

»Doing the Work«

Experiences of a *white* Early Career Researcher and Assistant Lecturer in the UK Higher Education Sector

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Many statements of solidarity have noted that »there is more work to do.« We urge you to consider that the »work« required is not only generating a list of actions, but an accountability of how and when these actions are delivered and to what effect. Most importantly »the work« requires a fundamental reexamination of the racist values that shape our fields. Otherwise, these statements amount to no more than performances of solidarity and apology — and, as theatre, performance, and dance scholars, you should be most aware of the limits of such performativity as empty gestures. (Revolution or Nothing 2020)

In this text, I reflect on my position, positionality and experience as a *white*, cis-female, German early career academic¹ and what »doing the work« might mean to me. I studied at undergraduate and post-graduate taught level in Germany and at postgraduate research level in the UK, and I have been living and working in the UK since 2012. During this time, the discourse on race, decolonization and a reflection on decolonial approaches to research and teaching has, thankfully, increased, due to the continuous work by Black and Global Majority² activists, authors, artists and thinkers. However, this in-

1 To disclose my positionality more fully, I also identify as heterosexual, able bodied and middle class. I was brought up Catholic but I do not practice any faith. At the time of writing, I am 36 years old.

2 Rejecting the abbreviation BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), at the time of their writing still officially used in the UK, and recognizing the problematic nature of any labelling practice, the group puts forward the term Black and Global Majority attempting at »signaling a political, collective and positive identification, so that we are not categorized in relation to whiteness.« (Revolution or Nothing 2020). I will follow

crease is incremental and, as the urgent appeal in the above quote of this text reminds us, this increase is not enough.

The paragraph above is taken from an open letter to UK Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies published in August 2020 on the independent publishing platform *medium.com* and entitled »White Colleague Listen!*.«. In this urgent appeal, a group of Black and Global Majority academics and students, working and studying in the UK, are voicing their critique of the institutionally racist UK Higher Education sector and give personal accounts of their lived experiences of overt and everyday racist incidents and microaggressions in the specific field of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies in the UK.

While acknowledging the recent upsurge of panel discussions around questions of race and decolonization in Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, their critique highlights failings in long-term institutional changes as well as the lack of fundamental changes in attitude by their *whitepeers*. They point out: the persisting and overwhelmingly *whitemake-up* of university departments, boards of representative organizations, editorial boards, journal editors, panels and conference keynotes; the wide-spread, persisting adherence and favouring of *whiteEurocentric* epistemologies and colonial research methods; the shirking away from focusing on discussions on race by pointing to tokenistic (and often short-term) diversification of staff teams and curricula or the co-optation of the term intersectionality (to address variously gender, sexuality, class or disability); the lack of racial literacy and competence by *whitepeers* relying on Black and Global Majority colleagues' emotional and intellectual labour, the lack of engagement with and understanding of and support with the UK visa and immigration system and its impact on Black and Global majority researchers' careers; and the lack of resources made available by departments to structurally change their institutions and curricula and undertake active antiracist and decolonial work.

Indeed, the emphasis of this open letter lies on »doing the work«, which the authors understand to be a specific practice of complicity, friendship and collegiality rather than a lip-service performance of allyship. This active work encompasses identifying and recognizing barriers and dismantling *whitesupremacist* structures, a reconceptualization of the foundational theories, texts and thinkers of the discipline and a questioning of the system of

this suggestion and will use the term Black and Global Majority or person of colour throughout the chapter.

academic validations through REF, TEF and KEF³ which make invisible already marginalized epistemes. It also requires an effort to decentre *whiteness* both (and this is crucial) through a long-term diversification of curricula and a reflection and expansion on racially literate scholarship and antiracist teaching pedagogy.

