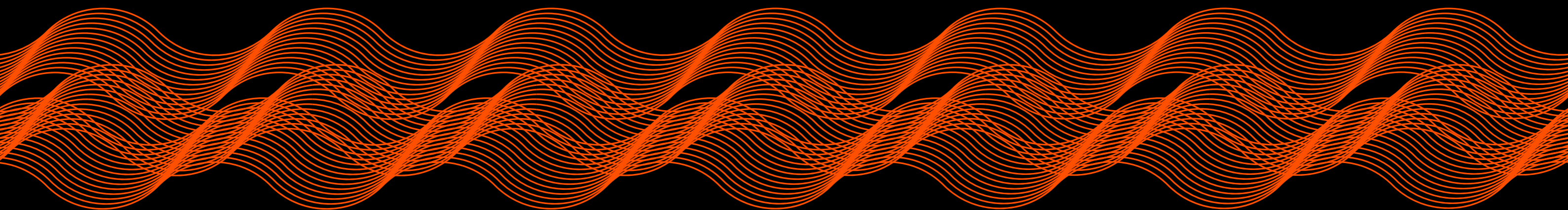


# Shermin Langhoff:

A Rebellious Spirit  
in a Mainstream Theatre



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# Summary

Shermin Langhoff, and her visionary artistic work at Maxim Gorki Theatre Berlin, are a crucial part of contemporary German theatre. But long before she became a pivotal artistic leader in Germany, she was an integral part of a movement that paved a way for artists of colour and minorities from the peripheries to the centre of Germany. In this article, I examine the long and successful career of Shermin Langhoff through different aspects and temporal phases, to form a multifaceted and critical portrait of her work. By looking into postmigrant theatre and its significance, I want to give an insight into the importance of her artistic and political impact for German society and German theatre.

## KEYWORDS

Shermin Langhoff, postmigrant theatre, artists of colour, postcolonial discourse, political theatre



# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Shermin Langhoff, and her visionary artistic work, are now acknowledged as a crucial part of contemporary German theatre. But long before she became a pivotal leader in German theatre and German society, she was an integral part of a movement that paved the way for artists of colour and minorities, from the peripheries to the centre of Germany. Until the opening of Ballhaus Naunynstrasse and the arrival of the self-defined label postmigrant theatre, for many decades migrant artists and artists of colour had been denied access to German theatres, their art excluded from theatre stages and its historiographies. And it was never about the art, theatre, and its aesthetic — people of colour have been excluded from German society on an institutional and structural level. After over four decades of immigration, the German government finally declared that it is a country of migration. Workers and migrant self-organisations had fought for decades for this concession, its social and political paradigmatic turn, for their rights to be treated equally in the housing and employment market, and in the social, political, and cultural realm.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. All translations from German to English are my own.

<sup>2</sup>. Manuela Bojadzije, *Die windige Internationale: Rassismus und andere Kämpfe der Migration* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot Verlag, 2012).

I had the opportunity to get to know Shermin Langhoff as a PhD student, while researching the impact of migration on German theatres. Back in 2009, when she and her colleagues had started their work at Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, she was confronted with a great deal of criticism and racist ascriptions. The tone and language were harsh, and she had to constantly defend what she was doing and why she was doing it. My PhD supervisor at that time, who published the first edited book on theatre and migration in Germany — even while acknowledging the essential work done by Shermin Langhoff and the artists of Ballhaus Naunynstrasse for the German theatre — still denied the importance of the movement by giving his introduction the title *Warum wir kein Migranten-theatre brauchen*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Langhoff and her team persistently produced theatre that intervened into the mainstream and its narratives about Germany. For myself, and other second, third, and even fourth generation immigrants, Ballhaus Naunynstrasse became a kind of sacred (theatre) home. Shermin Langhoff and the artists of Ballhaus Naunynstrasse opened a space in which to create, watch, and discuss the representation of our stories, our struggles, and our approaches to life in Germany. And Ballhaus Naunynstrasse and its artists fundamentally shaped my work.

