

The Struggle to belong

Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings.

Amsterdam, 7-9 July 2011-04-29

**Media images and everyday realities:
German-Moroccan perspectives on translocational positionalities**

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Paper presented at the International RC21 conference 2011

Session Nr. 28 Living with Difference

Round Table 2: Diversity and Social Cohesion

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1 Introduction

As far as the public discourse on migration and diversity in Germany is concerned a substantial shift can be observed. Legal and economic categories such as “foreigners” “asylum-seekers” or “guestworkers” have been replaced by cultural terms (cf. (Meyer 2007: 19); what used to be discussed as “the integration of foreigners” is currently being debated as “the integration of Muslims”. This paper argues that what can be observed is a shift of what (Bourdieu and Schmid 2001: 102) calls “*idées-forces*”: those categories that define major social groups and can be used to mobilize social forces. This new type of categorization is particularly evident in media and political discourses, and is increasingly becoming part of scientific research. However, it entails several problems:

- First of all it conflates two distinct and different analytical categories: religious belief on the one hand and a fundamental biographic event (international migration) on the other hand.
- Secondly, the shift of focus from national categories to culturally constructed categories of religious differences goes along with the depiction of Islam as something “foreign”, “dangerous” and opposed to “Christian-Jewish traditions” in Germany (CDU 2010: 2). This definition of Muslims as an out-group serves to deprive a large number of German citizens of their “right to belong”.
- Thirdly, the use of the term “Muslim” as an imaginary collective community integrates people from very different regional, cultural, educational or economic backgrounds and forces them into an apparently homogeneous group (Anthias 2009: 6–9) . Even a scientific study such as “Muslim life in Germany” (e.g. (Haug et al. 2009) which tries to contest this monolithic, negative image by pointing to the variations and differences between and positive achievements of the members of this socially constructed group, in the end cannot avoid contributing to the visibility of “Muslims” as a categorical term.

This paper therefore propose to shift the attention from a group category to the level of individual lives and individual identities.

The first part of this paper focuses on poststructuralist definitions of subjects and identities as temporary effects of discourses. Thereafter the concepts of narrative identities and intersectionality are introduced. They provide the necessary tools to highlight and understand the diversity and multiplicity of elements which individuals draw upon in the process of identity construction. The third section then addresses the spatial dimension of identities and asks how notions of belonging can be conceptualized in view of new cultural theories. It is argued that the concept of “translocational positionalities” provides an adequate tool to research identity and belonging under the conditions of a globalized world, where every identity is by definition hybrid, every culture transcultural and every space translocal. Finally two case studies are presented which illustrate how different translocational positionalities emerge and how they influence the way individuals experience, evaluate and deal with incidents of discrimination and ‘othering’.

2 Identity and differences

"Identity is a slippery concept, and not only contested but contestable" (Anthias 2009: 6).

This paper agrees with the notion that both "identity" and "subject" as scientific terms should be handled with care as they are used in diverse and often contradictory contexts to denominate diverse concepts. However, Hall is right when he argues that from a poststructuralist perspective a number of terms have to be reshaped, but nonetheless are still needed in order to answer important questions. "Identity is such a concept - operating 'under erasure' [...]; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all" (Hall and du Gay 1997: 2). Hence the following section presents some of the "new ways" in which identities can be defined.

2.1 Subjectivity, Identity and Discourses

The question of what identities are and how they are constructed cannot be answered without previously introducing the term subject. Contrary to conceptions of subjects as autonomous, self-conscious and capable of reflexive and intentional actions, poststructuralist approaches rooted in discourse theories define a subject as an effect of discourses which is not based on some sort of stable "inner self". This position does not however presume the "death of the subject" as Glasze and Mattisek "(2009a: 30) point out: As from a poststructuralist perspective an autonomous subject does not exist. The question as to how discourses produce identities and subjectivities and what kind of ascriptions and power relations are involved in this process are central issues.

According to Hall, Foucault's oeuvre explains how subjects are constituted through discourses "in reference to historically-specific discursive practices, normative self-regulation and technologies of the self" (Hall and du Gay 1997: 13). What Foucault's discourse theory cannot explain, though, is how and why subjects take on certain subject positions. This question has been answered from a Marxist point of view by the French philosopher Louis Althusser. In his essay on "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (Althusser 1977), Althusser introduces the term "interpellation" to describe the process of an individual being interpellated by ideological state apparatuses. Intermediary institutions such as family, school or church define subject positions and call individuals into these positions. A second important term coined by Althusser is „overdetermination“. Hence, subject identities as social effects are the result of several, potentially contradictory systems of reference (Glasze and Mattisek 2009a: 29).