Reading this open letter had a lasting impact on me as a *white* teacher and colleague to Black and Global majority students and peers. On the one hand, it confirmed and made crystal clear to me that my active role in the undoing of *whitesupremacist* and racist structures in my field was required. On the other hand, it had me thinking more carefully about the specific possibilities and challenges that this work poses to me at the stage of my professional career and the position I inhabit in the system as a *white* European person. How can I contribute to this antiracist and decolonial work – both on an individual and on a structural level? As an early career researcher in the UK higher education system, occupying mostly roles such as Teaching Assistant, Assistant Lecturer or Affiliated Lecturer, I currently have limited opportunities to exert influence on a higher management level – I do not sit on interview panels, I do not allocate funds, and (as I am hired for teaching-only posts) I do not even »count« (yet) for assessment and validation frameworks such as REF. However, as someone hired in zero-hours or fixed term, teaching-only roles, I do come into contact with a high volume of students. From first year to honours and Master students, from lectures to seminars to dissertation supervisions – a large number of students have had sustained teaching contact with me over recent years.⁴ Before the pandemic, I also regularly visited conferences

3 REF (Research Excellence Framework), TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework), and KEF (Knowledge Exchange Framework) are systems used to assess, measure and rank the quality, output and efficiency of participating HE institutions in the UK in relation to research, teaching and knowledge-exchange initiatives. These validating systems impose a hierarchy of value on research methodologies, knowledge distribution and research productivity. They are thus perpetuating neoliberal, capitalist values that characterize the economic business model of Higher Education in the UK.

4 Only counting weekly teaching formats, in which students and lecturer engage in sustained conversations (leaving out team-taught lecture formats), I have taught seminars with around 600 participants overall over the last 5 academic years despite never having had more than a fractional fixed-term or zero-hours employment contract or a combination of the two (moving between ca. 0.4 and 0.6 part-time employment). (Please note that this number does not account for the actual number of students which will be lower as some students will have had more than one seminar with me.) This number shows the high amount of sustained teaching contact and supports

in the UK, came into contact with Black and Global Majority peers and, of course, I still embark on publication projects. Active allyship and self-education in relation to racial literacy as well as an increased understanding of the institutional barriers created for my peers and students as well as sharing this knowledge, decentring *whiteness* and creating awareness of institutional racism within subsequent generations of students are work I can and must do.

In the UK, this work is now more necessary than ever. The *Rhodes Must Fall* as well as the *Black Lives Matter* movement resonated strongly with younger generations of pupils and students in the UK. Calls for a decolonization of institutions as well as curricula were issued and the institutional nature of racism discussed and criticized. The Conservative UK government under Boris Johnson reacted to this social justice movement by forming a Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities in the UK whose report was published in March 2021. In this, the authors not only discount the influence of structural and institutional racism in the UK, instead locating the roots of inequalities in other factors such as class and the lack of supportive family structures, they also refute the need for a decolonization of educational curricula and label this approach as negative:

The ›Making of Modern Britain‹ teaching resource is our response to negative calls for ›decolonising‹ the curriculum. Neither the banning of White authors or token expressions of Black achievement will help to broaden young minds. We have argued against bringing down statues, instead, we want all children to reclaim their British heritage. (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2021:8)

This government-sanctioned backlash to the recent BLM protests has garnered manifold highly strong criticisms from Black and Global Majority and *whites* scholars whose work was quoted out of context to serve a pre-approved outcome (Quinn and Parveen 2021). However, this report will most likely be

the argument that teaching assistants and assistant lecturers have a potentially strong and lasting impact on students' academic development and experiences. The reliance of the sector on fractional and casual contracts is emphasized and criticized continuously by unions such as the University and College Union, see for example: University and College Union (2018) *Precarious education: how much university teaching is being delivered by hourly-paid academics?* Available at: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/9258/Precarious-education-how-much-university-teaching-is-being-delivered-by-hourly-paid-academics-Feb-18/pdf/HP_uni_teaching_March_2018.pdf (accessed: 6.4.2021).

used as a basis for the introduction of new policies that will potentially increase rather than decrease structural inequalities in a variety of sectors.

These recent developments have thrown into relief the stakes that are involved in a continuous, antiracist teaching and research practice within the UK Higher Education and other sectors. It is important not to get side-tracked by what is increasingly emerging as a fabricated culture war instigated by the UK government and serving the purpose of fuelling endless circular debates, employing straw man arguments and thus delaying the implementation of antiracist and decolonial policies and practices which have been identified as necessary by several studies in recent years (Bhambra et al. 2018; Arday and Mirza 2018).

Therefore, the overarching question I am pursuing in this chapter is how I can contribute to the ongoing antiracist and decolonial work? To this end, I have decided to assess my educational academic formation as well as my current academic practice. I will look back to my years studying Theatre Studies in Germany and engage with some examples of teaching content and course assignments that had me grappling with the entanglements of good intentions and glaring oversights. What has shaped my thinking about race and decolonization throughout my academic studies? Where have been gaps and omissions? How were those omissions inscribed into the discourse of the discipline? How am I addressing these harmful oversights now as a *whiteacademic* within pervasively *whiteUK* institutions?