Shermin Langhoff's successful career and artistic work are outstanding. Since she became the artistic director of Maxim Gorki Theatre, she has opened the doors for artists of colour and minority artists to access the German state and city theatre system. To fully grasp the impact she had for so many different groups and communities within, and outside of, the theatre realm, I want to draw from these different aspects and temporal phases to form a multifaceted and critical portrait

<sup>3</sup>. 'Why we don't need a migrant theatre'. The point of his introduction was, however, that migration has be represented through the people, the productions, and the audiences in German theatre. Nonetheless, there is a lack of understanding of spaces like Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, dedicated to marginalised people. Wolfgang Schneider, *Theater und Migration: Herausforderungen für Kulturpolitik und Theaterpraxis* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011).

of her work. In the first part of this article, I go back to the period that led to the implementation of postmigrant theatre, and the frame of her work, which is necessary for understanding her later work and the trajectories German theatre, and artists of colour, have taken due to her impact. The second part of the article examines her current work, and its influences and consequences, not only for German (and European) theatre but also for German society in political and social terms. By suggesting that her radical spirit has always guided her artistic work, I want to emphasise her determination to stand up for herself and minority subjects and communities.

## Thinking through beyond belonging

Under the leadership of Matthias Lilienthal, Hebbel am Ufer invited Shermin Langhoff to curate a festival for young Turkish-German artists. Hebbel am Ufer was founded in the current formation in the season of 2003/2004, situated in the heart of Berlin Kreuzberg, historically a district of immigrant residents. Langhoff, who had until then worked in the film sector, for example as the assistant to Fatih Akin, founded the festival *Beyond Belonging: Migration*<sup>2</sup>, which took place for the first time in 2006. The festival represented second generation immigrant artists. Langhoff expressed her curatorial vision as follows:

Beyond the currently dominant discourse on integration and constructed (national or ethnic) affiliations, as well as the everyday (and structural) racism which is part of the cultural and media industry, we want to open to artists (of colour) coming from film, literature, fine arts and music the forum of theatre.<sup>4</sup>

# Labelling yourself

The title of the festival, *Beyond Belonging: Migration<sup>2</sup>*, addressed the main idea of a rejection of nation-bound cultural frames. The superscript component in the festival's name recalled, for Langhoff, the mathematical equation 'a × a = a<sup>2</sup> oder auch = b [a × a = a<sup>2</sup> or even = b]',<sup>5</sup> which she linked to the festival's sometimes playful approach to dealing with racism and marginalisation.

The festival that was produced twice at Hebbel am Ufer, and the third time as part of the newly founded Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, was well received. After the second edition of the festival in 2007, Langhoff and her colleagues (like Tuncay Kulaoglu) started planning a platform for a new venue, for which they founded the organisation Kultursprünge e.V. They envisioned a theatre that would operate in 'contrast with already established theatres as an exploratory concept with respect to the artists involved and their narrative and aesthetical aspirations'.<sup>6</sup> In 2008, the city government of Berlin finally decided to fund the new house.<sup>7</sup>

In 2008, the theatre venue Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, which had established links to independent immigrant theatre groups since at least 1983, became the foundation for Langhoff's postmigrant theatre. Ballhaus Naunynstrasse was a response to the imperative, and the necessity, for a venue dedicated to artists of colour and marginalised artists, to develop and present their work without being put in a box, named, and labelled as the Other. Ballhaus Naunynstrasse is the kind of space that Stuart Hall would call a 'creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised peoples'.<sup>8</sup> Instead of being labelled, Shermin Langhoff and her colleagues decided to change the power game and label themselves, label their work. The term postmigrant theatre emerged as a way to intervene in the migration and integration discourse in Germany, and to emphasise that the process of migration does not only affect immigrants and their descendants, but German society as a whole. The concept of postmigration, or of the postmigrant, is highly influenced by postcolonial approaches to politics, knowledge production, identity, and cultural belonging. Originally, the term was used by German scholars in the US to capture the complexity and intertextuality of literature by

← 4. 'Jenseits des aktuell dominanten Integrations-Diskurses und konstruierter Zugehörigkeiten sowie des oft auf Herkunft reduzierenden, alltäglichen Rassismus in Teilen der Kultur- und Medienindustrie wollen wir Künstlern und Künstlerinnen aus Film, Literatur, bildender Kunst, Musik u.a. das Forum theatre öffnen.' Shermin Langhoff, *Beyond Belonging: Programmheft Hebbel am Ufer* (Berlin, 2006).