This idea is taken up and developed further in cultural and postcolonial studies, (for others Bhabha 2004; Hall and du Gay 1997). They stress the fact that especially in times of globalization and increasingly heterogeneous national societies subjects are integrated in diverse and multiple systems of reference. As a result their identities can only be described as fragmented and hybrid. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, these authors stress that any construction of personal identities draws on differentiations and thus establish boundaries between the self and the other which are inscribed in power relations and establish hierarchies (cf. Glasze and Mattisek 2009a: 29; Hall and du Gay 1997: 4–5). In her work Butler (2001, 1997) reconciles the Foucauldian discourse theory with insights from psychoanalysis and thus illuminates the intricate relationship between subject, identity and materiality. According to Butler the formation of subjectivity and identity corresponds to a continuing process that is shaped through economic, political, social and

cultural discourse practices. She refers to identities as discursively constituted subject positions, which however have to be reaffirmed through performative actions i.e. designations and interpellations. As individuals can be interpellated by different discourses, subjects are always positioned on the intersection of several subject positions, none of which can offer a stable and complete identity. Therefore identity, by means of identification with a discursively constructed subject position must fail. Identity thus is never stable but rather a contingent and temporary structure, an “articulated set of elements” (Laclau 1990: 32) that “creates unity and belonging in the light of the complexity of social fissures” (Glasze and Matissek 2009b: 162).

2.2 Intersectionality and narrative identities

In order to take this multiplicity of categories and social fissures into consideration, feminist researchers have developed the concept of intersectionality. This concept aims at deconstructing seemingly homogeneous group identities (such as the socially constructed category of “Muslims” that the current paper is concerned with). It was first phrased in the context of political engagements: “political projects such as that of the Combahee River Collective, the black lesbian feminist organization from Boston, pointed, as early as 1977, to the futility of privileging a single dimension of experience as if it constituted the whole of life” (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 78). Introduced in the USA as a political intervention in the context of critical race studies (cf. e.g. Crenshaw 1989) has been taken up in Europe and as a “traveling theory” (Knapp 2005) has been adapted to poststructuralist research frames (Davis 2008). Contrary to previous additive concepts of “double jeopardy” and multiple discriminations, the notion of intersectionality is based on the presumption that categories of difference are not only added onto each other, but become meaningful only in their interrelatedness¹. Concepts of intersectionality follow Hall’s definition “that identities are never undivided and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall and du Gay 1997: 4).

Taking the role of discourses into account is rather a novelty in intersectionality research. Most early empirical studies focused on the micro level of performativity, asking how identities and differences “are done” (cf. West and Fenstermaker 1995). Other authors argue for analysis on a macro level of social structures in order to find out what “lines of difference” make up the basic pattern of socially and politically relevant structures of inequality. Contrary to this, recently devised concepts (e.g. by Winker and Degele 2009, 2011) look at practices of identity construction in their interrelatedness with discourses and social structures. Multi-level concepts of intersectionality can thus be used in migration research to show how symbolic and discursively constructed categories of difference become relevant for negotiations of belonging as well as for access to power and social resources (or lack thereof) (Riegel and Geisen 2007: 14) cf. also (Schmidtke 2001: 141). Empirical research should therefore strive to answer the question which categories of difference become relevant at a specific point of time and space.

¹ Because the term “intersectionality” evokes a picture of lines of difference which intersect only at a specific point (cf. Walgenbach (2007: 60f); Knapp (2008: 138), some authors prefer the term “interdependency”. This paper however follows Winker and Degele (2009: 13) who argue that intersectionality is sufficient to denominate and emphasize the interlaced character of social categories.

This is clearly in line with poststructuralist notions of identities as context specific and changing over time: "Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formation and practices, by specific enunciative strategies" (Hall and du Gay 1997: 4). "I understand identities as points of suture, points of *temporary* attachment, as a way of understanding the constant transformations of who one is or as Foucault put it, 'who one is to become'" (Hall 1995: 65). An analysis of these temporary points of suture becomes possible because a person who speaks must do so from a certain position. Hall reminds us that we have to take up a specific subject position, however temporary it might be, in order to act at all (Hall 1995: 66): "You have to stop, because if you don't you cannot construct meaning. You have to come to a full stop, not because you have uttered your last word, but because you need to start a new sentence which may take back everything you have just said."

In order to translate this perspective into empirical work this paper proposes to employ a narrative identity approach, following Anthias's argument that "what has usually been thought about as a question of identity can be understood as relating to narratives of location and positionality" (Anthias 2002: 501). Drawing on intersectional social categories such as gender, ethnicity and class these accounts "mirror as well as produce social ontologies" (Anthias 2002: 498). This double effect of structuration in and through language reflects Butler's identity theory which maintains that subjects - as discursive effects - can neither act nor speak outside of the discursive structures but can still be held responsible for the statements they make (Strüver and Wucherpennig 2009: 117).

