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# Socialization and Gendered Biographical Agency in a Multicultural Migration Context.

## The Life History of a Young Moroccan Woman in Germany

### **Abstract:**

In light of the challenges of globalization, hybridization of cultures, and transnational migration movements worldwide, some central deficits of socialization theory have been identified. As a response to these challenges, the necessity of developing “biographical socialization research”<sup>1</sup> and a “subject-oriented socialization theory”<sup>2</sup> are underlined. In this paper, the notion of “biographical agency”, embedded in the social and temporal context of biographies, is proposed to overcome shortcomings of the theories of socialization. Drawing on the concepts of biographical knowledge, biographical work and biographical reflexivity, biographical research can show how individuals develop biographical agency and engage in meaningful social actions within their life courses under the conditions of globalization. On the basis of Samira’s case, I will point out the kinds of multiple exclusion/inclusion mechanisms that operate in multicultural societies, mechanisms produced both by majority and minority groups, and how daughters of migrants can acquire biographical resources through their socialization in multicultural contexts to struggle against hierarchical gender norms, conflicting expectations, and restrictive social sites as well as enlarge their sphere of action.

**Key Words:** Socialization, gender norms, biographical resources, multiple belongings, religious identity

## 1 *Prologue – Samira’s Puzzle*

*Interviewer: I am very much interested in your life story. But if you do not feel ready yet, we can start somewhere else, for example, with your daily life or university study?*

Samira: I will start simply, namely, I was not born here, that is why. I came here only later. This had some consequences on my life, particularly on my school life.

*I: Where were you born?*<sup>3</sup>

Very much surprised by her explanation of “that is why” at the very beginning of her biographical narrative, I could not help asking Samira where she was born, even though I was aware that one of the main imperatives of biographical research is not to interrupt the narration. How should this global evaluation and the first coda of the interview be understood and interpreted? Should it be seen as signal of a highly reflected life story? Should it be seen as a difficulty by Samira to develop an extempore autobiographical narration of her life story (Schütze 2007) trying to mask the biographical events and their processing behind her reflexivity, thus gaining control over the possible interpretations of her story? Should it be seen as an attempt of legitimation, argumentation, and positioning in front of some invisible “demons or significant others” linked with some specific issue of her life of which I have no knowledge, neither of their existence nor of their relationship to her? Or should it be seen as a story of normalization, in which Samira tries to make it plausible to herself and the audience that if she had been born in Germany, things would have happened the other way around? Or is it simply a narrative strategy through which Samira actually tries to facilitate my entry into her story: perhaps she wants to integrate me as a “foreigner” in her story? Many unknown variables and a very short but rather complicated answer as a puzzle waiting to be solved: “Namely, I was not born here, that is why!”

Throughout the article I will try to solve what I call “Samira’s Puzzle” reconstructing her interpretations in relation to her biographical experiences. I will do this by drawing on the insights of biographical research method and socialization theory.

## 2 Theories of Socialization and Biographical Research

Writing on the challenges of multiculturalism and pluralization of the majority cultures of Western societies, Andrea Maihofer recognizes that a transformation in the subjectivation modes, in the hegemonic practices of identification, have taken place (Maihofer 2002, p. 21). Accordingly, she argues that the *normative hegemonic model of identity* dominant in Western societies, which requires the individuals to develop some kind of “sameness” with the culture of society in which they live, has become counterproductive in today’s time. She emphasizes instead the rise of pluralized lifestyles that necessitate persons to develop diverse emotional skills to cope with the new requirements of gendered, ethnicized multicultural societies (ibid.). New demands are put on individuals, such as mobility, flexibility of life plans, and the development of new skills that would help them to manage increasingly insecure, ambivalent biographies and ruptures (cf. ibid.).