5. 'Kultur ohne Grenzen: Kuratorin Shermin Langhoff über die Reihe "Beyond Belonging – Migration<sup>2</sup>"', *Berliner Zeitung*, Berlin, 2005.

6. Onur Nobegra, "'We Bark from the Third Row": The Position of the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse in Berlin's Cultural Landscape and the Funding of Cultural Diversity Work', in *50 Jahre türkische Arbeitsmigration in Deutschland*, ed. by Seyda Ozil, Michael Hofmann and Yasemin Dayioglu-Yücel (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011), p. 94.

← 7. Although the decision to fund Ballhaus Naunynstrasse was very important, it came with 'casualties'—the funding for Ballhaus Naunynstrasse was cut from the funding of the long existing Turkish-German theatre, Tiyatrom. In fact, Tiyatrom no longer received any funding from the city government, because Tiyatrom was deemed to be in 'an artistic sense not really professional' ['in künstlerischer Hinsicht sei das theatre unprofessionell'] (Abgeordnetenhaus, 2008). This decision regarding what is professional and what is not has been long used by German theatre leaders and funding organizations to keep artists of colour and minority artists out of the system.

8. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 36 (1989), p. 69.

immigrant writers.<sup>9</sup> Postmigration is an attempt to describe the heterogeneity and fluidity of immigration and emigration, both of which have transformed German society.<sup>10</sup>

Shermin Langhoff has stated that postmigrant theatre represents ‘the stories and perspectives of those who have not immigrated but who have the migration background as part of their personal knowledge and collective memory.’<sup>11</sup> Langhoff repeatedly stated that Ballhaus Naunynstrasse was not a ‘Ghetto-theatre’,<sup>12</sup> but an approach to represent what was, until then, in the margins and invisible within German theatre.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the term postmigrant theatre can be seen as a direct result of the stigma that immigrants and artists of colour have experienced. As an unknown and ‘unwritten’ label, it became an umbrella under which theatre and performance could be produced without — or as a challenge to — the internalised double consciousness lens. Postmigrant theatre established an aesthetic and intellectual space for subaltern artists to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and thus to produce new theatrical discourses. Artists of colour could stage their own plays, author their own narratives, and forge their own aesthetics. The theatre’s strategy, especially in its early years, involved dramatising experiences

of migration, displacement, and life in the diaspora, as well as critically examining Germany society, both historical and contemporary.

Despite all the success, not only on a national, but also on an international level, Shermin Langhoff stated that ‘we bark from the third row’<sup>14</sup> and spoke of a cultural hegemony that defines and simultaneously excludes artists of colour and minority artists:

Who has the right to say That is Art. And that is not Art. How art should be or not be. Or what is part of art and what is not part of it. There is a power of labelling, that is not outside of our reach, a power of interpretation that is (ironically) not completely in our own hands.<sup>15</sup>

There was always the aspiration to not only produce from the margins but to aim for the well-funded German state and city theatres.

9. Karin Lornsen, *Transgressive Topographien in Der Türkisch-deutschen Post-migrantenliteratur* (University of Waterloo, 2001), p.8.

10. Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019).

11. ‘Die Geschichten und Perspektiven derer, die selbst nicht mehr migriert sind, diesen Migrationshintergrund aber als persönliches Wissen und kollektive Erinnerung mitbringen’. Sherin Langhoff, Tuncay Kulaoglu and Barbara Kastner, ‘Dialoge I: Migration dichten und deuten: Ein Gespräch zwischen Shermin Langhoff, Tuncay Kulaoglu und Barbara Kastner’, in *Das Drama nach dem Drama: Verwandlungen dramatischer Formen in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. by Artur Pelka and Stefan Tigges (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), p. 400.