I have re-read my personal archive of essay assignments, course descriptions and reading lists from my own student years. These documents help me trace my educational development and reveal structural exclusions as well as an individual lack of awareness. The descriptions of my often well-meaning but sometimes unwitting lack of competence vis-à-vis racialized, racist and colonial language are not, and this is important to me, used as a cathartic exercise. Nor are they meant to put blame on individual lecturers that did not »give« me the theoretical and academic tools I would have needed to address the issues I did not see or clearly wanted to engage with while still lacking argumentative or investigative finesse and self-critical awareness of my positionality. Rather, these examples highlight the institutional and structural omissions and exclusions that are imbedded in our discipline and thus amount to a *white* supremacist gatekeeping and perpetuation of processes of racist othering and the firm centring of *white* perspectives.

Working on Rethinking the Foundations

Winter 2005 and Summer 2006 – I am an eager first year Theatre Studies student learning about the specific materiality of performance, its ephemerality and the difference between *Inszenierung* (production as conceptual mise-en-scène) and *Aufführung* (performance as event), which is particularly stressed in the German-speaking foundational studies of the Theatre Studies discipline. Erika Fischer Lichte's study *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004)⁵ is our introductory volume into Theatre Studies and the focus of the first introductory lecture series and tutorials. I am soon comfortable with concepts such as performativity and performance, the idea of an autopoietic feedback loop between audience and spectators, and the distinction between the semiotic and phenomenal body of the actor. I also attend a first year seminar on performance analysis in which we are regularly writing memory protocols of our specific experiences as audience members. The writing about the live event and the reflection of our experience of and at the same time contribution to the live event is trained through these exercises.

Reading through my assessments of that time reveals a keen interest in the body on stage – both in my memory protocols as well as in my performance analyses, I am trying to make sense of the relationship between phenomenal and semiotic bodies. What is conspicuously absent in these early student writings however, is any kind of observation on race, ethnicity or racialized performance, despite my interest in bodies on stage. This is, on the one hand, a testament to the overwhelmingly *white* casting structures within ensemble structures as well as within Germany's independent performance scene. I do, after all, heed the advice of my professors and tutors and go to the theatre whenever I can – working my way through Berlin's repertoires and seeing a great variety of performances, collecting leporellos and theatre programmes and compiling my very own theatre-going archive. On the other hand, this lack of racial awareness and the invisibility of *whiteness* in my writing points to the absence of theoretical and discursive tools I have at my disposal at this stage of my academic development.

Skip ahead a couple of years and I find myself lucky having snatched a spot on a seminar dedicated to theatre reviewing, held by a prolific *white* theatre critic. Again, there is a lot of going to the theatre involved; a lot of watching

5 The English title is: Fischer-Lichte, E. (2008) *Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*. Translated from German by Saskya Iris Jain. London: Routledge.

and writing about theatre. In this setting, however, an analysis and description is dedicated to making value judgements on a performance and, ideally, entertain your readership. The writing exercises and assessments throughout the semester culminate in the publication of several reviews written by seminar participants on the then emerging and now established and influential independent, German-speaking online reviewing platform *nachtkritik.de*.⁶ I choose to write about a solo-performance in which a *white* male performer portrays different characters living in Berlin, who are unhappy with their daily lives yet lack the drive or tools to break their routines. I seem wholly unperturbed by the fact that the *white* performer indicates his shift into a Turkish-German greengrocer by donning a black moustache. Rather, I praise his ability to use »wenige Mittel und Gesten« (scarce materials and gestures) (Simke 2007) to portray the characters movingly and humorously. I fail to notice the problematic nature of this racialized performance and the hegemonic power structures inherent to this casting choice. My understanding of racism at this point is not structural and since the portrayal of the character is sympathetic and does not seem derogatory to me, I do not recognize the problem. The review is published without further discussions or amendments.