The issue of *subjectivation* (i.e., how an individual becomes a social subject) has been addressed by different theoretical approaches and research paradigms. Writing on gender-specific socialization, Helga Bilden and Bettina Dausien differentiate between subject-centered approaches versus poststructuralist approaches (Bilden/Dausien 2006, p. 10p.) and identify three different conceptual tools which these approaches utilize: the concepts of *habitus*, *biography*, and *discourse* (Bilden/Dausien 2006, p. 11). While the former approaches put more emphasis on individ-

ual experiences and agency in the creation of social meaning and action, the latter puts more emphasis on the role of social structures and enabling/preventing societal conditions on the life worlds and social actions of the individuals.

As a theory of social agency, socialization research provides answers to the question of how an individual develops agency (Hörning 2000; Geulen 2009; Bilden/Dausien 2006) and actorship, becoming an “integrated” part of the society in which he or she was born. In the broadest sense, socialization refers to the process of learning, developing, and adopting an individual way of feeling, acting, thinking, and becoming a gendered subject (young adult) in which the subjects select from a pool of socially and culturally defined identification models, ways of life, gendered practices, life visions, and professional aims (cf. Geulen 2009; Maihofer 2002). Most of the socialization theories put particular emphasis on belonging to a specific group, on the internationalization processes, and how individuals fit in with the group they live in (cf. Kidd/Teagle 2012, p. 72; Costa 2013, p. 247).

But there are different types of socialization theories. Unlike researchers employing functionalist approaches, symbolic interactionism and life course researchers put the subject’s perspectives into the center of their analyses, and do not overlook that there might be *conflicting socialization influences* exercised by different socialization agents such as parents, school education, peer groups, religion, mass media, and the workplace (Kidd/Teagle 2012, p. 74), as well as – in terms of representations and values – potentially conflicting life worlds and contexts (cf. Tsiolis 2012, p. 114p.).

Socialization involves the processes of constructing, envisioning, and knowing a social reality (Geulen 2009, p. 30; Hörning 2000) that enable the subjects to engage in meaningful social action and to anticipate the consequences of their action (Geulen 2009, p. 31). At the same time, depending on the particular social environment in which one is socialized in relation with one’s class, ethnic, religious affiliation, and gender identity, socialization might also become a mechanism of emergence, transmission, and reproduction of social inequalities along the axes of differences (cf. Hörning 2000, p. 4; Geulen 2009, p. 17). In this sense, ethnic differences and other axes of power and social inequality have not yet been sufficiently considered or have even been totally neglected for a long time by studies on gender-specific socialization in Germany (cf. Bilden 2006; Dausien 2006; Ruokonen-Engler 2006). Parallel to this critique, some researchers note that challenges such as the hybridization of cultures, globalization, and transnational migration have not yet been reflected upon and included by gender-specific socialization research and theory (Bilden/Dausien 2006, p.11; Ruokonen-Engler 2006). Consequently, there is also need for a theory of *multicultural* and conflictual sites of socialization and forms of subjectivities that would combine biographical research methods and socialization theory.

After realizing the influences of deconstructivist and discursive approaches on gender and socialization, researchers became cautious about developing an essentialist approach to the construction of gendered identities that obviously carried within it the paradoxical risk of reproducing the unequal gender relations through socialization theory. This has led to a crisis in this field of theorising, even to the extent that its usage eventually became taboo in gender studies in German-speaking environments, as has been noted by many researchers (Dausien 2006, p. 18; Maihofer 2002).

Apart from the crisis of theory, the authors note the lack of a “grand theory” (Dausien 2006) and a lack of an overarching valid theory of socialization that

would be applicable to different fields of empirical research (Bilden/Dausien 2006, p. 9). Different solutions have been proposed for this problem: Some state that, despite the moderate theoretical claims, the question of the relationship between an individual and society is *still valid* (cf. Bilden/Dausien 2006; Thiessen 2002), and researchers try to combine both actor-centered and structuralist approaches to address this issue (Bilden/Dausien 2006, p. 14). Others emphasize the need for *context-related research* (Ruokonen-Engler 2006) and a consequent theory construction based on *empirical reconstructive research* against the shortcomings of socialization theory (Dausien 2006, p. 28).