The above described view on subjects as discursive effects who do however retain a capacity to act and speak is reflected in dialogical-performative approaches to narrative identities. This perspective highlights that identities are constructed socially, interactively and through language, by means of "discursive practices of everyday interaction" (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004: 56). A narrative identity approach thus takes into account the two-fold epistemological limitation that stems from the definition of identities as situated and temporary points of suture. This means that empirical studies based on narrative-biographical interviews are restricted in their analysis to narrative identities, defined as the ways in which a narrator relates and produces specific aspects of his or her identity which are of relevance in an interactive situation at a specific point in time and space (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004: 56). An analysis of narrative identities consequently strives to discover, explicate and systemize those categories, processes and relationships which narrators refer to in order to constitute their narrative identities.

2.3 Identity and space: positionalities and belonging in a globalized world

As cultural geographers have observed, the recent cultural turn has gone hand in hand with a spatial turn, thus putting the relationship between culture, identities and space on the agenda in many different disciplines of social sciences (Pott 2007: 28).

One of the key concepts in this context is the idea of Transnationalism. Developed in the USA in the early 1990s this concept describes a new type of migration which could no longer be explained and analyzed using the traditional bi-polar migration theories that focused on questions of integration and assimilation (Han 2005). Based on empirical studies of circular migration between Central America and the USA, (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994)) observed that

today's migrants take advantage of facilitated means of transportation and communication to live their daily lives increasingly across instead of within national borders. The German sociologist Ludger Pries argues that transmigrants - through their simultaneous embeddedness in both host and source countries - contribute to the emergence of new, transnational social spaces (Pries 2003: 27).

The intensified migration processes as well as the increased world-wide exchange of goods, products, thoughts and ideas addressed in the concept of Transnationalism have raised serious questions on initial concepts of culture as well. These concepts (e.g. by Pufendorf and Herder) presumed a basic equivalence of culture, territory and people. Contrary to this essentialist assumption of culture as something bound to a specific social group on a delimited territory current theories define culture as a *troupe* of all those elements, patterns, forces and influences that shape an individual's life. Thus no individual is equipped with an identical set of cultural values and there is no fixed, stable, general and common concept of culture. The philosopher Wolfgang Welsch has coined the term „Transculturalism“ in order to earmark “culture” as a concept operating “under erasure” (Hall and du Gay 1997: 2) and to highlight that lives and lifestyles are situated across and not along national borders: "For *every* culture, all *other* cultures have tendentially come to be inner-content or satellites" (Welsch 1999: 198). This intermingling of different modes of consumption and production as well as diverse elements of patterns of thinking, perceiving and acting is reflected in varied lifestyles. On a micro-level this means that subjects are embedded in several discourses and systems of meaning (see 2.1) which are reflected, (re)produced and possibly transformed in everyday linguistic and non-linguistic practices (cf. (Reckwitz 2005).

The postcolonial and cultural studies school has argued in a similar vein against the concept of authentic and/or homogenous cultures (cf. (Meyer 2007: 25). In this context the term “hybridity” is used to describe cultures as bricolage and to emphasize that cultures are by no means “closed systems of symbolic referrals” (Pütz 2004: 26).

The advantage of these new concepts of culture for migration studies is the possibility to go beyond the description of migrants as being “lost between two cultures”. It is instead possible to conceptualize culture as something which is always hybrid, thus allowing individuals to position themselves self-confidently in the imaginary “Third Space” (Bhabha 2004) opened up by these conceptions (Spies 2010: 48). This does not mean that Hybridity can be celebrated as a new form of sociality in which exclusions or power relations no longer exist (cf. Terkessidis 2006 critique of Bronfen 1997). However, if we do take into account the symbolic power which is always inscribed into the production of culture, we can use concepts of Transculturality or Hybridity to address those ideas about cultural differences which are referred to in everyday language without having to draw on essentialisations. Cultural classifications can thus be analyzed as the symbolically drawn boundaries between social groups that enable or deny belonging and influence the distribution of social resources (cf. Schmidtke 2001: 141; Pütz 2004: 26).

Anthias points out that belonging and identity – although similar in meaning – should be differentiated for analytical purposes. Contrary to identities, which are more closely related to narrations about oneself and the others, belonging is “more about experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences and emotions of inclusion” (Anthias 2009: 8). Even if identities are unstable, multiply

and hybrid, being able to answer the question “where and to whom do I belong?” remains extremely important to people’s health and well-being even in modern times (Prins 2006: 288). The emotional and mental “rootedness” in space, time and society is facilitated if a person can relate to a specific place as an “anchor of identity” (Pott 2007: 30) and/or is able to share common values in his/her social networks and translate these values into common practices in everyday life²(Anthias 2009: 8).

