belittling their talents and capabilities. By the time the rehearsals had finally come to an end and the show opened, the accusations and animosity felt by the two residents toward the director had become so obvious that, for fear of splitting cast relations any further, the director felt it best to withdraw a bit from interacting with the cast members. When this happened, she was accused of not caring about the cast and attempting to claim all the credit for the success of the show.

Although all the cast members remained loyal to the project, there was a general feeling of tension and unease. Those who felt a strong allegiance to the company and the director resented the animosity and the insults, which had racial and sexist undertones toward the black female director and which were experienced not only backstage, behind the scenes, but also in the open space of rehearsals. However, at the strongly voiced request of the director, they never confronted the residents and continued rehearsals without any disagreement surfacing. However, the tensions were deeply felt.

Nia was deeply saddened, because the exalting experience of working with Cross Bridges now turned into a nightmare. There was a clash of values and, for Nia, the very goal of the Urban Arts Cross-Cultural Exchange had abysmally failed.

When the show finally ended, the two residents left Cross Bridges and the director vowed never to work with them again or to participate in the Urban Arts Exchange.

Nia's challenge as a critical ethnographer and a student of organizational communication was to interpret the provocative tensions and layers of conflicts she witnessed within the organization. She decided that her interpretive method would primarily draw from *feminist theory* and *critical race theory*.

Key Concepts in Theories of Difference: Race

Theories of difference are concerned with the histories, consequences, and contexts of what it means to be unlike the norm, the majority, the comprehended, or to be outside certain registers of power. Theories of difference that encompass how race, gender, and sexuality operate confront the complexities of identity, belonging, and language by and within realms of politics—and I use "politics" in the same way Ingraham (1997) does, to mean "all those social, material practices in which the distribution of power is at stake" (p. 290).

Difference is full of complexity. There are obviously differences within difference. Those who are of the same race but a different gender—or of the same gender but a different race—complicate any notion of a clean or neat division of difference. The same can be said of sexuality and class. There are differences within differences, yet there are profound realities of sameness

across different divides. A poor, black, gay woman born outside the United States is multiply "different," and each difference matters more than the others depending on the particular context or situation she must confront. Yet, in certain circumstances, she may feel more affirmed in a gay community than in a black community, and in other circumstances she may feel more at home in a black community than in a feminist community. Differences both intersect and diverge depending on specific contexts; however, to be different is always to be positioned against a norm.

Nia turned to theoretical conceptualizations of race and gender to help guide her through her analysis. The following terms were central to her understanding of the complex dynamics and frictions that erupted during her fieldwork research.

Race, Essentialism, and Social Construction

Critical race theory begins with the presupposition that race does not exist solely as a biological fact and is therefore less a product of nature and more a product of social classification and identification. Therefore, it is the social, political, and cultural processes of classification and identification that constitute race or racialization (Torres, Miron, & Inda, 1999). For essentialist thinkers, the body occupies a pure presocial and prediscursive space. The essentialist-versus-constructionist debate concerns what constitutes the *natural* and what constitutes the *social*: "While the essentialist holds that the natural is repressed by the social, the constructionist maintains that the natural is produced by the social" (Torres et al., 1999, p. 6). Constructionists, however, reject the idea that there is a natural human determinant or an essential fact of existence that precedes social, economic, and political processes. However, the term *strategic essentialism* argues that there is no pure order or essence in what it means to be human, but rather that, as a "rhetorical maneuver," essentialism has its place (Fuss, 1989; Spivak, 1988). Therefore, strategic essentialism asserts that the use of essentialism for useful ends depends on who is using it and how it is being used, as well as to what purpose. The postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak (1988) reminds us that we are born into nature and we are born into history, therefore essentialism can be powerful for the dispossessed. Thus, interrogating essentialism does not necessarily entail dismissing it. The problem, according to Spivak, is when it moves from something provisional to something permanent.