To address these shortcomings of socialization theory, *biographical research* has been proposed as a response to the main questions posed by the debate on socialization and gender (Dausien 2006, p. 17)<sup>4</sup>. What are the methodological and conceptual advantages of talking about biographies and *biographical agency* instead of general theories of socialization? Biographies are time and context embedded; they are relational, processual, and dynamic products of interactions between individual and social processes: micro-, meso- and macro-social constraints, opportunities and processes (cf. Apitzsch/Siouti 2007; Dausien 2006; Kazmierzka 2006; Apitzsch 2003a, Hörning 2000). The biographical research method looks at agency in relation to *time* and *context* dimensions of biographies in which experiences are processed, contemplated, and interpreted. Biographical research investigates how the life story is (re)narrated, reinterpreted, and retold from the perspective of newly made experiences (cf. Apitzsch/Siouti 2007; Hörning 2000). Accordingly, depending on the particular life stage of the narrator and the social context biographies are constantly reinterpreted, relying on the narrators' *biographical reflexivity*, their *biographical work* (Riemann/Schütze 1991, p. 339; Dausien 2002, p. 102; Apitzsch/Siouti 2007, p. 5)<sup>5</sup> and *biographical knowledge* (Hörning 2000, p. 8; Apitzsch 2003a, p. 69)<sup>6</sup> gained from processing new experiences. Thus, *biographical socialization research* focuses on life experiences and their meaning for the biographical transformation processes (Hörning 2000, p. 8). Therefore, the *experiences*, as well as the *biographical knowledge* gained from these experiences within one's life course, become sources (and resources) for social action and agency (cf. *ibid*).

Moreover, the biographies overcome the duality of agency versus structure (cf. Dausien 2002, p. 100; Thiessen 2002). Since the biographies show how individuals deal with social institutions, norms, and practices (cf. Apitzsch/Siouti 2007; Schütze 2007), activating both internal and external biographical resources (Günther 2007), they are "radical documents of the sociality of the individual" (Apitzsch 1990; cited in Apitzsch/Siouti 2007, p. 13) and reveal the coping strategies and interpretation processes of subjects in relationship with social structures. In this sense, biographies are relational because they intermediate between the subject and context, individual and collective, social structure and experiences (Dausien 2006, p. 32). In other words, biographies overcome the duality of individual versus society, subjective versus social reality, social versus psychic structure.

In light of the pluralized, globalized character of the subjects' social worlds, there is a need, on the one hand, for intersectional analysis, since the biographical processing of experiences takes place in interaction with gender, ethnic, and class identities (cf. Dausien 2002, p. 100; Maihofer 2002); on the other hand, parallel to this, macro-structural factors such as developments in national and global political economies should be taken more into account in the socialization paradigm (cf. Bilden 2006, p. 65). Bearing in mind these insights of socialization theory and biographical research, I argue that there is a need for an *intersectional, subject-*

*oriented, biographical socialization research and subjectivation theory* which would consider the contradictory and competing dynamics of socialization in pluralized, multicultural societies under the increasingly unequal conditions of globalized political economies and transnational migration movements.

Drawing on the previously developed insights on biographical agency, the following questions will now be discussed based on a reconstruction of Samira's life story:

- What kind of biographical resources (internal and external) does Samira activate to develop biographical agency in a multicultural migration context?
- What kind of biographical work is done by Samira during self-transformation processes?
- How are the production of biographical knowledge and reflexivity related to the dominant process structures in her life history?

### 3 Ruptures and Deviation as Biographical Normality of the Migrant Self – *The impact of social work discourse on migrants' lives*

There are two central biographical process structures in Samira's narration: *Creative metamorphoses of biographical identity* during her school life and (ethnically defined) *institutional expectation patterns*<sup>7</sup>. However, they contradict each other, leading her to reposition herself in the "hegemonic field of ethnicized, religious, and gendered identification models" (cf. Maihofer 2002). Continuing with her education by attending a college preparatory high school instead of a vocational school after junior high school constitutes in this sense *the* central biographical turning point in Samira's life story. In the following I will reconstruct the process structures resulting from this biographical turning point, showing how Samira deals with them.