What sort of practices and experiences a person can share and where and to whom he or she can belong to depends on his or her position in society and space (his or her “space of experience”) and is also circumscribed by formal and symbolic boundaries effective in a certain location at a specific time. In order to capture the specificity of individual positions with relation to these intersectional categorizations and social divisions, Floya Anthias introduced the term “translocational positionalities”. “Trans-location” refers to social spaces defined by the “intersections of gender, ethnicity and class and other important social boundaries and hierarchies” (Anthias 2009: 15). The term “positionality” alludes to what Giddens termed the duality of structure and agency (Giddens 2008), stressing the interrelatedness of social position (as an outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices and actions, a process).

The concept of “translocational positionalities” offers the possibility to conceive identities as multifaceted and instable, while at the same time taking into consideration the multiple and powerful discourses and social structures that frame narrations of identity and belonging. Probably the most important advantage of this concept is that it takes into consideration both geographical and social dislocations. Consequently, and in contrast to notions of “transnationalism” and “transmigrants”, the concept of “translocational positionality” is applicable to all individuals, whether they have migrated across an international border or not.

Although her definition of “social space” remains within the realm of the social and is not based on theories of space, Anthias argument against “fixed and given location” and her definition of translocations as a way to think about „the multiplicity of locations involved in time and space, and in terms of connections between the past, the present and the future“ (Anthias 2009: 15) can easily be linked to critical and poststructuralist theories of space that think of space and society as interrelated (cf. Strüver 2010: 3–5; Bauriedl et al. 2010: 12). The definition of translocational positionalities as multiple, changing over time and characterized through trans-locational relations mirrors in particular the three characterizations of space that Doreen Massey sets as premises in her monograph “on space”: firstly, space is always the product of interrelations, secondly it is “the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality” and thirdly space is always under construction (Massey 2010: 9). In this sense “trans-locational” could be used from a geographical perspective to describe the idea that although people are situated, “located” in time and space, these locations can never be delimited since spaces are always characterized by relations between people and places that constitute space as a “simultaneity of unfinished, ongoing trajectories”(Massey 2006: 92) or “stories-so-far” (Massey 2010: 9).

² The idea of belonging presented here is closely related to the concept of “social milieus” defined as communities of experience that share common implicit understandings and outlooks as a result of similar life trajectories and socialization experiences Schittenhelm (2001)

3 Two cases of translocational positionalities

The empirical evidence³ used in this chapter was collected in 2010 in several cities in North-Rhine-Westphalia. The forty participants were either native Moroccans⁴ or had parents born there. Interviews were narrative and biographical in type and interview partners were selected to reflect a broad range of age, gender, occupation, education level, and regional provenance. Although Majida and Raif's stories do reflect specific experiences common for children migrating with their parents or of-age student migrants respectively, it is crucial to note that in no way do they claim to be generally representative of either of these groups. The two life-stories presented here have been chosen according to the criterion of maximal deviation. Because of their uncommon and profound outspokenness they work particularly well to uncover the mechanisms at work in the construction of social differences.

3.1 Majida

1) Growing up: Born in a large city in Southern Morocco Majida describes her family as exceptional: Her father, a senior official, encouraged his daughters to study and put less emphasis on them getting married. Her mother's occupation is that of an active midwife, which Majida proudly points out is a very prestigious occupation in Morocco. This experience of her mother as someone who gives help, and receives gratitude and esteem, incited all four daughters to turn to medical professions. Majida's father is relocated regularly, which is why the family had to move every 3 or 4 years. She explains that her mother always followed her father while keeping up her own career at the same time. Whenever the family moved she always immediately found a new occupation leading the local midwife school. Looking back at this time, Majida is well aware of the difficulty of having to make new friends all the time, but she also regards relocating as a valuable experience. Having to adapt permanently to new surroundings, she learned to open up to and get along with many different people, "regardless of language or culture".

This short introduction already shows that Majida displays a very specific translocational positionality: Although not mentioned explicitly, one can deduce that with both of her parents working in higher positions, the family is endowed with a decent income and could be described as upper middle class [In contrast to other interview partners, financial aspects relating to work life are of no relevance in Majida's narration]. Much more important in Majida's own view is the fact that both her parents take specific views on gender roles different from those Majida experiences as "mainstream" in her Moroccan environment: Her father is not only able but also willing to pay for higher education for his daughters and her mother functions as a role model. She not only shows that women can work, but also serves as an example for how a career furthers one's social position and gain in esteem. Finally, Majida's internal migrations exposed her very early to diverse ways of living in different places and thus prepared her mentally for her international migration experience.

³ The interviews were conducted as part of a research project based at the department of cultural geography at RWTH Aachen University which is financed by the DFG.