12. Andreas Fanizadeh, ‘Wir inszenieren kein “Ghetto-Theater”’, *Taz*, 2009. <https://taz.de/!674193/>

13. Nobegra, ‘We Bark from the Third Row’, p. 100.

14. Nobegra, ‘We Bark from the Third Row’, p. 94.

15. ‘Da sind wir bei dem Punkt der kulturellen Hegemonien. Wer hat das Recht zu sagen Was ist Kunst. Was ist nicht Kunst. Wie darf Kunst sein oder wie sollte Kunst nicht sein. Oder Was gehört noch zur Kunst und was gehört nicht mehr dazu. Es gibt eine Begriffsmacht, die nicht in unserer Hand liegt, eine Deutungshoheit, die (ironisch) noch nicht komplett in unserer Hand liegt’. ‘Im besten Fall stürzt das Weltbild ein’, *Freitext, Kultur-und Gesellschaftsmagazin*, 22 (2013), p. 9.

# Fighting for a seat in the front row

Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin was always a theatre of radical changes. It was founded in 1952, in the first period of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), with the aim of emphasising the Russian and Soviet Union theatre tradition, and Stanislavsky's theatre practice. Manfred Brauneck points out that the plays and productions that were shown at Maxim Gorki Theatre corresponded with the political *Zeitgeist* of these eras.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Jana Simon asserts that, if there was ever a tradition at Maxim Gorki Theatre, it was not a linear or chronological one. She even suggests that every artistic director of the Maxim Gorki Theatre was writing their own history.<sup>17</sup> After reunification, the theatre was threatened by a shutdown due to lack of funding. The highly celebrated director Armin Petras took over the leadership in 2006, and Maxim Gorki Theatre became one of the crucial spaces in Berlin. But budgets were always a problem; Maxim Gorki Theatre has the lowest budget of all the state and city theatres in Berlin.

When Shermin Langhoff became the artistic director of Maxim Gorki Theatre in 2013, a highly controversial public discussion started. On the one hand, the nomination was perceived as an important step towards the representation of a current, diverse German society, a cultural political coup that finally acknowledged the ongoing exclusion of migrants and racialised minorities in the German theatre. And Shermin

Langhoff, as one of the pioneers, was finally to be seated in the first row as the rightful successor to the artistic leadership of a German state theatre. On the other hand, she was perceived as a neoliberal destroyer who discharged fifty of the former employers to make room for her 'Kanaken'.<sup>18</sup> In several interviews, she repeatedly stated that bringing in her staff was part of how the system worked, and that every (male) predecessor and white artistic director had done it before and after her. She was criticised nonetheless; the biased treatment of a non-white person and a woman became visible. She is, in fact, the first artistic director of colour in a German state and city theatre, and the line of acknowledging and perpetuating the not-Germanness of her person become blurry in the discussion. For example, her ethnic background is highlighted in every interview or article, with media representatives referring to her as either a 'Turkish' or an 'immigrant' artistic director. And then there is the issue of being a women leader in the German theatre. Around twenty percent of artistic directors in German state and city theatres are female.

The intersection of racism and sexism are very evident and female theatre-makers, especially women of colour, are greatly affected by under-representation within the German state and city theatre. Shermin Langhoff was caught in the crossfire of an angry mob<sup>19</sup> that feared losing their sovereignty over what theatre should and can be, and who can represent German theatre. But she also knew how to play the system, and not only occupy a role, but take space. While the role and her

<sup>18.</sup> *Kanake*, similar to the N-word, is an ethnic slur directed towards mainly Turkish, Arab, and other people of colour in Germany. But, similar to the N-word, it has become a self-expression, especially amongst youth of colour (Sharifi 2018).

<sup>19.</sup> While I use the term mob, I am referring to colleagues and theatre-makers who, behind closed doors and in 'private' conversations, have used racist stereotypes to downplay and keep out the impact of Shermin Langhoff. I was present at several of these conversations, where high ranked scholars and theatre-makers suggested that she had only made it that far due to her bond to the German theatre family Langhoff.