Theatre scholar of colour Angela Pao observes in her study *No Safe Spaces. Re-casting Race, Ethnicity and Nationality in American Theatre* (2010:27) that influential semiotic studies of the 1970s and 1980s in Europe by white scholars such as Keir Elam, Patrice Pavis, Erika Fischer-Lichte or Anne Ubersfeld etc. do not mention or discuss issues of race in relation to how an actor's body might signify in performance. Equally, another look through Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004), a foundational text for us as students at the time, confirms a lack of discussion on how race might complicate and interfere with the negotiation of semiotic and phenomenal bodies. Indeed, writing about the specific challenges that emerge from what she calls »non-traditional casting«, Pao explains:

Forcing spectators to become aware of the concrete materiality of the actor's body rather than leaving them free to focus on the illusion of the character's physical and psychological qualities therefore does not merely require a re-encoding of the signifying functions assigned directly to the actor; any such shift instigates a realignment that traverses the entire semiotic system

6 As far as I can find out, these reviews are no longer available in the *nachtkritik.de* archive. I used my own archived documents to access the review.

of a production. This is what happens when nontraditional casting magnifies the effects of the paradoxical relationship between actor and character (2010:28).

It is clear, therefore, that the specific ontology of acting, as detailed by Fischer-Lichte in her distinction between semiotic and phenomenal body requires urgent attention to race and performances of race as well as politics of casting as Angela Pao and other Black and Global Majority scholars such as Brandi Wilkins Catanese (2011) and Ayanna Thompson (2006), to name just a few, have written about in detail. However, the pervasive state of normative *whiteness* in the casting and make-up of theatre companies in 20th century European theatre made it possible for the above-mentioned texts to contain such clear omissions. In this way, both the theatre industry and the academy mutually uphold and reinforce the invisible norm of *whiteness*.⁷

Who is Doing The Work?

Throughout my undergraduate studies, I engaged with playwrights such as Shakespeare and Heiner Müller – both canonical authors in German-speaking Theatre Studies and theatre repertoires. In my undergraduate and later in my postgraduate studies, I frequently returned to Müller's work. I was fascinated by Müller's strong use of language and particularly interested in his Shakespeare adaptations. As valuable as the seminars and assessment exercises were, I would again like to trace some gaps in my engagement with these authors. This is an attempt to show how casually these omissions are overlooked and thus are bearing evidence to the pervasiveness of structural *white* innocence and invisibility which obfuscates a complex discussion of race and decoloniality and ultimately leads to a marginalization of Black and Global Majority thought and scholarship. It is an exercise into the shortcomings of my own thinking that might be helpful as an example for other white scholars

7 In recent years, edited collections such as *Re/produktionsmaschine Kunst. Kategorisierungen des Körpers in den Darstellenden Künsten* (Kreuder, Koban and Voss 2017) and *Neue Methoden der Theaterwissenschaft* (Wihstutz and Hoesch 2020) have started to acknowledge and address these omissions and asked to which extend the field of German-speaking Theatre Studies has to assess its epistemological and methodological foundations.

in trying to understand and analyse their own formative educational experiences.

In the summer of 2010, a couple of semesters into my Master's degree, I had developed an interest in postcolonial theory. In my seminar »Reading Heiner Müller Today«, I was interested in applying postcolonial theory to his Shakespeare adaptation *Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome – Ein Shakespearekommentar*, a reworking of one of Shakespeare's most brutal and violent plays, *Titus Andronicus*, featuring the villainous Black character Aaron. Tracing the development of my critical engagement with postcolonial thought from a position of colour-blindness and obliviousness to race in 2007 – what anti-racism trainer Tupoka Ogette refers to as living in »Happyland« (Ogette 2017) – through to this emerging interest evidenced by my choice of essay topic in 2010, I have to ask myself: What had happened?

A few years before, I had spent two semesters abroad in France, where I had attended a seminar on postcolonial drama held by Romuald Fonkoua, the first and only Black lecturer I had throughout my taught degrees⁸. He introduced me to the anticolonial work of Frantz Fanon as well as the founders of the francophone Négritude movement, Martinican poet and politician Aimé Césaire and Senegalese poet and politician Léopold Sédar Senghor. This was an eye-opening experience – a true »threshold concept« (Meyer and Land 2006) learning experience in pedagogical terms. It shifted the lens through which I looked at artistic and academic work and impacted my *Weltbild*. It laid the foundations for further self-driven study and a more specialized selection of seminars in my following Master's curriculum.

