems.

In engaging with what one Berlin official has separately described as "a paradigm shift from a 'deficit' to a 'resource' perspective on cultural diversity" (in Bodirsky 2012: 460), Kulaoğlu's phrasing within the quotation above also seems to carry echoes of the ideas of Richard Florida (2003) and of Phil Wood and Charles Landry (2008), whose work on cities and the creative class has helped created an association between spaces characterised by ethnic diversity and creative industries. Termed 'culture for competitiveness', this association has in turn informed policy in cities including Berlin. The logic can be summarised as follows:

> [T]oday's global economy is increasingly knowledge-based and innovation is more and more central to competitiveness. Thus, competitiveness relies on appropriately skilled 'human capital' that can contribute creatively to innovation. Successful economies have to form and attract such creative workers, and because culture – the arts, human development, and ways of life – is central to their creativity and lifestyle, policy-makers need to foster it. This includes support for creative and cultural industries, openness to immigration (of the right kind), and diversity-sensitive integration of migrants. As the argument goes, using culture for competitiveness in this way will lead to economic growth and consequently to more jobs. This 'culture for competitiveness' approach (CfC in the following) has been popularized in particular as strategy for the economic development of cities afflicted by deindustrialization and social polarization. (Bodirsky 2012: 456)

As Bodirsky highlights, "Berlin partakes in the CfC approach in treating creative industries and the arts as well as migrant diversity as a resource for innovation and economic competitiveness" (ibid.: 461). Florida's work usually positions the two separately, with ethnic diversity forming a desirable background for creatives, rather than looking at race and ethnicity within the creative class. Kulaoğlu here, however, highlights the symbolic and economic potential of acknowledging the creativity and wealth of cultural references at the disposal of creative practi-

tioners with 'a background of migration' (to use the unhappy terminology of the German state).

In the language of branding, claims such as Kulaoğlu's 'add value' to the artistic product: association with the label of postmigrant theatre thus raises the symbolic value of the work in question. To turn to Saha briefly:

> Marketing in the cultural industries […] entails turning cultural commodities / producers into brands, constructing their identity and promoting them as such. They are brands in the sense that extra values and qualities are associated with them – a guarantee of worth, which deems a brand to be superior or at least equal to other brands (often based around fantasies of upward mobility and increased status). (2018: 131-32)

This is something Kulaoğlu has reflected on elsewhere, for example in his consideration of the much-vaunted late 90's claim that "the new German film is Turkish" (1999). This claim linked the new generation of emerging Turkish-German film makers with the auteurship of the New German Cinema of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Wim Wenders (Berghahn 2006: 141), allowing the symbolic capital of one to rub off on the other.[8] In turn, the most prominent member of this new generation, Fatih Akın, lent his celebrity power, or to use the language of Bourdieu, symbolic capital to Dogland, the opening festival of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theatre in 2008, appearing in press images with Shermin Langhoff at the opening (Ballhaus Naunynstraße 2008).[9] Considering the artistic work developed at the Ballhaus from 2006 onwards in relation to the role of branding in the cultural industries helps bring into focus the politics and creativity of the work which sits behind and frames the theatrical performances we tend to focus our analysis on.

Equally, Shermin Langhoff's 2018 nomination for a prize in the awards for European Cultural Branding (13. Europäischen Kulturmarken-Awards) as cultural manager of the year reminds us that her work as artistic director, creating an identity and narrative for the theatre she leads, is also a form of work in the field of branding and marketing. There is, then, an interesting intersection between the activist and commercial arts of persuasion here, one which is however to be understood as symptomatic of, rather than at odds with, the challenge of trying to create anti-hegemonic artistic work; indeed, this is an intersection which approaches from cultural studies can help us understand. As Cayla and Arnould

8 Symbolic capital being "a form of recognition and prestige that can be variously constituted (e.g. through cultural capital or social capital), and accumulated, reduced, and traded in exchange for (other forms of) symbolic and/or monetary capital" (Koegler 2018: 17, summarizing Bourdieu 2004 [1983]).