<sup>16.</sup> Manfred Brauneck, *Die Welt als Bühne: Die Geschichte des europäischen Theaters* (Stuttgart: J.B.Metzler, 2007), p. 399.

<sup>17.</sup> Jana Simon, 'Shermin macht Theater', *Die Zeit*, 2014.  
<https://www.zeit.de/2014/39/gorki-theater-berlin>

assignment for Langhoff, and her colleague Jens Hillje, seemed to be very clear ('be the outsider in a capital city theatre who entertains the always underfunded smallest city theatre'),<sup>20</sup> they had other plans.

Shermin Langhoff wanted to open the theatre to the social reality of Germany, and she wanted to interfere in current debates and conflicts, with a political agenda from a theatrical perspective. 'Maxim Gorki Theatre is the only state theatre in the German republic that unites a heterogeneity in its ensemble.'<sup>21</sup> And she called it, in the beginnings, in reference to Bertolt Brecht, 'the new Berliner Ensemble'. She stressed that 'the cultural practitioners have a social responsibility to act and to voice their opinion in times where the majority is not sharing the same opinions.'<sup>22</sup> While her position has been perceived, antagonistically, as instrumentalising art for the sake of political positioning, it was never about this, but rather was always about creating artistically inspiring theatre, including several layers of entertainment, political and social reflection, and representation. She aimed to change the Maxim Gorki Theatre to a theatre that would emanate not only throughout Germany but also to Europe. Her long-time colleague Tuncay Kulaoglu has stated that 'we are everywhere the first German-Turks of the second generation, and we needed to do the pioneering ourselves'.<sup>23</sup>

The biggest success of the first season was the production *Common Ground*, directed by Yael Ronen, which premiered in March 2014. The performance engages with the incidents — crime and violence — of the Yugoslav Wars and its aftermath. The research project is based on the biographies of the cast members who have interwoven their own family stories into the theatrical confrontation between the multiple layers of their experiences as children of perpetrators and victims. The performance has been highly celebrated by the audience and theatre critics. It was invited to *Berliner Theatertreffen* in 2015 and won the prestigious audience award of *Mühlheimer Theatertage* in the same year.

Under the leadership of Shermin Langhoff, Maxim Gorki Theatre has now been twice awarded the title *Theater des Jahres* (theatre of the year) by the theatre journal *Theater Heute*, in 2014 and 2016. The nomination is based on polls by German theatre critics. The importance of Langhoff and her work has also been acknowledged through many awards and honours, for example by the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2017.

20. Jana Simon, 'Shermin macht Theater', *Die Zeit*, 2014.

<https://www.zeit.de/2014/39/gorki-theater-berlin>

21. 'Das Maxim Gorki Theater ist das einzige Staatstheater der Republik, das eine solche Heterogenität in seinem Ensemble vereint'.

22. 'Die Kulturschaffenden haben eine gesellschaftliche Verantwortung, zu handeln und sich zu äußern. Gerade in Zeiten, in denen man nicht die Mehrheit hinter sich hat'.

Jana Simon, 'Shermin macht Theater', *Die Zeit*, 2014. <https://www.zeit.de/2014/39/gorki-theater-berlin>

23. 'Wir waren immer überall die ersten Deutschtürken der zweiten Generation und mussten Pionierarbeit leisten'. Jana Simon, 'Shermin macht Theater', *Die Zeit*, 2014.