Additionally, the visit to the theatre festival *Theaterformen* in Braunschweig in June 2010, which featured the theme »Presence of The Colonial Past – Afrika auf Europas Bühnen« and presented performances as well as a series of academic talks and provocations, sharpened my interest in this topic. More precisely, similarly to my experience studying in France, it was the presence and work of Black and Global Majority artists and scholars that lent this engagement urgency, actuality and social and political complexity. Performers such as Boyzie Cekwana and Faustin Linyekula problematized the performance of Blackness and Africanness in front of a majority white German audience. Writers and scholars such as Grada Kilomba and Kien Nghi Ha challenged apo-

8 At Freie Universität Berlin, Université Marc Bloch in Strasbourg and University of Glasgow.

logetic narratives of the relative insignificance of Germany's colonial endeavour in Africa (Ha 2011) and spoke about the existence of everyday racism in Germany (Kilomba 2010). The unsettling nature of this complex learning experience for the white-majority audience and some of the student groups that attended the festival (me included) is palpable in the carefully worded reflective accounts of the festival visit that were later published in a festival reader (Festival Theaterformen 2010) that served as a documentation of the festival's events and discussions. The presence of Black and Global majority artists made the pervasive *whiteness* of and the legacies of colonial thought in the German theatre and academic landscape visible and brought with it feelings of discomfort and insecurity. Knowledge or the absence thereof was questioned. Tentative attempts to analyse performances replaced confident analyses. Epistemological frameworks started to shift away from the *white*, European centre.

For Example: Working on Müller

Motivated by my studies in France as well as the above-detailed experiences, I bring my interest in postcolonial theory into my Müller seminar and propose a reading of the Black character Aaron in Müller's play *Anatomie Titus* through a lens of postcolonial thought, as developed by Fanon and Césaire. To be brief on this, my argument goes something like this: While the Shakespeare version of the villainous black character can be read as »a textbook illustration for early modern stereotypes of blackness« (Loomba 2002:76), Müller's reworking of the play shows his interest in the Global South and its revolutionary potential. Müller's stark, racialized language – replete with the N-word which appears countless times throughout the text and which I do not abbreviate in my quotes – imitates the discursive strategies of the poetic movement of the Négritude and characterizes Aaron as an anticolonial activist and revolutionary. Müller, so I conclude, criticizes the neo-colonial order of the world of the 1980s by adapting the Black, African character Aaron into a villain, who flips the derogatory language that likens him to an animal and devil into an empowering strategy and becomes an adversary to the imperial Romans (i.e. Europeans) in the play.

Looking at this piece of writing ten years later, I recognize, despite my best intentions, a problematic conflation of contexts and positionalities that should have been discussed at the time, and, ideally, pointed out in feedback

to this assessment. After all, Müller was not an African or Afro-Caribbean author who had experienced or whose ancestors had experienced slavery or colonialism or, indeed, racism. He was a *white*, East-German author who wrote in a *white*-majority German context and was and still is received by a *white*-majority German audience in a *white*-majority German theatre landscape that more often than not casts *white* actors as the Black character Aaron. In the conclusion of the essay, I do admit that I am unsure of how to deal with the ubiquitous and problematic use of the N-word in a contemporary German context. I fail to see, however, how simply stating the problematic nature of something without actively enacting alternatives does not change anything. Instead, I receive a high mark without any feedback (no feedback, simply a mark for assessments is at that time the norm during my studies) and move on.

This procedure at the time is, sadly, not surprising as the contemporary discourse on Heiner Müller's work does not critically assess the use of the N-word within Müller's oeuvre either. Indeed, Müller himself famously stated about his identity within Germany: »I am an N-word« (Hörnigk 1997:255). In the common Müller reception, this statement was understood to have emerged from an attempt to show solidarity. Frank Hörnigk writes:

Müller speaks for them all – with the attitude of solidarity for the oppressed and victims – and with the disgust for their oppressors but also with the disgust for his own role within this violent relationship, in which he is only a privileged spectator of this violence – and therefore has become himself a writing-machine, who is standing and writing on both sides of the front (Hörnigk 1997:256, my translation).

However, what is being overlooked in this exegesis of Müller's words is the fact that the act of speaking for and the use of derogatory language – no matter the intention – constitute *white*, Eurocentric, hegemonial epistemic and semantic violence in return. This observation does not discount Müller's continuous engagement with and hope for the potential of anticolonial insurgencies in the Global South, proven by texts such as his play *The Mission* as well as his speech *Shakespeare A Difference*. In fact, Müller's adaptation is *both* a productive critique and expression of solidarity with the Global South *and* a problematic appropriation of racialized language that is insensitive to its context and needs to be called out and worked through.