The concepts of race and social construction guided Nia in (a) analyzing how race became a barrier in communication between the residents and the director, all of whom believed themselves to hold no racial prejudices and who prided themselves on their sensitivity to and engagement with difference; (b) analyzing

reproduction

the very nuanced, convoluted, and obscured ways racism operated in the company through unconscious habit, naturalized practices, and white supremacy; and (c) providing a framework for understanding how the director, company members, and the residents are constructed as racial beings according to certain assumptions about their own race as well as the race of others.

Race, Structure, and Image

Understanding racialization as process or construction leads us away from thinking about race as simply "natural" or biological and leads us to thinking about the *power dynamics*—ideology, images, and institutional formations that hold race in place. This means that physical appearances of what people may look like in racial terms, how we enact and react to these appearances—classify and identify them—becomes a legal, political, social, and historical reality (Guillaumin, 1999, p. 45). Therefore, race is a "human construct based on ideology with regulatory power within society" (Solomos & Back, 1999, p. 68). As the argument for racial construction is made, pulling it away from biological determinism toward a more radical discussion of social and political power, we see how race is formed and embedded by class and economic stratifications. Making the point that racial difference is a prevailing feature of American life that is inherent in structures of hierarchy, the critic Stephen Small (1999) states,

> Racialized structures are the institutional pillars of society. They are the routine, recurrent and organized features of contemporary life. The idea of "racialized" structures has two key components. First, it refers to the distribution of valuable resources such as political power, employment, education and housing. Primarily this aspect involves who owns what, works and lives where, and has good health. Secondly, it refers to the normal, recurrent and routinized procedures of institutions that shape and constrain our daily lives, from politics (voting and political representatives), economics (businesses, employment), education (universities, schools) health (hospitals) and other spheres of social life (family, media, music, sport). These behaviors and actions sustain the distribution of resources. (p. 50)

With these words in mind, we may agree that racial categories are produced and reproduced by everyday American activities of inclusion and exclusion (Ong, 1982, p. 267), and we may also add that the economic and political implications of race are always simultaneously operating through images, values, and desires that are racially oriented. Critical race theory analyzes the complex machinations of racialization in the various ways it is created, sanctioned, and employed, but it also illuminates the various ways race is an effect of our imagination and how racial symbols and representations determine our

understanding and attitudes about race in the first place. These racialized images and ideologies turn back to shape structure, just as structures shape us. The cultural critic Cornell West (1991) reminds us that structures are not simply economic and political creations; they influence desire and value. It is images, not ideas, that dominate. Racialization therefore becomes a reciprocal circling of institutional process and individual ideology, each shaping and empowering the other. This is a complex and often hidden circling.

The concept of structure and image was an elaboration upon Nia's analysis of race as construction, and guided Nia in (a) understanding how construction actually works and what the forces and factors in society are that contribute to the construction of race above and beyond others, (b) analyzing how structure and image are conceptualized in critical race theory as a means out of which the subjects in her study operated, and (c) understanding how image was key in articulating how representation in performance and popular culture informs identities and how they are treated as a result of representation.

Whiteness and Privilege

We must keep in mind that critical race theory is not simply directed at the racialization of so-called minority identities or the social constructions of people of color; the construction of *whiteness* is also under examination. Critical race theorists point out that whiteness is often perceived as nonracialized; they argue, however, that whiteness is in fact a construction of race and that it forms a structural position of racial privilege. The most ardent theorist on whiteness states,

> In contemporary social settings, whiteness has been identified as a core set of racial interests often obscured by seemingly race-neutral words, actions, or policies . . . the phrase *white culture* is proffered to convey the material relations of social structures that reproduce white privilege and racism in this country, quite apart from what individual whites may feel, think, and perceive. (Frankenberg, 1993, pp. 196–205; qtd. in Hartigan, 1997, p. 185)

Critical race theorists argue that "whiteness is a taken-for-granted experience based on varying 'supremacist assumptions' that are sometimes critical, sometimes biological, sometimes moral, sometimes all three" (Bonnett, 1997, p. 213). The repeated phrase in much of the literature on race theory is that "whites have privilege whether they want it or not." White privilege is often masked as neutral social arrangements and institutional operations that seem to have no basis (Bonnett, 1997). Michael Eric Dyson (2003) states, "The genius of unarticulated, invisible whiteness is that it was able to impose its particularist perspective as normative" (p. 40). In other words, not only

does the very invisibility of whiteness or its seemingly racial neutrality operate through machinations of privilege for a particular group, but these machinations are masked, distorted, and instituted as being normative.