9 Image on the following webpage: https://p106499.typo3server.info/index.php?id=21&evt=13.

highlight: "To talk of brands as cultural forms is to acknowledge that branding is a specific form of communication, which tells stories in the context of products and services, addresses people as consumers, and promises to fulfil unmet desires and needs. In other words, branding is a specific symbolic form, a particular way of talking about and seeing the world" (2008: 88-89). Similarly, Koegler stresses that "any form of enthusiastic promotion of particular ideas, theories, or aspects of the self is interwoven with symbolic valuation processes" (2018: 9).

I find this particularly important to highlight as it speaks to the way in which postmigrant theatre at the Ballhaus, and its iterations beyond that particular theatre, can become caught up in the recognition of postmigrant audiences as both excluded taxpayers (see, for example, Temiz 2013), but also potential consumers needed to support a cultural industry often perceived to be in crisis or decline. In the UK context, Saha suggests that, "[t]he politics of recognition – that is, the demand of minorities to be recognised – has been reframed as a commercial imperative (rather than as an ethical/moral one) where particular demographic groups become "recognized" as market niches" (2018: 89). This is certainly something I would suggest we see in the emergence of postmigrant theatre in the context of a tension between concerns of market and governability, and rights-based inclusion.[10] I highlight this not to in any way downplay or disparage the work of the Ballhaus but rather because I think it is illuminating to explore the institutional structures and ideological landscape this important work has to navigate.

Certainly, branding provides an interesting lens through which to view the interaction between the core team at the Ballhaus and the loosely-structured network of artists surrounding it. We see significant consistency of the presentation of a wide range of very different artists' work in advertising materials at the Ballhaus under Shermin Langhoff and Tunçay Kulaoğlu via the use of Esra Rotthoff's photographic arrangements from 2011 onwards. Rotthoff's work was featured, for example, in the promotion of the "Almanci" festival (2011), the "Voicing Resistance" festival (2012) and "§ 301 – Die beleidigte Nation" (Article 301: The Insulted Nation, 2012). When Langhoff left the Ballhaus in 2013 to take up the position of artistic director at the higher profile Maxim Gorki theatre in the centre of Berlin, this relationship with Rotthoff was then continued at the Gorki.

Describing her involvement with the initial visual identity of the Gorki, Rotthoff's website details the following:

> Esra collaborated with the core Gorki team on developing all the visual aspects of the theatre. She started with the theatre's logo, flipping the R of GORKI backwards – which in Russian is the letter ya [Я] – meaning I/me. This idea of the actors' personal identities runs as a leitmotif through all of the Gorki's stagings, as a mirror

10 This is the subject of discussion in Stewart 2018.

> of the contemporary Berlin. Esra photographed and recorded every actor who graced the Gorki stage, as if in a precise biometric image. If you look closely, you see her leitmotif of the flipped R reflected in each actor's eyes – the result of being lit by a flash with a stencilled "ya" in it, imprinting their gaze with a notion of their own identity. (Rotthoff, n.d.)

While the "Я" or "I" at the centre of the eyes is positioned by Rotthoff as a reference to individuality and humanity, the branding of each individual's gaze with the institution's new logo also reminds us of the broader aim of such presentation: the establishment of a recognisable identity for the theatre house under its new artistic directors and for the theatre to be produced there. Looking more broadly at the rebranding of the Gorki under Langhoff, the use of the Russian letter within the new logo defamiliarises the now-familiar name of the theatre for Berlin audiences and so draws attention to an aspect of transnationalism long present within the history of the German theatrical establishment: it is, after all, the Soviet post-war occupation of East Germany and East Berlin and the subsequent establishment of the GDR which led a theatre which is today located in the centre of the capital city of a united Germany to be named after the Russian playwright, Maxim Gorki.[11] The postmigrant theatre practice already established under Langhoff at the Ballhaus is thus positioned both as in the tradition of, and as a new direction in, transnational flows of political theatre.[12] The biometric i.e. passport style imagery is also of interest here, however, referencing as it does a focus on demands for uniformity and the use of an undifferentiating gaze as means of governance of bodies which cross borders. The potential violence of such framing sits in ironic tension with the vulnerability of each actor's naked shoulders.