<https://www.zeit.de/2014/39/gorki-theater-berlin>



# How to reconcile a rebellious spirit with a mainstream theatre?

Before she officially started at Maxim Gorki Theatre, Langhoff gave an extended interview with her colleague Tuncay Kulaoglu for *Freitext*, a magazine that was founded by the writers and playwrights Deniz Utlu, Mutlu Ergün, and Sascha Marianna Salzmann, who began their careers in Ballhaus Naunynstrasse and were later at Maxim Gorki Theatre's Studio Я. In this interview, Shermin Langhoff emphasised that she understands art as a necessity that derives from the impulse that urges one to become a political activist. She calls it the 'causal' (Ursächliche). This impulse can be grown out of experiences of injustice in society, or key moments in one's personal development:

Maybe the causal impulse lies in the interest for humans, for humanity, for utopia, that is, to imagine a justness and peaceful world. Politics and the arts share, in the first place, a yearning for utopia. This impulse in humanity is something that derives from biography and socialisation.<sup>24</sup>

The necessity, not only to express her political views, but to take an active social stance, engage in various public discourses, and make her

<sup>24</sup>. 'Vielleicht liegt auch darin ein ursächlicher Impuls, sich zu interessieren für Menschen, fürs Menschsein, für Utopie, also wie man sich eine gerechte, eine friedliche Welt vorstellt. Die Sehnsucht nach der Utopie teilt die Politik mit der Kunst erst einmal. Dieser Impuls im Menschen kommt oft aus seiner Biographie und seiner Sozialisation'. 'Im besten Fall stürzt das Weltbild ein', *Freitext, Kultur- und Gesellschaftsmagazin*, 22 (2013), p. 9.

voice and her position visible, has accompanied Langhoff's whole career. This results from her upbringing in a political context, as she has publicly emphasised, but also the way she, as one of the few female curators of colour, and later as the only female artistic director of colour in Germany, had to fight her way through a highly predominantly white male domain. The struggle of claiming a space within the German mainstream as a migrant woman has shaped her public persona that, in many ways, takes on the role she sometimes has been given by politics and media to undermine racially loaded assumptions and presumptions. And while she has been recognised for her work, and has achieved a more prominent social position within theatre discourses, she is still willing to take on risky places and political positions. And this has somehow formed the programming of Maxim Gorki Theatre.

The Maxim Gorki Theatre programme engages in the discourses around migration and diversity in a way that is not purely artistic and aesthetic. Many of the projects that have been initiated or affiliated with Maxim Gorki Theatre can be viewed as interventions and activism that has sparked controversial debates, not only in the mainstream but also in marginalised communities. In the midst of the so-called refugee crises — which rather should be called the crises of Europe in regards of the failure to acknowledge its colonial legacy and its responsibility for the continuity of exploitation and political crises — Shermin Langhoff invited many artists from marginalised communities, but also Zentrum für politische Schönheit (ZPS) to participate in the second Berliner Herbstsalon at Maxim Gorki Theatre. Berliner Herbstsalon is a format that allows for interdisciplinarity in arts, discourses and methodologies. In their performance/intervention *Die Europäischen Mauertoten* (or *The European border-victims*), ZPS wanted to highlight the interwovenness of European history and its border and migration regimes, tracing back from the killing of people at the Berlin Wall who attempted to flee the GDR to the current deaths of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea and

on the shores of Europe. The Agitprop group, who work with methods of disruption and spectacle, claimed to have stolen seven tombs' crosses from the Berlin memorial site in order to transfer them to the new borders of Europe. The performance included one hundred participants who were brought via bus to the borders of Europe (Bulgaria) to set up the tomb crosses and tear down the border fences. After the performance was stopped by Bulgarian police — and when the leader of ZPS, Philipp Ruch, had declared the end of the performance — many participants, including refugee right activists, were disappointed that the highly agitated action had no real political agenda, and moreover did not include a self-reflexive moment where the agitators and the participants could come together and discuss the outcome.<sup>25</sup> Overall many artists, activists and scholars — especially black, person of colour, marginalised, and minority communities — were criticising how the projects initiated by ZPS perpetuated a colonial and hegemonic gaze, where people of colour are depicted and represented merely as props to a white German, exclusive discourse on migration. For *Die Europäischen Mauertoten*, they published images of unknown and unnamed black young men, presumably depicting African refugees, who were holding the white 'stolen' crosses that had the engraved names of the victims of the Berlin Wall. The black men were objects of the staged public stunt for a white audience, where their individuality and their life story did not matter. While the defence of this form of representation is that these images reflect German public discourse, they simultaneously exclude all Germans of colour, black people, and people of colour living in Germany. Despite the controversies, Shermin Langhoff has chosen to stand by ZPS as the artistic director of Maxim Gorki Theatre, for several reasons. Firstly, ZPS attract a wide ranging audience, and they