The discussion of whiteness pointed Nia toward (a) the unmarked and unnamed ways in which the residents, in manner and attitude, were not simply constituted by racial privilege but were, more importantly, so uncritical of the privilege they inherited that they behaved with arrogance and entitlement when a racialized Other was placed in a position of authority/power over them; (b) how white privilege does not necessarily equate with white supremacy or racist acts and how white members of the company from the same community as the residents were an integral and active part of the company; and (c) an analytical framework upon which she could articulate the ingrained assumptions of white supremacy, particularly when supremacy becomes in tension with racialized Others where its own (unconscious) superiority is impeded.

Key Concepts in Theories of Difference: Gender

Nia also employed the next set of terms to unravel the very discreet but penetrating ways the problems of gender surfaced in her fieldwork.

Feminism and Power

Generally, feminist theory is concerned with power differences between men and women and how these differences impact the public and private domains of our lives (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1990; Warren 2003; Weedon, 1987; Wood, 2005). Feminist theory is concerned with gender inequities and "who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become" (Weedon, 1987, p. 1). With the understanding that sex usually refers to biological differences between the male body and the female body, feminist theory focuses on how these differences are performed, hierarchically classified, and materially arranged in the social world.

Feminists have also been in tension over the struggle for representation and membership in dominant institutions at one end, and the struggle to dismantle or eliminate the very foundations of these institutions on the other. Many feminists feel the feminist movement lost its significance when it ceased in great measure to condemn patriarchal systems and focused more on the empowerment of a few women. This is certainly the case with certain feminist researchers, whose narrow understanding of empowerment does not consider broader implications for women who are not the same race, ethnicity, or nationality. Achola Pala (1977) states,

I have visited villages where, at a time when the village women are asking for better health facilities and lower infant mortality rates, they are presented with questionnaires on family planning. In some instances, when the women would like to have piped water in the village, they may be at the same time faced with a researcher interested in investigating power and powerlessness in the household. In yet another situation, when women are asking for access to agricultural credit, a researcher on the scene may be conducting a study on female circumcision. (p. 10; qtd. in Carby, 1997, p. 123)

The researcher's notion of empowerment does not comply with that of the women she is researching or their needs. Therefore, the researcher's notion of empowerment does not take into account the very institutional mechanisms that disempower the subject of her research. The controversy over women, empowerment, and what constitutes a feminist perspective that incorporates a broader and more useful agenda for women can be traced by what has been described as the three movements or waves in the development of women's rights. The first concerns itself with women's inclusion and access to institutions that had historically been denied women. In this case, the concern was for the liberty and freedom of women to enter the doors of these institutions and structures and to be represented in them, but not necessarily to change the structures themselves. The second movement or wave was also concerned about access and membership, but it was also concerned with the transformation of the structures themselves relative to discrimination practices at multiple levels (e.g., women, family, race, sexuality, economic inequities, and the environment). Second-wavers were interested in transforming institutions to make them more just, to build a more equitable society. The third wave, however, for many contemporary feminists is more global in perspective and more visionary in its concern for overlapping oppressions of difference. (I shall describe it below through the concepts of *material feminism* and *ecofeminism*.)

Feminist theory aided Nia in (a) addressing the interpenetrating domains of race and gender, particularly because the director was Othered by both race and gender; (b) analyzing discrimination, relative to the residents, as an intermix of race and gender; and (c) analyzing how patriarchal structures and practices position and discipline women with narrow choices—as a black female director, was she outside the domestic and patriarchal boundaries or women's work?