It is not only the marketing of the work produced at the Ballhaus which helped create a distinctive identity for the theatre. Continuation of dramaturgical techniques between plays written, developed and directed by a range of authors and directors at the Ballhaus can also be seen. As discussed in detail elsewhere, one

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11 Although the 'r' becomes a different letter of the alphabet in Russian, so the result is not the creation of a translingual pun here. In the title of the Gorki's associated Studio я, in contrast, the Russian word for 'I' combines phonologically with the German word for 'yes' (ja) creating a bilingual affirmation of the identity work within the German theatrical establishment that this studio allows, and perhaps signalling more visibly engagement with the experience of artists who have immigrated, or whose parents had immigrated, from the former USSR and former Yugoslavia.

12 For a close reading of the ways in which the programming and casting of plays such as Gorki's *Children of the Sun* and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, combined with the dramaturgy of the theatre's marketing to make the new direction of the theatre "legible", see Simke 2017: 110-160. Simke also discusses Rotthoff's photography there as part of a broader and very detailed discussion of the posters and advertising materials used in the opening season.

example of this is the experimentation with striptease across plays performed under the label of postmigrant theatre from 2006 onwards. Early examples include *Schwarze Jungfrauen* (Black Virgins, 2006), developed for the early festivals which preceded the Ballhaus' establishment, where a false striptease down to flesh-coloured bodysuits and bald wigs thematised the issue of potential audience voyeurism within the staging of a play which took Islam and sexuality as its theme. In later examples such as *Lo bal Almanya* (2011) striptease is used as part of an extended parody of a particular political figure, Necla Kelek, or, as in *Verrücktes Blut* (Crazy Blood) as part of a critical exploration of the relationship between the racialised and islamified body and the demands of the German state.[13] This particular technique engages a common tendency toward nudity in Germany's experimental "postdramatic" theatrical scene, signalling the theatre as aesthetically aligned with the provocative, anti-establishment stance such work still affects. However, it also distinctly combines this with attention to the disciplinary and racialising dimensions of such tendencies, giving an established anti-establishment practice new and much-needed political bite. The movement of productions such as *Schwarze Jungfrauen* and *Verrücktes Blut* to the Gorki means that this aesthetic and the "brand" of political theatre-making initially developed at the Ballhaus has continued there, while further consistencies have grown up between productions within the Gorki and its associated Studio Я (on dramaturgy at the Gorki, see Simke 2017: 149-160).

Postmigrant theatre and the "right to imagine"

Of course, artistic ownership in theatrical production is always diffuse. However, this is particularly interesting with respect to Anamik Saha's suggestion in his exploration of the cultural industries and race that "authorship under capitalism is increasingly shaped by industry practices […] In other words industry practice takes on an authorial authority in itself" (2018: 115). This leads him to argue for an extended focus on "unpack[ing] the industrial processes, including the behaviours and actions of those who operate within them, that determine the production of representations" (ibid.). Such unpacking is certainly of interest with respect to what Mark Terkessidis calls the "entanglement of 'documentary and migration' in the theatrical sphere" in Germany (2010: 7). Here I want to draw on Saha's theoretical insights to take an analysis of this entanglement further.

