**Roujia Wang**

**Honor 384B**

**Research Proposal**

**Personal Title: Voice of Ethnic Minorities in Germany through Stage Performance Arts: Different Way for Seeking Social Inclusion.**

**Abstract:**

As a group, we have chosen to examine the use of various mediums as a means of identity expression and self-advocacy, as well as how these artistic and often personal choices impact outside perceptions of certain groups. Focusing on personal choices, Hannah will be researching how people use clothing as a form of expression and how society perceives them as a result of these decisions. Mira will be exploring how various minorities are portrayed in films and how German-produced films and those produced by the groups of interest may differ in their portrayals of the minority group. Roujia and Kendra will both be exploring German theater, examining the different aspects of social change that can be achieved through live performance. Roujia will be examining how ethnic minorities use stage performance as a means for social inclusion by the majority, while Kendra will be looking at how marginalized groups use theater arts to advocate for equal rights and opportunities in their own communities. In totality, our research will focus on how judgments based on appearance can affect daily interactions and how these judgments are either perpetrated or broken down through the human mediums of fashion, film, and theater.

**Background:**

**Group Part:**

Identity most visibly manifests itself in the choices that people make in their own presentation. Our group -- which was loosely titled “Performance” -- chose to extend this concept of identification to include the artistic choices involved in film, fashion, and theater. In synthesizing the different arts we chose to investigate identity with, we arrived at the broader concept of a “human medium,” that guides both the formation and perceptions of identity. Unlike music or visual arts such as painting or drawing, artists don’t require tools or years of practice. An form of art that uses the human body as a medium makes these forms of expression more accessible to individuals from a variety of backgrounds where the tools for other arts may not have been available to them. The accessibility of these forms of expression places them among the easiest ways to share the unique experiences of individuals and come to significant understandings about the different identities they are rooted in.

**Personal Part:**

**Hannah’s Section:**

Fashion is truly a human medium.  It is created by, chosen, worn and interpreted by people.  It is not only an expression of the artist that originally created it, but also the model that chooses to wear it and the manner in which they chose to do so.  To many the artistry of clothing seems trivial and pointless, but clothing and fashion represent a billion dollar, global enterprise that employs millions of people with countless professional aspirations.  The influence of fashion is not to be overlooked.

Like film and theatre, fashion is form of expression.  Expression that can be used for social activism, oppression through stereotyping or self-identification.  There is really no limit to what fashion can be used for or how it can be perceived.  This makes fashion a very powerful tool and is the reason why it is so important to the social structure of a community or country.  Common attitudes towards clothing create social narratives that can be hard to change or most past.  These attitudes also give people to portray themselves in a more favorable manner, conversely it can cause people to give off an impression that they may not have intended or that may not apply to them.  This can cause misinterpretations or representations of identity, which perpetuates stereotypes and a leads to a lack of social progress.

**Kendra’s Section:**

Stereotyping is a way in which people can group like-individuals in order to make quick decisions on how to interact with that type of person.  When referring to a group it is much easier to make broad assumptions and generalizations, however this means that when a person is associated with a particular stereotype they are labeled with generalized characteristics of the group and their individual identity is lost.  In this way, stereotyping can be correlated to a form of oppression in which a person who stereotypes is dehumanizing an individual by classifying them as a generalized group instead of a unique person. Through theater, individuals are able to tell their story and share their internal narrative with others.  This internal narrative gives the artist’s audience a snapshot of the artist’s identity and is a way for them to express the trials and triumphs they have faced as a fellow human. This makes theater a wonderful way for individuals who are underrepresented to not only express themselves and share their story, but to explain to their audience why they are equal as humans.  In this way, theater becomes a powerful method for minority groups to advocate for equal representation and opportunities in their communities.

**Mira’s section:**

Film is a form of self-expression that not only conveys the beliefs and attitudes of the creators, but also has the potential to influence those of the audience. In this way, it is an incredibly important medium when it comes to the separation of "others" in society. Through the lens of the filmmaker, society can either be broken up into its pieces or seen as a whole. It is my aim to look at the portrayal of immigrants in German cinema, in films produced by mainstream production companies and those produced by the demographic in question. The treatment of this often-marginalized group in fictional narratives speaks volumes about the larger perceptions of their role in society, and to what prejudices come attached to this identity. The other side of film as a medium for immigrant stories are those told by the immigrants themselves. These works represent a view of the larger German society as the "other," as opposed to identifying the minority group as the "different" factor. The accessibility of film has incredible consequence in the spreading of the stereotypes or understandings it perpetuates. Thus, looking at the messages being broadcast by an entire industry is necessary in order to understand the national climate for immigrants in Germany.

**Roujia’s section:**

In the long history of migration, the racial distribution overall the world has changed and the racial diversity generally increase in immigrant-receiving countries. Possible root causes for immigration are political inequality or wars in home countries and economical incentives provided by the immigrants receiving countries. Immigrants as influx of labor forces not only affects promotes local economy but also brings social and political impacts on the local society. However, not all the local residents welcome these changes in their society. In fact, people refuse to let those change happen to them, especially happen to their generations, even though those immigrants and their generations are contribute a lot to the immigrants-receiving countries. The voices of ethnic minorities were shielded from the majority. Meanwhile, minorities groups were not adapting the new social environment. This also exaggerates the gap between minorities and majority.