However, the German scholarship on Heiner Müller is prevalently *white* and the problematization of the use of the N-word is regularly ignored or

evaded. The *Heiner Müller Handbook* for instance, a volume of more than 500 pages, features only a brief account of a problematization of Müller's appropriation of Blackness by Indigenous Australian director Brion Syron (Lehmann and Primavesi 2002:362). Other, more substantial critical references to his use of the derogatory term are lacking.⁹ This absence of a critical discourse is sadly not surprising as only recently, the German BIPoC Network dedicated to representing and supporting Black, Indigenous and People of Colour within the German-speaking theatre landscape reacted to an increase in reports about discriminatory and racialized language within German-speaking theatres by issuing an urgent call to abolish the use of the N-word by *white* people and introduce robust structures of anti-racism training for all employees (BIPoC Netzwerk 2021). Even in 2021, the recognition of the epistemic violence inherent to racialized and racist language still requires sustained anti-racist lobbying and activism.

My Work

A look into my archived writings from a decade or more ago has revealed several shortcomings that I am currently grappling with in my own work as a teacher in Higher Education in the UK. Therefore, questions I ask myself when I am engaging with students in a *white*-majority classroom are: Are students able to situate race within their understanding of theatre history and theory? Are they racially literate and understand their own positionality within discourses of race? Have I sufficiently marked my position as a *white*, middle-class, cisgender, female, heterosexual lecturer? Is there space for a critical reflection on *whiteness* and the unmarked position of this racial category and its accompanying phenomenon white fragility? What do I need to do to make

9 Incidentally, this absence of problematization of race is similarly prevalent in the instrumentalization of Brecht's theory and application of the estrangement technique to justify incidences of the racist practice of blackface on German stages. This was painfully brought to the fore in the German debate on the use of blackface in 2012 (Sieg 2012). In her study *Ethnic Drag* (2002) white scholar Katrin Sieg deconstructs this argument by examining how »Brecht's writing is shaped by historically specific conceptualizations of race and their blind spots« (p. 59). Her analysis of how Brecht's concept of race escapes historicization and instead is »relegated to the natural realm« (p. 64) serves as a warning to anyone who might try to apologize the practice of Blackface by uncritically pointing towards Brecht's racially undertheorized technique.

these discussions happen? Am I providing a safe space for having uncomfortable discussions about race? Who feels safe in this environment, who might not and why? Do I listen enough? Do I challenge enough? Do I challenge myself enough? What plays am I reading with my course, what authors are we engaging with? Do I actively reflect on canon formation with students? What about theory? Do I actively encourage them to engage with Black and Global Majority authors and scholarship? This list can be extended almost indefinitely...

In 2019 when I was teaching at Glasgow University, I had the opportunity to create and deliver the course *Decolonising the Canon*. The seminar consisted of 9 white, female-identifying and 1 white, male-identifying student who engaged with seminal postcolonial theorists and authors of the 20th century such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Ama Ata Aidoo, Wole Soyinka and many more. They readily embraced the reading list and always came prepared to the seminar. However, as Wue-therick (2011) posits, postcolonialism as a threshold concept often takes students several courses and levels to fully grasp. Therefore, I built explicitly on what students had already learned in the first years of their degree by discussing the curriculum and different approaches with my colleagues and building reflections and references to previously learned content into my course. It was as much about learning new content as it was about applying new frameworks of thought to already acquired knowledge, to disturb, unsettle and re-centre educational givens.

I started out with a teacher-centred approach and structured my sessions with an initial lecture covering key ideas and subsequent discussions of the key texts in small groups. While students were engaged and interested in the topic from the start, I noticed that the majority remained in »a suspended state in which understanding approximates to a kind of mimicry or lack of authenticity« (Land and Meyer 2006:16). This was often paired with an intense feeling of inadequacy and fear of failure that seemed to stem from a need to perform well academically for me, their teacher. I started changing the structure of my sessions and asked students increasingly to take charge from the beginning, identifying and writing key words from the texts on whiteboards and subsequently discussing them in small groups and feeding back to their peers. The overall atmosphere changed from a narrow discussion of the presented concepts to a free-flowing creative discussion with students taking responsibility for explaining their understanding of specific ideas to their peers. Of course, there were still a few students who expressed frus-