⁴ In contrast to other countries like France, Belgium and the Netherlands, Germany hosts comparatively few residents of Moroccan origin (66.886 in 2008). However they represent the second largest group from the MENA region and the third largest group among Muslims in Germany. Haug et al. (2009). 52% of all Moroccan live in North-Rhine Westphalia (Statistisches Bundesamt 2009) (cf. also Hajji (2009)

2) Pursuing a career: Majida is the second eldest of five siblings, which made it easier for her to follow the career path already carved out by her eldest sister, who - not having been admitted to university in Morocco - had obtained her father's permission to study medicine in Germany. Two years later Majida took the same decision. She prepared her migration by taking German language courses both at the local Goethe institute and with a private teacher. She learned fast because she was fascinated by this language which nobody else could speak by. Having arrived in Germany, she remembers the great pressure her father put upon her by providing her with a round-way-ticket - meaning she had to come back in case she didn't succeed the entrance examinations⁵. However she did succeed and then passed her one year "Studienkolleg" in a medium sized town in North-Rhine-Westphalia and could immediately enroll in human medicine at the University of a neighboring town of similar size. Majida's account of her career sounds extremely smooth: She passed her preliminary medical examination, worked as an intern abroad, passed her final examinations in Germany, worked abroad again before she came back to Germany, prepared her Phd and specialist certificate, after which she was offered an executive position in a big hospital where she now works part time and hopes to prepare her postdoctoral lecture qualification, just like her husband who works in a similar position at the same hospital.

Majida has succeeded in everything she aimed at and is therefore very satisfied with her current situation and grateful for the career opportunities that she has encountered in Germany. She wants to stay in the city she now lives in because she doesn't want to run the risk of having a less comfortable life elsewhere. As to the reasons for her smooth success she takes an ambivalent stance: on the one hand she is aware of her parent's motivation and encouragement and realizes that she is lucky in never having to face any serious obstacles or people who mean ill. On the other hand however she stresses that hard work always wins the day. If turned upside-down this meritocratic principle means that people who are not successful just have not worked hard enough - thus ignoring the potential effects of different translocational positionalities (especially in terms of social class) on an individual's chances to succeed. This type of discourse attributes success to the individual, while social positions are obscured.

3) Geo-social positionalities: Majida feels that her success distances her from other Moroccans in Germany who have failed to graduate from university. She claims that neither she nor her siblings were (financially) advantaged over the other Moroccan students and therefore cannot understand those who have not taken profit of the chances offered by migration. To her the only relevant reason to change physical location is to better one's situation - otherwise one could stay at home. Although she does get along with other Moroccans like the "Arabic speaking, headscarf-wearing women" she meets at her mosque, but cannot identify with these women and is unable to feel that she belongs to them.

Having been asked about the importance of religion in her life Majida positions herself as a staunch and practicing Muslim, missing out only on the headscarf. Her personal order of importance is first religion, then career, and then all other minor points of life. However, in her eyes, Islam is a very flexible religion that she can practice in Germany as she likes. She believes that as long as one does not provoke other people by importing religion in the public sphere (by using a prayer scarf or calling for prayer in public) there should be no problem for practicing Islam

⁵ Third State nationals have to pass a first language test in order to enter the "Studienkolleg" which is a one year preparatory course that has to be successfully completed in order to enroll at university.

in Germany. In this respect Majida conforms fully to those German social norms that consider religion an entirely private issue.

This very straightforward position as a convinced and practicing Muslim becomes more complicated when looking at Majida's opinion on the image of Islam in Germany. Immediately relating this question to her sister's political engagement in a small local party Majida uses this passage to explain why she personally does not feel interpellated to participate in (Muslim) identity politics. A principle which has been guiding her own behavior is that only those should speak in public whose education and knowledge entitles them to do so. Contrary to this principle however, she feels that many Muslims in Germany who vent their feelings and opinions in public, lack the education that would entitle them to do so. The meritocratic argumentation underlying her report is that whoever works hard is successful and therefore content and thus has no claims to make. Although she does feel hurt by the negative image of Islam in a certain way, being successful and content herself, she cannot identify or let herself be identified with those other Muslims prevalent in the media images. She perceives a profound lack of positive examples of successful Muslims that could compensate for the violent acts of a few Muslims dominating the news and the media.

Majida's general attitude towards society [everyone takes care of him/herself] combined with her disassociation of a specific type of Muslim she sees represented in the media and politics [mainly the uneducated ones] enable her to fend off any feeling of responsibility. Although she concedes that this attitude might be considered egoistic, it enables her in a very specific way to confirm her – very positively connoted – Muslim identity – while not having to identify with – or feeling disturbed by – the negative connotations of Islam prevalent in German media and society.

Due to her encounters with people from different national or ethnic backgrounds Majida is convinced that “national cultures” exist and can be compared. Interestingly, although these ways of living are described in quite essentialist terms, Majida also narrates how in her own life on a personal level changes and adaptation to different ways of living have taken place. Her account also reveals the complexity and ambivalence of translocational positionalities: Although in terms of shared values she feels very close to certain traits of culture she identifies as German. In terms of belonging, she still struggles to position herself with regard to German-Moroccans as the group she feels she should belong to – probably because this is the category which outsiders (including the author) have used and still employ to interpellate her⁶.