Germany, as one of the examples of population receiving country, still faces racial problems. From the middle of 20th century, Germany became one of the most popular immigration destinations of European countries. United Nations listed Germany as the third highest number of international migrants worldwide. (1) Before 1950s there were few ethnic minorities in Germany. However, “ The recruitment of guest workers, the influx of Spät-Aussiedler (ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states), as well as the reception of asylum-seekers have led to the growth of the immigrant population in the country.”([2)](http://focus-migration.hwwi.de/Germany.1509.0.html?&L=1) By the beginning of the 21st century nearly one-tenth of the population—some eight million people—were still non-Germans. ([3)](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/231186/Germany/58004/Ethnic-groups)

In fact more than 16 million people are of immigrant descent, which refers to the first and second generation, including mixed heritage and ethnic German repatriates and their descendants. (1) However, about half of them are still not owning a German citizenship. “Migrant background” is still being emphasized in Germany and many German still defined Germany as “monoracial country”. Throughout Germany people still keep asking, “where are you from” and with implicit follow up “when do you go back”. (4) An quote from an African German shows as an illustration for current situation ethnic minorities faced in Germany. "For hundreds of thousands of years, identities were created by excluding those who weren't part of the crowd, by drawing up borders," he says. "And this is why becoming a German — when you are from Africa, Asia or Turkey or elsewhere — is such a difficult thing because not only do you have to subscribe to everything that's normal here, you also have to overcome this exclusion barrier." Ethnic minorities are still treated as “invisible”, isolated from the major society. It is necessary to take a deep look into their actions for seeking more social inclusions.

People are taking actions to overcome such exclusion, both white German and non-white German. Artists or students from minorities groups in Germany lead an immigrant vanguard in seeking more social inclusion by the society. The idea behind this is a different type of social activism, also called creative activism. “In cities worldwide, where different politics of place stimulate capitalist appropriation, individuals and groups use the public space as a laboratory for resistance, creative act, and as a medium for communication. As such, creative activism is a strategy for those who are widely excluded from social, political, cultural, and economic participation.” (5) There are different types of creative activism. A group of young German students direct musicals “Yes We Can” and “Wedding on the Street” to examine racial issues in Germany, which is a good example. Moreover, Maxim Gorki, which is the leader of Turkish theaters in Berlin, is also a source of creative activism. The director of Maxim Gorki “made a nexus for plays tackling issues like immigration, race and assimilation” in their theater so that they move daily life of ethnic minorities to a public stage. They used stage performance, a form of “human medium”, as their pathway to share their perspectives. They are seeking an echo not only among the minority group, but also in the entire society. Those efforts in self-expression of ethnic minorities and promoting creative activism are worth to gain much more insights about them.

**QUESTION:**

From every German teacher I took class with, they all mentioned about the Turkish community in Germany. It is the largest minority group in Germany and also the most developed one. They formed a fully functional social system including educational, social system, which is just like a small Istanbul within Germany. This information triggers my interests in life of immigrants and their descents in Germany. After learning about the current situations of German ethnic minorities, I am interested in the current actions taken by the German ethnic minorities and compared those with the civil right movements for African American in American history. But at the same time, I am also super interested in the arts in Germany, especially in Berlin. Artworks are derived from people’s daily life, which are good reflection of the social environment of a place. In order to understand the particular culture and social norms in Germany, artworks and artists are good pathway to gain some insights.

I struggled a lot at first to determine which direction I should choose. However, after reading the passage from “German Minorities Still Fight To Be Seen, Heard”, especially the part about how young German use musicals to examine racial problems in German society, I found a connection between my two interests. From these two perspectives, I came up with my current research questions that “How artists with different background in Germany try to use stage performance arts to seek social inclusion or as a way of creative activism? ”

I tried to generalize my research question in a way that I still have different options to narrow it down after I go to Berlin. One of the options I have is that I can focus on artists from specific ethnic groups, for example Turkish artists in Germany and analyze their works in terms of self-expression or seeking social inclusion. Another possible option is that I can focus on one specific artwork and make deeper analysis, not only from artist’s side but also from audience’s perspective. The reflections and feedbacks from audience can shows how they interpret the artwork and what messages they receive from it. The third option is that I focus one theater and target on audience so that I only analyze the reactions of audience. In this case, the resources I can have in Germany will determine how I narrow my question down and which option I choose.

**CULTURAL SENSITIVITY:**

I live in China for my first seventeen years. Even though there are fifty-six peoples in China, I am belonging to “Han”, which includes majority of Chinese people. I came to US about two years ago. Even though, as a foreigner here, cultural difference is influential on me, I am still stay at here a short period of time and don’t have very deep involvement with the society. Unlike immigrants who migrate to a different country and live there for years, it might be difficult for me to fully understand the situation they faced for years. Moreover, the financial condition of my family is relatively wealth compared with average level in China or in United States. Therefore, I never face a tight budget conditions. It is less likely for me to obtain same understanding about suffering or struggles that some social groups have.  However, in terms of gender issue, I might be more sensitive to it since I am a female and the gender discrimination in where I come from is very noticeable. There is possibility that gender issue may be amplified in my mind than it should be if observe very objectively.

**DAILY SCHEDULE:**

People (names, titles, etc.) Artists from different background who create stage performance related to ethnic minorities.

Places (location and transportation) Maxim Gorki and other similar theater. Equipment (cameras, video recorders, paints, logbook, etc.) Cameras, recorders, notebooks, writing tool, dictionary.

Information you’ll gather (photos, notes from interviews, observations noted in logbook, etc.) Questionnaire about audience reactions, photos about performance, interview with artists and audience, my personal observation of stage performance, short videos if allowed.

**Reference:**

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4. Poggioli, Sylvia. "German Minorities Still Fight To Be Seen, Heard." *NPR*. NPR, 12 Jan. 2009. Web. 13 June 2015.
5. Youkhana, Eva. "Creative Activism and Art Against Urban Renaissance and Social Exclusion - Space Sensitive Approaches to the Study of Collective Action and Belonging." *Sociology Compass* 8.2 (2014): 172-86. Web.