<sup>25</sup>. The theatre critic Sophie Disselhorst was one of the participants and has written for the website *Nachtkritik* live on her experiences. Sophie Disselhorst, 'Wer schön sein will, muss leiden?', *Nachtkritik*, 2014. [https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10218:2014-11-11-15-05-49&catid=38:die-nachtkritik&Itemid=40](https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10218:2014-11-11-15-05-49&catid=38:die-nachtkritik&Itemid=40)

are able to play, and control, the media and the political discourse. The political and social debates and media attention these debates around ZPS have generated were also beneficial for the Maxim Gorki Theatre. It opened one, very problematic, stream of politically virulent topics that was then picked up by different artists with different approaches at Maxim Gorki Theatre to widen the perspectives on it.

Outside of German public discourse, Shermin Langhoff interacts with, and programmes, transnational discourses like the Armenian Genocide. The systematic mass extermination and expulsion of 1.5 million ethnic Armenians during the Ottoman Empire that began in 1915, and ended around 1923, is acknowledged as one of the first genocides of the twentieth century. At that time, Germany was allied with the Ottoman Empire and carried out an active role in the mass murders.<sup>26</sup> While the genocide is still denied in Turkey, many critics, especially in Turkey, have spoken out against this denial. One of them was the Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink. Hrant Dink's body of work made the perpetrators' responsibility for the genocide a subject of discussion, as well as the issue of thinking through ways of reconciliation between Turkey and its Armenian citizens. He was jailed and persecuted for a very long time by Turkish nationalists and, in 2007, was murdered in Istanbul. Along with other artists, Shermin Langhoff established a memorial for him back in Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, with the five piece collective performance *§ 301 – Die beleidigte Nation* (or *Paragraph 301 – The Insulted Nation*),<sup>27</sup> by Züli Aladağ, Miraz Bezar, Silvina Der-Meguerditchian, Hans-Werner Kroesinger, and Hakan Savaş Mican. The performance contextualised the death and the staged trials of the murder of Hrant Dink, as well as drawing attention to the Armenian Genocide and its ongoing dismissal in Turkey.

<sup>26</sup>. Jürgen Gottschlich, *Beihilfe zum Völkermord: Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2015).

