Hardcore Confrontations

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In the first decades of the twentieth century, German society was confronted with questions of otherness, elimination and exclusion for the sake of an illusion of purity of race. The horrors of the Nazi regime, and the Holocaust, have never left the memory and the trauma of German society. Such a systematic act of annihilation to a massive amount of people was conducted not only by the regime but by all the people who served the regime and believed in it through a pedagogy of obedience and order. This pedagogy justified mass killings under the pretext of functionality; it terminated lives because they were not considered functional or productive for German society and for the purity of the white race. It specifically terminated all those who did not fit into the model that was set by the dictatorship for how a German citizen should be. Therefore, it erased people who could not work because they were old or sick, people of different religions, people of different sexual orientations or from different origins, and people who were disabled, among others.

The pedagogy of the regime facilitated such criminal acts of dehumanisation while resting on the forced and deformed notion of identity of a certain Nazi German-ness. Now, after so many years and transformations, German society has to continue being alert towards new transformations and the emergence of that old ugly pedagogy. Although we live in a democratic regime with a lot of space for expression, criticism and change, we still need to pay attention towards any potential divergence from the foundations of human rights and equality. The great opportunity given to Germany with the recent waves of migration can actually enrich the culture and the economy, provide a better future for society, and guarantee the renewal of a country that may otherwise age very soon. The youth generation of recently migrated families will fuel the workforce and social fabric. It will create a new face for Germany within the next 15 years, a Germany that will no longer be primarily white. It is because of this coming generation, and because of migration as an opportunity for German society and not as a threat, that we need to change our cultural policy as part of an overall change in the value system, constitution and legislation to accompany the transformation of realities in Germany and the new era that it is stepping towards. Change in the performing arts sphere and its legislation would be part of a bigger change in the notions of citizenship and identity. Such change

should be founded on equality above all and on up-rooting racism in all its forms and practices.

It is time now to review some notions and terms that are no longer reliable for change, whether because they have gradually fitted into the system instead of changing it or because the pace of manipulation and alteration is too fast for them to remain significant in their initial meaning and way. Among those concepts is "diversity". "Diversity," which started as a goodwill expression, could have gradually been transformed by the instrumentalisation of the ruling order and authority to become another expression of otherness. The German society has formulated its new terminology regarding "the inclusion of others", as expressed in the term "diversity". Therefore, "diversity" has been used to point out a certain non-uniformity while pointing all the way to a certain definition of German identity. "Diversity" has been carrying the connotation of "not German", "alien", "other", therefore contributing to the disconnection between today's German cultural sphere and its social fabric, focusing on difference as an exception to German identity, an exception that the German order is so charitably containing under the label of diversity. Today's cultural policy cannot be examined without consideration of the German concepts of identity and the Other, which stand in the core concepts of culture, policy, and state politics. To re-understand equality, equity, and social justice is also to examine citizenship and its constituents and go back to the constitutional definitions and the human rights laws and conventions.

If cultural legislations and policies are dividing and distributing cultural services and rights, and -initially- creating a space for typical German citizens (what is a typical German?) and another space for those who are not defined as such (like diversity funds, and migrant artists grants), those very legislations and policies are following a specific concept that guides them towards identifying who is a "typical German" and who is not (meaning who fits under the umbrella of "diversity"). For how can one define what is diverse without defining what is uniform, and how can one decide what is "other" without defining what is "same". The guidelines or concepts that define what needs to be "included" stipulate as well what is the norm. To think of what one can "include" is also to think of what is "inside" and what is "outside" and to define oneself as a stipulator/legislator of identity and otherness.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights stipulates that everybody has the equal right to participate in culture. This participation can take the shape of either the right to produce culture or the right to receive cultural services. The concept of cultural justice is the foundation of such equality of rights when it comes to cultural creation and reception. The constitutional legislations of culture in each country should go hand in hand with the foundations of human rights conventions and declarations, which clearly stand against any discrimination based on race, gender, religion or ethnicity. Therefore, it is not acceptable to see that censorship still exists in some countries as an official department of the Ministry of Culture, just as it

is equally strange to see that some societies that adopt the concepts of equality still discriminate between certain forms of cultural production and cultural actors. Considering some forms of art and cultural production as inferior to others, or as "not modern enough", as "undeveloped", or as "folklore" could be seen as a kind of cultural discrimination that is embedded in a specific vision that entitles itself to decide what art is and what identity is. This specific vision is not far away from racism.

When the legislator takes extraordinary measures to define the hierarchy within artistic production, he/she also decides what art is from a position of political power. While art is very relative and subjective, arts' legislations and policies should remain relative and with a big distance towards absolute thinking and the categorisation of human creativity. The other facet of such strict categorisation is the divisions and labelling of citizens. Thinking of a German citizen of Turkish origin as only belonging to a specific/special community can somehow be a pretext to "exclude" this citizen from the social fabric and, therefore, make the deformed attempt of bringing him/her back under the label of "inclusion". Inclusion is primarily based on exclusion. Labelling cultural productions, arts and artists as part of "inclusion" is equally labelling them as "others" or "Othering" them. Instead of confronting the major phenomenon that Europe and Germany are dealing with now -which is the decline of white uniformity and conformity in their societies- legislators are creating new labels and categories to encourage everybody who is outside of their concept of whiteness and identity. While German society is potentially living in one of the richest opportunities for growth and transformation - economically and culturally - a discriminatory system of thinking within the political power forms a major threat to such opportunity, basically reversing it into a weakness, a danger to white supremacy that has to be contained.

It is necessary to look at the cultural policy of Germany today through the lens of knowledge decolonisation, where the old notions of "same" and "stable" cultures can no longer survive.