Drawing on Murali Balaji's work on Black and Asian cultural production in the music industry in an anglophone context, within his broader discussion, Saha

13 This is discussed in detail in Stewart 2017. On striptease in *Schwarze Jungfrauen*, see also Sieg 2010.

points to the use of 'formatting' i.e. "creating a cultural text according to a production format or formula" (2018: 131-132) or "producing an original to type" (ibid.: 131) as a means of navigating the tension between the need for innovation and low risk investment in the cultural product. Such formatting ensures the cultural product both meets audience demand and is reproducible in relation to further demand for similar material (Balaji 2009; Saha 2018: 131): "On the first level, it helps to guide creative intermediaries in commodifying an artist in a way that is consistent with consumer expectations. […] On a higher level, however, formatting is a 'safe' way for corporations to (re)produce commodities with little risk and the potential for high reward" (Balaji 2009).[14] Both Balaji (2009) and Saha (2018) locate such formatting primarily in the sphere of corporate cultural production. However, it is also reminiscent of the vast growth in postmigrant documentary theatre we have seen in Germany over the past ten to 15 years, and what I would see as the associated continuation of the documentary format in engagements with newer migrants to Germany.[15] This development marks a stark change to a previous reluctance to stage stories of migration by, with, or about postmigrant artists: and we can perhaps see the attraction of a reliable format for theatres trying to either sell postmigrant theatre to established audiences or use it to open themselves to new audiences.[16]

A result of such formatting practices though is that "the right to imagine […] is structurally relocated and authorized as the (cultural) task of the general management" (Ryan 1992: 168; quoted in Saha 2018: 131). Such a 'right to imagine' is

14 Both Balaji (2009) and Saha (2018) here draw on earlier work on formatting by Ryan (1992) which, however, "does not account for how race and gender influence production formats" (Balaji 2009: 229).

15 Saha notes that scholarship on cultural and creative industries focuses on cultural production in a context where a shift has taken place from systems of patronage to a corporate era (2018: 130). The German theatrical system might be said to function somewhere between patronage and corporate systems, given the high level of state subsidy in many theatrical institutions including those under consideration in this chapter (see Weiler 2014 for a detailed explanation of the German theatrical system). It is also not industrialised to the same extent as the music or film industries insofar as the product itself (the play) does not generally circulate via mechanical reproduction (exceptions to this include occasional DVD recordings and streaming events). However, both in accessing additional funding and in promoting productions to local, national and critical audiences, theatres in Germany do engage in what Saha calls the "employment of rationalizing techniques" typical of other cultural industries, "encompassing bureaucratization, formatting, packaging and marketing" (2018: 130). Thus, Saha also brings in reference to his work on Rasa Productions, a British South Asian theatre company, in making his argument (ibid.: 136).

16 An obvious example of such formatting would be Rimini Protokoll's work which falls somewhere between these two models. Garde and Mumford discuss plays such as Rimini Protokoll's *100% City* plays as touring formats (2016: 112), but do not link this to scholarship on formatting in other cultural industries.

traditionally more dispersed in theatre, and within the German theatrical establishment often an integral part of the role of artistic director. Indeed, such 'formatting' and the assumption of the 'right to imagine' by figures such as Langhoff and Kulaoğlu had a useful, that is to say, enabling role to play in the early and specific context of the initial festivals where the term 'postmigrant theatre' was used: the Beyond Belonging festivals held at the HAU theatre, Berlin, in 2006 and 2007, and at the Ballhaus. Here Langhoff and Kulaoğlu actively drew on production techniques they were familiar with from the film world, and the emphasis was on creating a structure which would allow artists based primarily in the other arts, such as literature or film, to enter the theatrical sphere (Langhoff/Kulaoğlu/Kastner 2011: 400). The classic example of this practice is now the piece which was the first big success to come from Langhoff and Kulaoğlu's postmigrant theatre: Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel's *Schwarze Jungfrauen* (2006), a semi-documentary play based on interviews with young Muslim women living in Germany, and directed in the premiere production by Neco Çelik. Here such formatting perhaps has more the character of practice as research and provided an enabling framework for bringing artists with an established literary or filmic practice into the theatre, thus redressing the lack of recognised training and associated cultural capital which had previously been a factor in restricting access (on access, see Nobrega 2013).