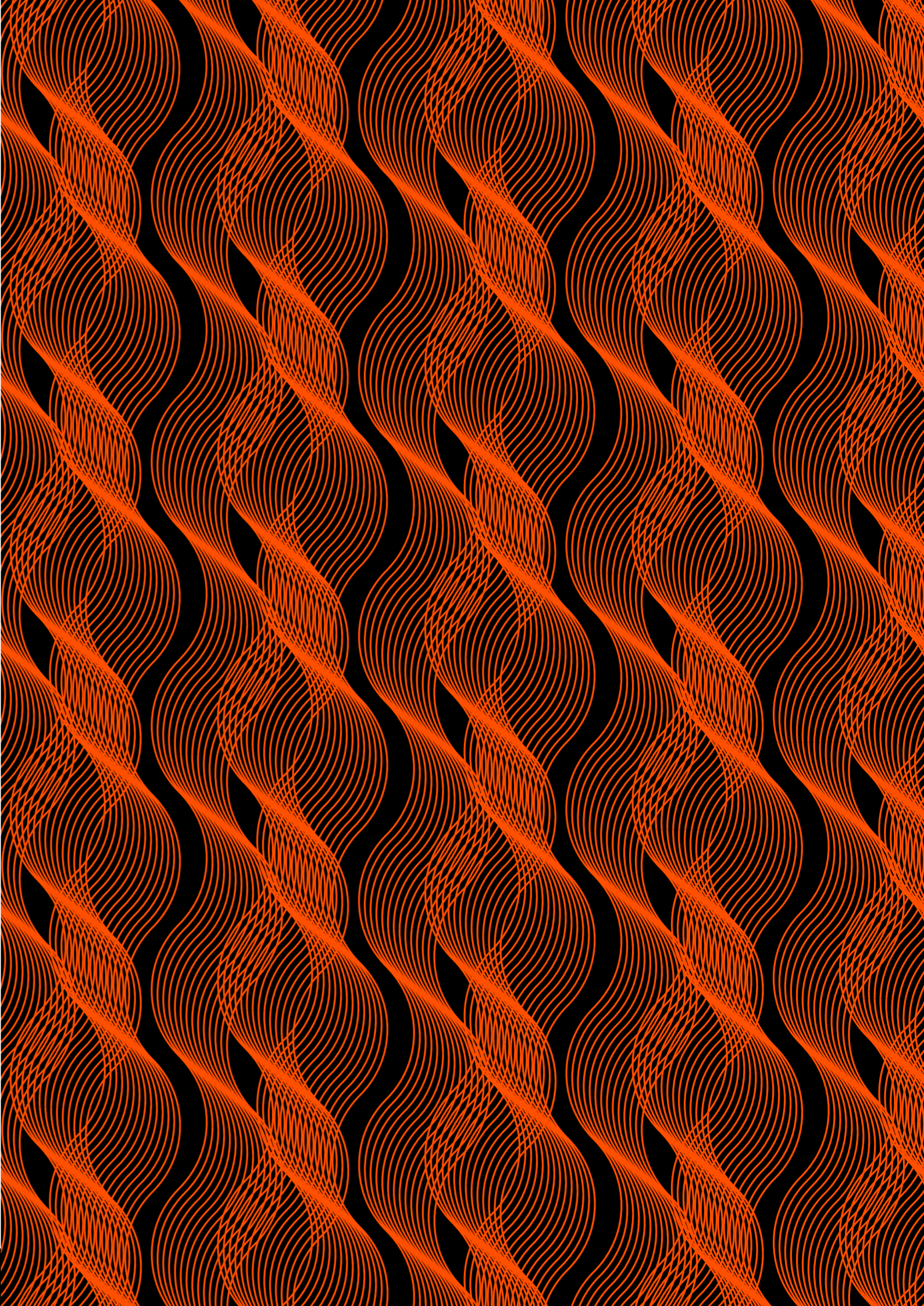
<sup>27</sup>. According to the announcement for the performance, §301 is a paragraph from the Turkish law that forbids and penalizes insulting 'Turkishness'.

After the failed coup d'état in Turkey staged in 2016, which resulted in many arrests and a massive exodus of scholars, writers, journalists, and various other intellectuals, many fled to Europe and Germany. Can Dündar, former editor of Cumhuriyet newspaper, one of the oldest national newspapers, who was charged for 'insulting' President Erdogan, fled to Germany. In 2017, the event 'HRANT DINK (GE)DENKEN' (or 'Memory and Thinking of Hrant Dink') was staged at Maxim Gorki Theatre, where Can Dündar had compiled a selection of Hrant Dink's texts, contrasting them with transcriptions of the trial of the murderers. The event was accompanied by a panel that included the lawyer of Hrant Dink's family as well as his former colleagues from his newspaper Agos; issues around Hrant Dink's death, the genocide, and the present Turkish state were discussed.

## Conclusion

Shermin Langhoff continues to open her theatre house to many other marginalised communities and de-legitimised topics. Her rebellious spirit and her resilience have paved the way for many artists and theatre-makers of colour. While she has integrity in her political and artistic views, she was, and has been for many years, the only woman of colour in the German speaking theatre scene. Now things are also changing, for example Hayat Erdogan is the artistic director of Neumarkt Zürich, together with Tine Milz and Julia Reichert. And Julia Wissert, a director and artist, will be from the 2020/2021 season the first black artistic director of a German state and city theatre.

In many ways, Shermin Langhoff has found ways to engage with multiple important social issues, willing as she is to take a stand for her beliefs, as reflected in her programme. With her work, she continues to be a vital part of an ongoing discourse on theatre and politics. ●



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