Samira is a young woman of Berber origin of the second generation. She came to Germany at the age of six years to join her family. In the interview, she recalls this situation as "this family reunification law" (P. 1, L. 12). As the interview took place, she was 26 years old and attending a university of applied sciences, where she was studying social work. The main narration part, which is a little less than twenty minutes in duration, consists of various types of text such as narration, argumentation, self-evaluation, and background construction (Rosenthal 2004; Schütze 1984). The narration is dominated by Samira's report on educational life, with the largest part dedicated to recounting the changeover from secondary (*Realschule*) to the college preparatory high school (*Gymnasium*), interpreted as a "change of worldview" and a "break in life".

Samira reports her school life in Germany as a series of ruptures. First the experiences of being helpless and disoriented in the first year of elementary school where "German sounded as if it were Chinese", where she "could not concentrate, only slept and dreamt, and could not add the numbers either"; then junior high school, where "the majority of the students had a migrant background" where she had to learn "again another culture"; and finally the college preparatory high

school, where she got “again a culture shock” and “was under pressure to earn high grades”.

This last change became central for the transformation of self. In her words: she had “contact with Germans”, her “horizons grew”, she got to know “new personalities, characters, new interests, and an abundance of information” which she “needed to reflect upon” (P. 2, L. 73–81). So far she had only known, at junior high school, what appeared to her now, in retrospect, as a single subculture due to the “mono-cultural” character of that junior high school where the Turkish, Moroccan, Tunisian, and Bosnian-Yugoslav students shared – in Samira’s view – the same (Muslim) “mentality” (P. 7, L. 244): they would get together to participate in social activities, that were familiar to Samira due to their family background (P. 2, L. 57–61). But now, socialization into the “new” culture of high school (*Gymnasium*) meant the beginning of doing away with prejudices against “Jews” and “Germans”; of breaking away from stereotyped thinking; of getting to know a diversity of scenes, subcultures, and plural life worlds:

“But then at the college preparatory high school, my horizons were broadened. I got much more [from the world]. I got to know Jews who then became my best friends. That means many prejudices that one learns in other subcultures, one has them in high school, and one thinks ‘This is not true at all, they are not like... they are not like that!’ Many things so much, the world picture changes gradually.” (P. 3, L. 89–93)

This dominant process of metamorphosis of Samira’s biographical self was criticized and challenged by her peer group (migrant youth) and later by male relatives and by the members of her own ethnic community. At the same time, that marked the beginning of “*social suffering*” (Riemann/Schütze 1991) processes in which *metamorphosis processes* (Schütze 2007) were sanctioned by ethnic notions of a proper way of life, which were very strongly promoted and asserted by the groups of social actors (*peer group, uncle, close relatives and friends of the family*) belonging to minority culture. I propose to call this second process structure that stands in the way of the desired transformation processes of self, as “*ethnic, religious, and (minority) culture-specific institutional expectation patterns*” which were imposed on Samira. Samira felt obliged to justify her transformation, to legitimize her “new identity”, and to explain again and again that she still remains the “same” Samira with Moroccan parents. First she got accused of having become “too Germanized”; and later on, of not conforming to the gendered norms of Islam and to her community way of life<sup>8</sup>:

“That was the changing point in my life then. And the old friends whom I met again, so to speak, the Moroccans whom I know from my earlier scene, they always said: ‘yeah, you have changed somehow’ and ‘yeah how?’ ‘You became somehow German.’ ‘Oh well, that does not tell me much now. How German? I mean, we *live* in Germany, what you mean with becoming German?’ The type of music you listen to and the type of clothes you wear always account for this. Yes, but... Yes, but I think I have improved myself further, and in another direction improved, yeah. But I still know where I come from, what my roots are, and where my parents come from.” (P. 3, L. 94–100).