Arguably, however, such formatting can become restrictive when it becomes a format particular artists and themes cannot escape, or when the practice informing its usage changes. In the following section I turn to the example of *Schattenstimmen* (Shadow Voices) a play commissioned in the documentary vein in 2008 from Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel. *Schattenstimmen* was commissioned and premiered as part of Karin Beier's much-publicised project at Schauspiel Köln to reflect "the social reality" of Cologne as a city in which one in three people are considered "people with a background of migration". Accordingly, Beier recruited new members for the Cologne ensemble so that 30 per cent of the actors themselves had a "background of migration" (in Sharifi 2011: 100) and commissioned a new set of plays from directors and playwrights such as Zaimoglu, who is of Turkish origin. While the commission of *Schattenstimmen* seemed like an attempt to emulate the success of *Schwarze Jungfrauen*, the resultant text is generally considered significantly weaker by reviewers (see, for example, Granzin 2008; Keim 2011) – aesthetically, politically, and both as text and as performance.[17]

17 It was nevertheless also performed at the Ballhaus under the direction of Nurkan Erpulat in the same year as part of the Dogland festival.

Formatting engagement via documentary theatre

The commission of *Schattenstimmen* reflects not only the success and impact of earlier semi-documentary theatre at the Ballhaus; the structure of the piece also mirrors the structure of Zaimoglu and Senkel's first semi-documentary play-text, the aforementioned *Schwarze Jungfrauen*. *Schattenstimmen* consists of nine monologues based on interviews with undocumented immigrants to Germany and reworked in Zaimoglu and Senkel's own stylised idiom. The resultant play-text includes figures ranging from a homophobic and grossly generalised "African" male prostitute, a Russian widow who cares for the old ladies of a German village, a Moroccan kitchen porter who initially came to Germany to study and dreams of marrying a German woman, and a Ukrainian ex-au-pair who lives a party lifestyle in Berlin. They are joined by a migrant who longs to return to his life as an immigrant without papers in Rome (the "Roman"), an Eastern European high-end prostitute, a Kurdish honour-murderer who idealises the lives of other undocumented immigrants, an "African" drug dealer, and a vengeful Roma woman.

Generally considered a less successful piece than *Schwarze Jungfrauen*, in *Schattenstimmen* the highly sexualised and often racialised language of several of the characters is certainly noteworthy. The "Minus-Moroccan" of monologue two asserts his sense of self via his narrative of success and expertise in the "Dance Palace", for example:

> 'n Arab is no Arab, he's 'n enemy who every arse-cunt here wants a war with […] As long as I can wash-up here, I don't give a toss about the rest of the shit, human relationships – I get those elsewhere.
> To be exact, in the Dance Palace. […] I come into the dance palace and know how the game goes. (Zaimoglu/Senkel 2008: 13-14)

The quotation above is typical of the outwardly defiant tone of the monologues and the language used by characters throughout *Schattenstimmen* to gain some power from within a disenfranchised position via the infliction of symbolic violence on other vulnerable groups. Arguably, the banality of the monologues and the prominence of racial slurs reflects an element of the 'reality' of the subjects which the monologues purport to depict. The arrangement of the monologue also creates a distinct suggestion that this can be seen as a response to the situation of exclusion in which the figure's racialised and illegal status leaves him. The use of hate speech in the texts is particularly unrelenting, though, even for Zaimoglu and Senkel's work, which often dances close to the line in this regard (cf. Schmidt 2008: 196-213; Günter 1999: 15-28). As one reviewer of the later Ballhaus production states, the dramatic text "challenges even the willing recipient" (Granzin 2008).

Indeed, even Zaimoglu himself appears to have had reservations about the commission, both in terms of the subject matter and the form involved. In a personal interview I conducted with him in 2012, he recounted:

> It was immediately clear, from the theatre, that they wanted something documentary. And that is what we then suggested to them and they were really fired up with enthusiasm. And, I have to admit, in the meantime I had got to a point where I said "Oh God, not this again, not monologues again. Lord, can't it go differently for once!" But [...] no, they wanted monologues.