There is no same, and there is no stability anymore. The core of culture now is that it is continuously transforming and totally open. This core can be extended to our world's human, social and societal conditions today. The notions of supremacy and nationalism will no longer hold in today's world. Today, we live in a world where identities are hybrid and transformative. Binary terms of identity, thought, and knowledge are fading away. The essence of equality and humanness within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must create the foundation anew to understand today's world of armed conflict and displacement, to understand it as a world for which everybody is responsible. This egalitarian essence of humanness would enable us to re-think the notions of victimhood and humanitarian actions from an egalitarian perspective and to reverse them from being charitable actions of white supremacy into being a globally shared responsibility where the economic hierarchy of wealth is instead an economic and human debt to those who suffered

wars and paid the price for the economic richness of the others, of the colonisers. Suppose we rely on this humanising foundation and its philosophy of decolonisation. In that case, we may be able to see that no one can "own" the culture now, nor define its parameters; no one can stipulate that this is the "owner/dweller" and that is the "other/newcomer". After all, human identity has become so incredibly complex and multi-layered to the extent that it is impossible to look at concepts of "otherness" except as part of the domain of coloniality and its extended history.

It is worth noting that when it comes to discussing cultural policy today, many of us focus on arts organisations, producers, artists, and public and private sectors. Therefore, we focus on the service providers and tend to neglect the public, the audiences and the overall beneficiaries. By doing so, we seem to create an unhealthy imbalance that impacts the policies that are being created -or not created- to support the beneficiaries/audiences. To place the focus on one end of the cultural operation and service and diminish the attention given to the other end is to think in unequal terms, considering the "receiver" as a mere passive entity. Although some recent attention has been given to outreach and audience development in the theatre world, we still lack a solid policy that addresses all the residents of Germany at large. Such a policy would put much effort into welcoming and attracting audiences from all ages, social and educational backgrounds, and economic status. It would be driven by a will to celebrate togetherness and led by an understanding that cultural services are a right for all. A right that challenges the prejudices, stereotypes and cliches of the so-called regular type of arts' beneficiaries or the traditional image of theatregoers being the white economically privileged persons. To change and expand the scope of our understanding and expectation of theatregoers is to change and develop our art production and knowledge sharing. Hence, balancing the focus on cultural policy-making between service providers and service receivers is also a healthy procedure to support the development of artistic productions and break their stigmatisation. To work towards a policy of open doors is to create a creative process of producing performances and concerts that can grow, transform and connect to everybody.

The ideal is not to see that one position in a specific arts organisation is reserved for a person from a "migrant background" but rather to see that racist and colonial thinking has been erased from today's value system and behaviour, whether through clear legislation, by-laws, regulations, or through long-term training, education and pedagogy. The labelling of "inclusion" and "diversity" may have been initiated in the first place to amend past failures and to force change. Yet, those special measures can quickly help the colonial and racist thinking to get comfortable because there would be no pressure to make radical changes since there is now a specific position dedicated to "diversity" and, therefore, no need for significant or fundamental change. Change needs to be implemented on a legislative and structural scope to protect any individual initiative otherwise the unjust system of discrimination would keep going. Let's opt for radical and fundamental change so that we do not

find ourselves confronted again and again by the new countertactics that extend the life of racism instead of dismantling it.

Personal questions… in theatre… Here and now…

But what kind of theatre is considered eligible for consideration, funding and promotion?
Is it the theatre that looks similar to Western and European theatre concepts?
A theatre that re-produces a specific artistic identity set by the coloniser?
A theatre of imitation?
Or would it be a theatre that can be easily labelled as import, exotic, folkloric and alien?
Who defines what theatre is and what a good quality performance is?
And how do they define it?
According to which norms and aesthetics?
Because this debate is also about aesthetics and the forced borders of creativity and imagination, as well as it is about the rights to imagine and freely create art away from prejudice and away from the restrictions of the theatre venues and their preconceived notion of performance and scenography and rapport between the performers and the spectators.
This debate could also be about the new forms of censorship, one that is not set by a dictatorship but rather by a seemingly liberal system that employs categorisation to rule the market in a way that is already economically established and should not be shaken.
How can we, as artists, create without adhering to or listening to the categories and labels of the system?
How can I present myself as an artist with more than 25 years of experience in theatre and dance instead of presenting myself as an Arab woman?
How can artistic merit win over box-ticking?
How can my art be trusted enough to be qualified to be presented to an imaginary German audience?
How can my mind and professional creativity be accepted as equal and not inferior and less developed?
How would theatre venues and production systems welcome my topics and aesthetics if they do not adhere to the formula of speaking about my own Heimat and the suffering that exists there? And while we are supposed to be in the post-Heimat era? And without speaking of myself as a victim? And an alien?
How can I explain that despite all identity fragmentation, I still can belong?
Although it could be here or elsewhere, it could also exist as a nostalgic illusion of romanticism but with a practical sense of togetherness.

How can I explain that the stage can be a place for retrieving dignity and humanness, as long as it is a stage that respects my autonomy and does not invite me to perform out of charity or solely political correctness?

I would like to be in the program because I am a good artist who has succeeded in creating spectatorship over the years, and not because there is a slot available for migrant women!

I guess one could say that the German stage could have a different future. A future where the ownership of the stage goes to anybody and spectatorship goes to everybody, just as German soil can belong to those who plant it and make it flourish no matter their skin colour (this is almost an Egyptian metaphor).

A future with no stage ownership and no systematic power structures defining performance, censoring creativity and eliminating the unwanted because of the surplus.

In a future where every public space can become a stage outside the institutional theatre venues and structures, different communities can create their cultural and entertainment programs outdoors or in any communal space they design for themselves.

I guess the size of the yearly program would have space for everybody, and everybody would re-appropriate and re-claim knowledge, sharing and creativity.