Very interestingly, Samira does this work of argumentation, legitimation, and justification by basically referring to the concepts that she probably picked up during her study of social work at the university. So during her biographical account, Samira frequently employs academic categories and *concept constructions of the second degree* (Schütz 1971, p. cited in Dausien 2002, p. 97). She refers to the concepts of “culture”, “cultural shock” or “customs” in order to give meaning to her ex-

periences in the social environments of the elementary school, junior high school, and college preparatory high school. She makes use of the concepts “mentality”, “adolescence”, “persons with a migration background”, and “stereotyped thinking” to contrast the unitary/mono-cultural life and worldview of migrant youth with her new peer group from the junior high school who, in her own words, are free from prejudices. Finally she uses terms such as “scene”, “subculture”, “world picture”, and “Germans and Jews”, denoting the pluralist and larger world of the college preparatory high school (*Gymnasium*, or French *lycée*) by categorizations that are relevant there. Moreover, she does it in such a manner that each sequence of short narration is followed by sequences of argumentation and justification.

On the one hand, this “scientific language” enables her to tell a meaningful story of her biographical experiences. On the other hand, her recurrent references to concepts and theories, as well as her need for constant argumentation instead of narration, can be understood as an unfinished active process of repositioning and reinterpretation on her part. In this sense, she is still engaged in biographical work, which must be considered in the framework of the suffering processes caused by the exclusionary and highly normative attitudes of her peer group and ethnic community.

Ruptures exist in Samira’s narrative not only at the formal level of text types – namely, constantly switching between sequences of narration and of argumentative abstraction – but also at the level of *content and meaning production*. As already mentioned above, Samira retrospectively constructs her school life as a series of ruptures. Paradoxically, this style of biographical construction enables Samira to tell her life story along lines of continuity and coherence – again, a great accomplishment of the biographical work she has undertaken. Insistence on ruptures rather than continuity makes it possible for the audience to come to see ruptures as almost normal. On the one hand, through the construction of ruptures as a sort of (specific) biographical normality, Samira can show how the “feeling of foreignness” and the necessity to get adapted to the foreign environment was already familiar to her: something which she had got used to.

But on the other hand, these ruptures also signify the “deviations” of her own personal biography from what a normal (German) school biography would have looked like (according to her), had she been born in Germany. Nevertheless, these ruptures have positive aspects as they triggered a biographical learning process for her in which she acquired some strategies of action, such as “first watching and observing the behaviors of others” to get adjusted to each new environment. Her experiences of initial failures (at the elementary school, then at the college preparatory high school) and later achievement and success through her own agency constitute, in this sense, one central principle in her code of conduct (together with her reserved attitude): allowing herself the freedom for experimenting and for new experiences, environments, people, and situations (P. 5, L. 191–198). These are emotional skills and internal biographical resources<sup>9</sup> that Samira has acquired during the processes of biographical learning.

## 4 Out of the “Prison” of Ethnic Life: The Experience of Plural Life Worlds and the Development of a Cosmopolitan Worldview

In the following, I will treat the question of how the two process structures dominant in Samira’s life story, creative metamorphoses of biographical identity and ethnic institutional expectation patterns, contradict each other while a new scheme of biographical action is emerging.

As already mentioned above, against the mirror held up to her: “You have changed, you have become somehow German” by her old peer group, Samira tries to defend herself by arguing that she ‘has not forgotten where she comes from, and that (her) parents are of Moroccan origin’. Samira does not want to be restricted by rules, norms, beliefs and conventions as she regards her life and identity as an open-ended project.