Tom Cheesman and Karin Yeşilada have already noted that Zaimoglu's unusual monologues "are a gift for performers in the currently dominant idiom of 'shouty' theatre [theatre of the In-Yer-Face or postdramatic school]", but also that "calls upon him and Senkel to vary *Kanak Sprak* [his breakthrough literary work] for new occasions cannot be very productive for his development as a writer" (2012: 9-10). The desire on the part of the commissioning theatre for "something documentary" can also be situated within a broader tendency in the German theatrical establishment at that time towards documentary theatre as a form or format which provides access or insight to the 'authentic experience' of a group not otherwise 'available' to the mainstream theatre's typically middle-class, white German audience. In such cases the documentary format seems no longer to function as a structure enabling a form of practice as research from within communities, but as, will be discussed in more detail below, a format more akin to the kind of reality television that brands some societal groups as the object of the sociological gaze of others. A sense of fatigue at the request for a repeat performance is certainly present in the statement above. Here Zaimoglu's own success in working with semi-documentary monologue forms in other contexts, together with his position as a prominent artist within the initial postmigrant theatre festivals at the Ballhaus, seems to brand him in a way which restricts rather than enables his artistic development.

In *Schwarze Jungfrauen*, the relationship between the voice of the author and that of the 'original' women has been both praised – due to the shared religious affiliation of both parties – and problematised with regard to the lack of shared gender identity. In contrast, the relative lack of critical academic reception of *Schattenstimmen* means that the question of shared identity between 'source' voice and author remains largely uncommented on. This is particularly notable as this relationship is arguably yet more tenuous and politically and ethically fraught in *Schattenstimmen*. Zaimoglu and Senkel are themselves not undocumented immigrants; however, the label of "migrant" or "person with a background of migration" seems to be used to place Zaimoglu as a representative figure despite his own remonstrances against this and the difference in terms of citizenship between a German citizen such as himself and an undocumented immigrant in Eu-

rope. While questions of access and connection to the experience of the situation of undocumented immigrants may have affected the play, read generously, the 'weakness' of *Schattenstimmen* as a whole, compared to *Schwarze Jungfrauen*, may also register a certain resistance on Zaimoglu's part to the commission and the role assigned to him through it. In an article which also briefly addresses *Schattenstimmen* in its production by Nurkan Erpulat at the Ballhaus, Katrin Sieg argues that: "[t]he documentary theater's appeal to sociological notions of the real, coupled with the conflation of actor and character in some documentary performances, risks laminating social behaviour to a particular national psychology or even a racialized anatomy" (2011: 172-72). Here we also see the extent to which the documentary turn risks "laminating" particular aesthetic expectations onto postmigrant theatre practitioners, highlighting a highly constraining aspect of the documentary 'formatting'.

Head dramaturge Rita Thiele has stressed that part of the intention of the commission was for the theatre to distance itself from "multicultural kitsch" and other potentially problematic approaches to the theme of migration which it had adopted for that season (2009: 14; Sharifi 2011: 99). This was reflected in the choice of commissions:

> There is a very concrete search for plays such as the Zaimoglu we have in the programme or the Nuran Calis, [practitioners] who concern themselves with the situation of migrants very concretely in their plays. […] But as I said, always understood not as a kind of conservation programme on our part, but rather as a contribution to our urban hybrid culture, which should be taken as being as self-evident as possible. (Ibid.)

While the theatre rejects the idea of a "conservation programme" and talks the talk of hybridity, it is interesting to note that both the Turkish-German dramatists Zaimoglu and Senkel and Nuran David Calis were commissioned to provide semi-documentary, rather than fictional, plays. The turn to documentary and semi-documentary theatre when it comes to themes of migration is often justified by directors as a response to the supposed lack of plays which tell migrant and postmigrant stories. As the commissioning of *Schattenstimmen* suggests, however, the theatre's own expectations may also play a role in creating this self-perpetuating situation. Interesting parallels emerge here between the re-use of the documentary format, and even the same playwright, and "the role of formatting in cultural production" discussed by Balaji which "often puts the artist at odds with the corporation and creative management tasked with her commodification. The artist's role in this process is often determined by the amount of leverage she has entering into her relationship with the cultural industries tasked with producing and distributing her as a commodity." (2009: 227).