4) Translocational positionalities as a basis for encounters with othering: Majida's current positionality is characterized by a high degree of satisfaction with her story-so-far. There is only one short passage in her narration where the image of her smooth and lucky pathway is irritated and fissured. Asked about her allusion to “minor problems” she tells about her first weeks and months at university. She recalls feeling dis-located and out of place when she – the chatterbox – discovers that she cannot communicate as she wishes and that she belongs to those students that are “left over” when they have to get together in groups at her first day at university:

⁶ Since any empirical study needs to explain to the interview partners why they are questioned, the problem of labeling – and therefore calling into a certain subject position – cannot be fully avoided. In this case using an “ethnic” label enabled to avoid religious labeling and thus opened up the possibility of non-religious positionalities which was considered important in the context of the highly politicized discussions on Islam in Germany.

“Probably the students did all know each other already. But I felt like “well, you don’t fit in here!”. And we (..) we could indeed not talk at that time, but I felt as if the students didn’t have the patience to listen to us – what I can understand today! (laughing) But at that time it did hurt me a somehow – a little bit. Afterwards I thought (..) great. This group by the way was the first to pass the theoretical exam - with the exception of the senior student. But I mean (.) at that time (.) we were like (.) handicapped: I looked like this, my girlfriend tall and pitch-black, the Indian had a weird hairdo in the face (...), he has now qualified as a University professor by the way, he is an ophthalmologist, and my girlfriend moved to Canada, she graduated and I am sure she is also successful there right now. That’s a funny story, but it was# (..) ahem (..) and then during the courses# (.) or maybe I was just too sensitive at that time.”

In this passage Majida oscillates between re-telling and evaluating the events from her current speaking position, and her feelings and experiences at the time of the narration. The frequent changes in speaking positions result in contradictory sentences which reflect a pronounced ambiguity. While from her current position she rationalizes this event she cannot avoid recalling how this feeling of exclusion hurt her at that time. From her current speaking position she can put the experience of discrimination into perspective by pointing to the fact that all members of this excluded group have been successful in carving out a career. She reaffirms her self-esteem by insisting that her physical “otherness” is and should be interpreted in a positive way: She is different, but this is what she wants to be, exceptional in a positive sense. Majida distances herself from the situation in the past by displaying comprehensiveness for the other’s behavior and by delegitimizing her own feelings. In contrast to Raif (see below) who still fully identifies with his positionalities as a child, Majida tries to distance herself from the past events. In her tale, the past experiences of being “othered” and devaluated are not more than a very muted counter-voice, which however does disrupt and fissure her current position of poised coping.

3.2 Raif

While Majida’s tale emphasizes agency and choice and thus strongly relates to the active side of positionings, Raif’s narration is more about the experience of being positioned. Instead of being able to decide himself on his migration from Morocco to Germany, Raif’s father and uncle decided in his name.

1) Growing up: His family has a long tradition of transnational households: his grandfather was recruited to work in Germany at the end of the sixties, and, quite unusually had his family join him after his first year already. His wife not adapting to life in Germany, the parents returned to Morocco leaving the two eldest sons as “replacement” in Germany. When the grandfather died, Raif’s father – the oldest son - had to return to Morocco to care for his mother and his siblings, taking over his father’s bakery in a small village in the North of Morocco. Instead of returning to Germany himself, he decided to send his oldest son, Raif, to Germany to live with the brother who had stayed behind. His father had hoped that the migration will enable the to receive an education and thus ensure him a better future. Raif, however, did not follow an apprenticeship as his father wished. He finished his schooling with a Certificate of Secondary Education and then started to work as a driver for a messenger service. Today he is self-employed working as a used car retailer.

2) Geo-social positionalities: Raif feels firmly rooted in his German hometown, a middle-sized town of industrial background. Having moved to a larger city close by in order to get faster to his

work place, he very soon returns to his home town because he misses the social contacts he has established there. In his opinion, there are no “better” or “worse” places to live - at least not in a democracy like Germany, where the same rule of law applies everywhere. However, he personally prefers his home town because this is where he knows where to hang out to meet friends and acquaintances, where he can participate in religious celebrations at the big, purpose-built mosque. He feels safe and secure, being part of large community:

“However, a huge advantage here in N-town is that there are many, ahm, many fellow countrymen here, with whom one can discuss things. Naturally one has always about the same problems, the same celebrations. And then you can celebrate together [...] And then, we are many. One helps each other when there is any need [...] And that, yes, that is an advantage. For us, see? Thus for Moroccans it is an advantage to live here.”