Facing the critique of “being too Germanized” by her ethnic peer group, Samira employs basically three types of argumentation. Relying on the insights gained from her study in social work on adolescence and identity building, she argues that “identity building should be considered as an unfinished project, it can never be complete”, and that she would have too many different interests to get fixed on a limited set (P. 5, L. 171–178). As a second type of argumentative strategy, she uses what could be called “analysis and critique of the mentality and conventional life expectations of migrant groups”: she views the world of college preparatory high school as representing the plurality and diversity of life worlds because there she has met students of different backgrounds and origins, but by contrast the junior high school stands to her as a seemingly “mono-cultural” world of migrant (Muslim) people. Additionally, she uses the concept *mentality* to address a “migrant way” of life in relation to her critique on the gendered division of labor in migrant families. To my question about how the mentality of Tunisian, Moroccan, and Turkish people should be understood she gives the following answer:

“That was actually always so that.. well the mother usually does not work, she brings up the children at home so that there is always something to eat, and the father is always at work, and hmm yeah, when one undertakes family trips, then just with Moroccan people and not with any other nationality, and always the same activities like barbecue and always at X park always like this... well somehow there is such.., and such a program (she laughs) in fact that was the usual case, well but...well in other families...” (P. 7, L. 254–269)

Samira especially resists those gendered institutional expectation patterns which are fostered by the migrant groups. She rejects a life project according to which she would have “to do a vocational education, marrying soon after the vocational training, and getting pregnant at best” (P. 3, L. 104–110). Samira tries to escape the gendered conventions, cultural norms, and roles imposed on her by her peer group of migrant youth. Defending herself against the critiques directed by her peer group, she argues that she has got into touch with “different lives, cultures, people, and lifestyles” that she “must not spend her whole time only with Moroccan people” (P. 27, L. 1061–1069).

Despite this critique on the “ethnic conduct of migrant family life”, Samira emphasizes that she has the support of her family, especially of her mother<sup>10</sup>. The relationship with her mother, as she explains, is based on the exchange of mutual



understanding, tolerance, solidarity, and support. The kind of empathetic and protective style with which Samira talks about her mother reveals the rather weak position of the mother in the German migration context: The mother cannot speak German very well, she is a housewife, and it seems that it is mostly through her daughter that she has contact with the outside world. In return, the mother offers protection and tolerance for Samira against the critique of the local migrant community, as well as against relatives in the village back in the homeland<sup>11</sup>.

Talking about the support of the family serves many functions as an argumentative strategy. First of all, by referring to the family support, Samira can undermine accusations of “being Germanized” and having changed; she can show that she is still loyal to her Moroccan family. Second, with the support of her family, she may again justify her choices, behaviors and life conduct to her peer group; she seems to imply that “Look, if my family does not raise any objections, if they agree with my way of life and do not intervene, how can you feel authorized to criticize and intervene in my affairs?” Third, within the sphere of family she can be assured of a conflict-free space of action where she can gain the power to realize her life plans, wishes, and become more autonomous<sup>12</sup>.

Samira got acquainted, in her words, with new persons, characters, cultures, lifestyles, and environments: A window towards a new, plural vision of the world has been opened for her. In this new world, she has had new experiences; she has gained access to new patterns of thinking, behaving, and feeling; she has learned about new life visions, forms of holidays, places other than Germany and Morocco, new ways of spending leisure time, and cultural activities. She does not want to be deprived of the knowledge of these new experiences, world and people anymore. Such knowledge not only makes her culture richer, but it might provide her with cultural and symbolic capital that is useful to get access to new social worlds.

To come to terms with the conflictual requirements imposed by different agents of socialization and to develop a new biographical action scheme in order to remain capable of social action, Samira keeps collecting and appropriating many tools which seem to be of an argumentative character at first glance. She has learned new ideas, theses, positions, arguments, concepts, and theories such as “identity formation in adolescence”, “the culture of migrant youth”, “mentality and way of life of migrant groups” through which she can justify and strengthen her new position. She has crossed over from an ethnic minority position to a position in majority society. Through the newly acquired argumentative tools, she still works on her biography to create *a new biographical action scheme*, still in emergence in a social space containing contradictory expectations and conflicts.