tration at what they perceived as dense and challenging theoretical texts and troublesome concepts in postcolonial theory. In the later weeks of the course, I encouraged students to find visual or physical metaphors for aspects of these concepts that they could then present to their peers and later transform into writing again. While not all students responded to this task with enthusiasm, several students found creative and surprising ways of exploring their learning experience. Thus the focus started to shift away from the need to find answers in theoretical texts that could be understood and filed away to the awareness that the shift in perspective is always unfinished and needs continuous work and can also be located in our bodies and in relations we have with other people in the space.

Real enthusiasm started to become palpable when students were asked to curate a hypothetical theatre festival about postcolonial thought and decolonial curation connected to the city of Glasgow – the city they were studying in, a city that is deeply connected to the imperial slave trade. The moment the theoretical discussions in the seminar became connected to their surrounding cityscape and students felt implicated in shaping the engagement with their environment, they accepted this responsibility and relished the agency in formulating suggestions for the future. The applied element, despite its hypothetical nature, introduced a sense of urgency and commitment that I had rarely come across before and it was a hopeful experience listening to their presentations.

Some Conclusions I Draw

My own educational experience as a *white* student in Germany was a pleasurable one. I do acknowledge that the plethora of seminars on theory, aesthetics and historiography helped me and my (mostly white) peers develop skills in critical thinking and doing and set us up for a lifelong learning journey. However, German-speaking Theatre Studies despite its attentiveness to e.g. politics, bodies, institutions and subversive performances only slowly discovered the need to discuss racialized performance traditions and repertoires, to develop new terminologies and problematize analytic frameworks and to direct its critical attention to the formation and make-up of its field and its inherent exclusions and omissions. Working within the UK academic Theatre and Performance Studies sector with its (arguably marginally) closer attention to issues of race and class has made it possible for me to identify these gaps

more clearly. However, and this is very important to notice, the situation in the UK is far from ideal, as the introduction to this text has shown. While theoretical frameworks and terminologies engaging with race and performance are more readily available in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, the UK Higher Education sector, especially in the field of Performance Studies, is still pervasively white and in need of structural reform. This should be kept in mind as a warning to current developments in the German-speaking field of Theatre Studies. While calls for racially aware and decolonial curricula are currently voiced and in some cases acted upon, structural change needs sustained action and commitment.

And so I want to close this chapter by putting forward a few suggestions of my own, informed by my own teaching practice and the above reflections on my own experiences of being a student in Germany. It goes without saying that these suggestions are all already contained in the larger points brought forward in the open letter by Black and Global Majority students and academics in the UK. My aim is not to correct or amend. I simply tasked myself with looking closely at micro-examples of teaching and study practice that reveal harmful gaps and oversights which I should work towards undoing. This personal list is a to-do list and a reminder to myself where to start and, more importantly, how to continue.

1. The engagement with race and colonial legacies in the Higher Education system should be part of every introductory course in Theatre Studies. Rather than through specialized seminars that render this engagement optional, there is a requirement to normalize an awareness of race and a literacy in critical *whiteness* no matter what the topic. *White* perspectives need to be consistently made visible and need to be decentred. Calls for colour-blind approaches need to be continuously rejected.
2. Reading and examination lists need to be extended and foundational texts of the discipline need to be rethought, added to or reconceptualized when showing theoretical and methodological omissions that lead to the invisible norm of *whiteness* and lack of analytical tools to deal with aspects of race and racism.
3. Teaching needs pedagogical reflection. Formative feedback, oral or written, is an invaluable element of the teacher-student relationship. Learning is not always text-based. We need to share a space and inhabit it together – that is part of teaching and, incidentally, should be part of research.

4. More Black and Global Majority researchers and teachers are needed in the discipline. Their work and ideas need to be clearly referenced and given credit. Non-Western approaches to scholarship and research needs to be unquestioningly validated and applied.
5. I (and other *white* scholars) need to join the continuous antiracist work already undertaken by Black and Global Majority colleagues.
6. Lastly, we should see students as accomplices not adversaries in the efforts to decolonize Theatre Studies. We should make clear that their contribution in this discussion counts and that they have real agency in changing the culture around them – both on campus and in their communities.

Literatur

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