In this episode, by referring to the advantages “for us” “the Moroccans”, Raif pronounces a strong feeling of both local belonging and of being part of an ethno-cultural(religious) community. At the same time, however, right from the beginning of his narration and at several occasions in the interview, Raif makes it very clear that Germany, where he has spent most of his life, is where he belongs. Morocco remains to him *more* than only a vacation country, but when he stays in the village he was born at, he gets homesick for N-town. Being addressed as a “tourist” in Morocco puts him in an ambiguous social position: It is evident to everyone that he is “not only Moroccan” and he feels that he is treated differently in everyday life, but Raif remains unsure what this means in terms of hierarchy.

Raif’s specific translocational positionality proves all those wrong who fear that cultural identities drawing on values and traditions “from abroad” prohibit the people who integrate these cultural traits as part of their identities from identifying with the German state. To Raif being Moroccan and feeling at home in Germany at the same time is no contradiction. At the end of the interview however, when asked about his future, Raif explains how being positioned in a certain way did and still does impede his feeling of belonging to the German society as a whole. His narration also reveals how different social categories, such as gender, age and generation interact and shape his experiences of difference.

3) Translocational positionalities as a basis for encounters with othering: As a child Raif was several times blatantly accused of theft at the local super market. He was hurt and felt deeply ashamed and humiliated by these events that interpellated him as a “foreigner” and “thief”. His feeling of defenselessness – being a child as compared to an adult – was worsened by the fact that neither his uncle, nor any other member of the parent generation believed their children’s reports. From his current position, Raif understands that the parents were part of a completely different trajectory than their children. Having endured harsh and unfair working conditions in Morocco, they were grateful for the well regulated and correct treatment of their German employers. Their ensuing view of the Germans as straightforward and correct was not disrupted because in front of adults prejudices were usually not voiced as openly they were in front of children. This shows how living in the same location is experienced very differently according to ones translocational positionality in terms of gender, age, generation and occupation; diverse “stories-so-far” thus producing differing “spaces of experience”.

During his teenage years Raif became even more aware of physiognomy as criterion on which unequal treatment is based. He recalls that on his Saturday evening outings with his friends they were controlled by the police each time they changed trains. He describes this as annoying, but

normal, a banality. Until one day he brought along a German friend [meaning a white-skinned friend], who – being controlled with them – points out that he had never before been controlled, although he was exactly of the same age and travelled frequently to the same destination.

Raif's childhood experiences of social positioning have been complemented by an additional dimension. Since 2001, instead of being addressed as a "foreigner" Raif is very frequently interpellated as a Muslim. He reports that many of his clients treat him as a specialist for Islam, although he feels rather clueless himself. However, being asked about his religion only bothers him slightly. What makes him mad, however, is that most of the time he is not asked open-ended questions, but is requested to comment on the thesis "Islam = Terrorism". For Raif this new hegemonic discourse is something that further distances his experience from that of his parent's generation. He points out that when the labor migrants arrived in the 60s, nobody knew who they were, they were strangers. Still they were given work and housing, and were taking care of.

"But those who are born here, whom one knows right from the beginning, who have been born in the German hospitals – those are the ones who are dangerous, of whom one has to be aware. Those are the terrorists and so on. This is (...) that is something we have to refute. Although we are not concerned. We should be even further away from this than our predecessors, right? From this terror and so on. If Islam was as bad as its image, they would have bombed everything back then. Because they had been cordially invited! At that time many people came here undocumented, travelled back and forth. That's unimaginable today!"

This episode reflects Raif's position as part of the second generation. In his view being born and raised in a certain place should mean that one belongs to this place. This belonging however is challenged by the high degree of distrust which Muslims of foreign origin have to face in Germany today – and which according to Raif would have been much more appropriate vis-à-vis those unfamiliar workers who arrived in Germany some fifty years ago.

4) Current positionalities: Raif's extremely vivid narrations reflect how much he still identifies with his previous experience. His frequent inquiries for comprehension show how much he is concerned to get the message across that these experiences are not only a thing of the past, but still valid at present. Only a few years ago he witnessed several young Moroccans outside a discotheque in N-town. Just like him in his youth they were kept outside because of their looks. Some of the [white-skinned] club visitors came out as well, drinking and laughing, being loud "but nothing evil". When a police car drove up to the scene, the police officers went straight to the quiet group of Moroccan youths asking them for their documents.

Raif fully agrees that on legal grounds both the club owner and the police had the right to act as they did. However, he emphatically questions the consequences of such an unequal treatment:

"You must imagine the youngsters now, right? They are standing there. They cannot enter. They are excluded. Why, I don't know. They are foreigners. And back there, there are the Germans. They celebrate, they have fun. And they, they aren't allowed to have fun, to celebrate, they have to stay outside. And then the police purposefully comes up to them. Now you cannot reproach the police. Neither the club owner. Right? It's only morality. A question of morality! But now, what do you expect the youngsters to do? What will he think when he meets you in the street? What do you believe? Shall he be polite, as his parents have told him? Or rather ask: "Do you want to take the mick out of me?"