## 5 Multicultural Biographical Agency: Negotiation on Multiple Affiliations in the Domains of Family, Ethnic-Religious Community, Peer Group, and Majority Culture

From the clash of different socio-cultural contexts, Samira is in the process of developing a cosmopolitan, pluralist worldview. But the development of a pluralistic

worldview and cosmopolitan identity does not take place smoothly in a social space free from conflicts. In the following part I focus on Samira's negotiation between her multiple social affiliations, such as gender, religious, and ethnic/cultural affiliation, which is related to the development of a biographical action scheme.

As we have seen above, Samira reworks her biographical action scheme through her reflections on the shift from the milieu of migrant youth in junior high school to the milieu of the majority society in the college preparatory high school. In this process, she leaves behind her old patterns of thinking which categorize people according to stereotypes attached to their ethnic and religious attributions. Very interestingly, struggling against the ethnic and religious prejudices of her community means, at the same time, questioning the established norms and perceptions of how a young Moroccan woman should live a "proper" life and what kind of traditionally (and institutionally) acceptable way of life she should lead. This further demonstrates how closely *ethnic* and *gender* identity are interlinked with each other.

"Well, I live a life in accordance with my **own** beliefs and ideas, which I consider to be the right ones, yeah. I do not think that I should conform myself to conventions: I should do a vocational education, and I should marry immediately after that, and most ideally you get pregnant, because, I do not know, maybe this is the perfect age to get pregnant? Mmmh... that is postponed in my case to an older age. I do not judge the others at all. **Absolutely** not! Every one should know on his own, how one should arrange life best and under what circumstances." (P. 3, L. 89-95)

The creation of a new biographical action scheme pertaining to gender identity and struggling for the right to a self-determined way of life leads therefore Samira to a repositioning, and requires a new form of negotiation between her various affiliations. The *process of emancipation*, that is, becoming autonomous and able to claim herself as an independent young female subject with her own schedule and sphere of activities in daily life, goes hand in hand with her critical approach to the migrants' "ethnic" way of life. She criticizes their way of life as being organized along the traditional gendered division of labor, which she considers to be specific to ethnic minority groups rather than to the majority society in Germany.

What is more intriguing is that Samira questions the prejudices and stereotyped thinking not only of her ethnic groups, but also the prejudices of the majority culture against Muslim migrant groups and cultures.

Contesting the widespread hegemonic constructions of Muslim migrants in German public discourse and among the members of the majority culture, she rebels against the *common-sense perception* that "Muslim migrants are potential terrorists" and the common belief that "every Muslim woman wears a chador". Together with the cultivation of her image as a young modern German woman interested in arts, Samira defines herself as a young *believing Muslim* woman. Like the other children of migrants with a Muslim background, she can remember attending a Quran course when she was between the ages of 9 and 16 at a mosque, where in addition to Quran lessons she learned Arabic and civics. In her narrative, Samira embodies a modern, chic, German young Muslim woman of Moroccan origin. This enables her at the same time to resist the presentation of Muslims as the *Others* of Europe and Muslim women as the oppressed victims of their religion in the German media. The following passage shows how, during the daily interaction processes, Samira must deal with such prejudices and boundary making on the part of the majority culture.

"The people who know me as a Muslim think: "She is a Muslim, too". Sometimes at my workplace, they do not know that I am a Muslim, then they ask: "But you are not a true Muslim, are you?", "What do you mean by not a true Muslim?", "You do not believe in it", "Of course, I do." "But you are like this and like that" then I respond: "A Muslim is not the same as a terrorist" or "You do not necessarily have to wear a hijab." I think there are all these extremist people in every religion, and I don't know, but there might be hooligans everywhere, too." (P. 18, L. 699–712)

In her attachment to Islam, Samira develops a rather profane and secularist version of religious identity. The following passage shows on the one hand, how she finds herself in the position of justifying herself against hegemonic discourses, and on the other hand, how differently as seen in the dominant interpretation frame, she sees her religious identity as a *personal* attribute, in contrast to the perception of Islam as an attribute of *collective* group and identity processes.