Saha highlights the ways in which in cultural industries in the UK such formatting also leads to significant investment in marketing which becomes even more necessary in order to sell similarly formatted products as distinct. Here in the German theatrical context, the more important implication seems to be the parallels which emerge with the function of formatting as "a form of creative control that is the corporate response to the uncertainties of the cultural marketplace" (2018: 131). Rather than taking place in a corporate environment, within a semi-funded but still market-orientated system such formatting appears to be the artistic direction's means of controlling their own uncertainties, as well as the financial and aesthetic risks potentially associated with shifting the practice of a theatre in a postmigrant direction.

Postmigration in capitalist contexts

While Kulaoğlu, Langhoff and the creative teams at the Ballhaus and Gorki have made strategic use of "brand acts […] transferring symbolic and cultural capital" (Koegler 2018: 8) to artistic practitioners and practices otherwise positioned as lacking such capital, at Schauspiel Köln that transfer of cultural capital, at least in the example given here, appeared to run in the opposite direction: to improve the standing of the theatre and its leadership with regard to shifts in discourse around the relationship a state-funded theatre should have to its surrounding community, and a new funding climate. Balaji suggests that within the music industry formatting allows a corporation "to commodify an artist without much alteration to an established mould" (2009: 229). Similarly, within the German theatrical sphere, we may see the commission of documentary plays about migration as a "transferrable paradigm that corporations can use to replicate a commodity, thereby maximizing the corporation's potential for profits without the need for innovation", in this case allowing the theatre's artistic direction "to maintain control without appearing to do so" (ibid.). Notably the failure to alter the higher and administrative levels of the organisation along with the ensemble was a key point of critique in Azadeh Sharifi's analysis of Schauspiel Köln (2011: 102, 127-128, 205).[18] Discussing the challenges she has to deal with as an artistic director, Shermin Langhoff has also drawn analogies to the music industry and alluded to the "typical laws of the market" in which "the big labels buy out the bands from the small labels" (in Widmann 2019). In the example above, we see the effects of such

18 Peter M. Boenisch also draws on Sharifi in a 2014 chapter, where Beier's project at Schauspiel Köln is brought briefly into discussion alongside the work of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße to give a Žižekian analysis of the relationship between theatre and nation in contemporary Germany (Boenisch 2014: 148-52).

dynamics not only on the smaller theatres, but also on the artists involved, and on the politics and aesthetics of the formats developed under the label of 'postmigrant theatre' as they move into new commissioning and production contexts.

Again though, my intention in using the privilege of academic distance from the difficult work of cultural production in an institutional context is not to suggest a negative intentionality at work in the practices at Schauspiel Köln or to simply set up an easy opposition between 'good' documentary practice and 'bad' formatting. Rather it is to use these examples to explore the possibility that within the context of postmigrant theatre, it is partially "[t]hrough rationalized processes such as formatting, packaging and marketing [that] historical constructions of Otherness (in its racial and gendered forms in particular) are reproduced, despite the motivations of individual actors to do the opposite" (Saha 2018: 26). It is my contention that exploring how these issues are dealt within the theatrical sphere, in other words by front-line practitioners, highlights that postmigrant theatre as a practice has more to offer the social sciences than a new label and perspective which can be taken up while leaving those theatrical experiments behind. Exploring how theatrical practice produced under the postmigrant label or in the 'postmigrant society' deals with the tension between label and lens which this terminology induces, can provide a way into organisational analysis which centres migration, in line with the agenda set out by scholars such as Yildiz, Römhild, and Foroutan. It also draws attention to questions of the 'brand value' of postmigration in the theatrical and public sphere – and thus to the entanglement of this activism with production of culture in a capitalist context – in ways which provide important lessons for its developing usage in the academic sphere.

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