Raif claims to have overcome his previous held prejudices against Germans. Today he knows his rights, he is able to take a firm stand if discriminated against and he does feel comfortable dealing with many different people. However he is afraid that others might not be able to do so. He

points to the danger that young people like the protagonists of his story who experience time and again exclusion and powerlessness will in the end of the day take advantage of any situation that allows them to assert their power against the weaker ones, in order to redress their capacity of agency and their self-assuredness.

Several times in the interview, Raif stresses his knowledge of and respect for legal norms. He fully accepts and subordinates to the German authorities (e.g. when the police checked them as teenagers or when they raid mosque buildings at present). Still, he does claim the right to question these actions on a different level. He addresses them as problems of “morality”, of “ethical behavior”. According to his own experiences, behavior that goes beyond the sheer respect for legal norms, by showing respect and consideration for individuals and their feeling, would contribute considerably to social cohesion.

Although Raif himself has witnessed many instances of exclusion based on certain socially constructed categories of belonging, he still hopes that the future will provide a time when everyone is treated according to his personal character and his individual doings and not judged according to the discursively constructed image of some social group he or she is supposed to belong to, and when the binary categories of “Foreigner” and “German” that have so much influenced his own translocational positionality are no longer in use:

“Still, I believe in the younger generation. The foreigners grow in numbers. And the children grow up together. As I said, the first who came were migrants, some of them illiterate. And then it was our turn. We had to struggle and fight through. And now there is the next generation that we will raise and educate. We will explain them everything in detail and they will help one another. And then, I think, there will be a moment when everybody starts to respect the other as equal. When you hear no longer “that is a German, he’s not worth anything” or “that’s a foreigner, he has no value”. Instead one will say “That is my friend, he is ok, he is nice.” Or one will say: “that’s a bad person” no matter where he comes from or what is the color of his skin. Right? When every person will be judged based on his personality only. And nobody will say “this type of person is bad”.”

4 Discussion

This paper has pointed out that the concept of translocational positionalities, as framed by poststructuralist identity theories and based on notions of intersectionality, can be used to highlight the multitude of categories and dimensions referred to in the construction of narrative identities, without losing sight of how these identities are embedded in powerfully structured and structuring discourses and social relationships. In this context a narrative identity approach helps to take into consideration how the potential for any analysis of identities or subject positions is limited by the specific way in which information on identities is generated in interview situations.

The two exemplary case studies have served to illustrate how differences become obscured through the use of the term “Muslims” (or similar socially constructed categories) and how useless these “empty signifiers” are when it comes to explaining everyday lives and the uptake of certain subject positions. Although both Majida and Raif would identify themselves as believing and practicing Muslims, besides being born in the same country at roughly the same time, they hardly have anything in common and their stories reflect two very different translocational positionalities.

While Raif experiences belonging in his local community, which he describes as ethno-culturally homogeneous and therefore as providing a common “space of experience”, he also points out that this space is not experienced in the same way by first generation immigrants and their children. He feels that all those born (or having grown up) in Germany, should be able to feel to belong to the German society “at large” as well – a claim which according to his experience cannot be realized because of categorizations and hierarchisations that are used to discriminate against and exclude people like himself and his peers. Majida by contrast finds her definition of belonging less on a local(ized) definition. Instead she refers to the importance of values and career aspirations that she has been brought up with. Although she describes herself both as Muslim and as Moroccan, she insists emphatically on not being able to identify with or belong to those “other” Moroccans and/or Muslims who are not as successful as she is. By positioning herself outside this group, Majida can escape the mechanisms of exclusion inherent in the German image of Islam and avoids any responsibility in political terms.

Both cases show that feelings of belonging and solidarity are facilitated through “common spaces of experience” which can be defined as translocational forms of social classes or milieus that are characterized by shared values and practices. Although both Majida and Raif experienced discrimination and feelings of exclusion as a result of their transnational migration, their stories show how - due to different positionalities and biographic trajectories- such experiences and the discursively constructed images and categories activated in these events are perceived and interpreted differently, trigger diverse reactions and contribute to varying attitudes.

Taking our cue from Raif’s story we can reason that prejudices against ‘others’ will persist as long as individuals are categorized and judged accordingly. Social cohesion, however, in the sense of solidarity going beyond individual “spaces of experiences”, is only feasible if firstly, individuals are judged according to their individual traits of character and behavior instead of according to their presumed group affiliation and if secondly, the principle of “equality” is truly established as a premise for all kinds of social relations. Taking into account though the common human tendency to draw on clichés in order to simplify an all too complex social world (Ostermann and Nicklas 1984) these premises remain difficult realize.

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