Material Feminism and Ecofeminism

The "material" in material feminism means the emphasis is on divisions of labor and the distribution of wealth both nationally and internationally, as well as how meaning and value (relative to freedom and opportunity) are

constituted globally. Material feminism responds to pressing global issues of inequality and exploitation, as well as charges by so-called third-world feminists and people of color around the world that feminism in the West is out of touch with the struggles and debates outside the interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual women in the United States and Europe (Minh-ha, 1989; Mohanty, 1984). Chrys Ingraham (1997) states,

> This call for an international re-evaluation of western feminism intersected with the circulation of newly forming critical knowledges such as Afrocentrism, post colonial criticism, post structuralism, neo-Marxism, postmodernism, and brought about a rethinking of feminist concepts and politics. Throughout the struggles and debates within feminism over the past 20 years, materialist feminists have continually worked to develop an analytic capable of disrupting the taken-for-granted in local and global social arrangements and of exposing the economic, political, ideological conditions upon which exploitation and oppression depend. (pp. 276–277)

As a form of critical postmodernism, materialist feminism argues that the interlocking web of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, and racism are neither abstract nor isolated, but they are interpenetrating and ubiquitous as they interact at varying levels and degrees in regulating our everyday lives.

Ecofeminism

Karen J. Warren (2003), one of the leading proponents of ecofeminism, describes ecofeminism as feminism that employs gender analysis "to describe, analyze, and resolve the varieties of ways in which the unjustified domination of women and other subordinated groups of humans (human other) has historically been interconnected with the unjustified domination of 'nature' (nonhuman animals and the nonhuman environment)" (p. 5). Ecofeminism is both a theory and a social movement that is concerned with the very nature and practice of oppression in all its formations. The feminist communication scholar Julia T. Wood (2005) states,

> Ecofeminists believe that domination and oppression are wrong and destructive of all forms of life, including the planet. . . . For ecofeminists, oppression itself, not particular instances of oppression, it the primary issue. They believe that, as long as oppression is culturally valued, it will be imposed on anyone and anything that cannot or does not resist. Thus, women's oppression is best understood as a specific example of an overarching cultural ideology that idolizes oppression in general. (p. 71)

Ecofeminism is a more radical position than traditional forms of feminism in its emphasis upon social justice relative to multiplication of oppression and their interconnectedness. Again, Wood states,

> The goals of this movement flow directly from its critique of cultural values. Ecofeminists seek to bring themselves and others to a new consciousness of human's interdependence with all other life forms. To do so, they speak out against values that encourage exploitation, domination, and aggression and show how these oppress women, men, children, animals, plants, and the planet itself. (p. 72)

Although all ecofeminists do not agree, across the board, on points of emphasis and the urgencies given to certain oppressive practices over others, "all ecofeminists agree that many environmental issues have a gender dimension and that many gender issues have an environmental dimension" (Warren, 2003, p. 6).

As a critical ethnographer, Nia felt that she wanted to include a feminist analysis that also especially addressed issues of class and the political economy, because one of the missions of the theatre company was to inspire and promote economic justice in the community. Because the director was a black woman and because her performance dealt with issues related to the local/global nexus, it was important for Nia to include a feminist analysis that went beyond the racial and gender conflict with the residents to provide a deeper and more comprehensive examination of the feminist politics of the director. Nia was careful not to make the conflict with the residents the full story. Because the director played a significant role in Nia's research, it was necessary for Nia to understand the philosophy that guided the director's artistic productions. As a critical ethnographer, Nia understood she could not provide a substantive analysis if she did not study the theoretical principles that guided one of the central subjects of her study; therefore, examining gender and difference from a global perspective was important.

Warm-Ups

1. How might the theoretical concepts organized under each individual case study be applied and extended to the other case studies? For example, can Nia borrow certain concepts from postcolonial theory in her analysis of the community theatre company? How can Robert use Marxist theory in his project? Discuss how specific concepts may be especially relevant to your project and/or other interpretive questions relating to critical fieldwork.