"I do not see any reason now why I should take up another religion, because I am happy with mine. I grew up with this religion. I got used to it. I have it with me overall, so I don't know, and it depends on how one lives it out, and I do not have any problem with how I live out my religion." (P. 17, L. 661–664)

Especially in the aftermath of September 11th, Muslim migrants have been increasingly stigmatized in public discourse with regard to integration debates and even in the literature on migration research (cf. Buitelaar 2006; Erel 2003). An overview of this literature shows that social scientists have contributed extensively to a process of ethnicizing migrant women through the distribution of stereotypes (Bildén 2006, p. 52p.) and through essentialist and homogenizing discourses in which the Muslim women of migrant origin are depicted as the passive victims of their religion and oppressed by the patriarchal relations of their communities<sup>13</sup>.

In this vein, Samira's religious identification as a Muslim woman together with her claim of belonging to majority culture in Germany should be seen as a remarkable accomplishment of her 'biographical work' (cf. Riemann/Schütze 1991, p. 339; Apitzsch/Siouti 2007). At the same time, her identity synthesis challenges the dichotomizing trend of identity thinking, such as "modern" versus "traditional": For Samira there is no such conflict between being Muslim – which is perceived rather as a traditional identity – and being German, connoted as being modern. Her embodiment of Islam and modernity in her biography challenges "the common view on migrant families that tradition and modernity<sup>14</sup> are opposite forces which would create a generational conflict between parents' traditional views and children's ones" (Delcroix 2008, p. 34). In this sense, social scientists identify the newness of the religious identification practices of young Muslim migrants in the second and third generations in Europe. They propose that instead of the imagined "authentic" identity of Muslim migrants that supposedly does not change across spatial and temporal contexts, one should talk about the emergence of European Islam and European Muslims (cf. Vertovec/Rogers 1998) or, in the words of Catherine Delcroix, about "Muslim Westerners" (Delcroix 2008, p.32).

A closer look at the sequences in which Samira talks about religious and ethnic identity reveals how she considers both of these as located in the family domain. As she defends herself against the members of her peer group, telling them that she is not "Germanized" and cannot understand what they mean, because she still 'gets on well with her family, thus still knows where her roots are', she is basically referring to her family. In defending her Muslim identity against the hegemonic images from the majority society, she refers to her childhood years to tell how, like

other children, she attended a Quran course. Considering that she claims to have multiple affiliations and cannot be limited to her ethnic, religious identity and its “traditional” gender norms, I argue that Samira does not want these collective identities to have such importance. She rather sees being Moroccan and Muslim as personal attributes linked with her family background (cf. Apitzsch/Gündüz 2012), parts of her but not the whole of her. In this sense, in her biography, Samira’s deep attitude embodies the opposite of strategies related to *identity politics*. She does not want to be categorized with reference to traditional collective identities, since the other identification model seems to grant her more freedom of choice and thus, more biographical agency.

Negotiating between different affiliations and positioning is in this sense an *act of balance*, and requires considerable biographical work to be done on the part of individual subjects. In this regard, “multicultural experiences” and “multicultural socialization contexts” (Rosenthal 1997) or dual processes of identity construction, that is, the internalization of family values together with prevalent values and norms of the receiving society (Delcroix 2008, p. 33) might offer her the biographical resources which enable the processes of self-reflection and biographical transformation. These young women might even become “the agents of innovation” and social change (cf. Delcroix 2008) through their biographical sketches and multiple affiliations which radically question the established notions of what culture, community, religion, and tradition are (cf. Vertovec/Rogers 1998; Buitelaar 2006), concepts which are very much embedded in the normative framework of the nation-state model.

## 6 The Crossover from a Minority to a Majority Position as a Biographical Action Scheme

Samira has been socialized in her Moroccan family, in her Quran course, and also in the peer group of migrant youth during her years at the junior high school (*Realschule*). But attending the college preparatory high school (*Gymnasium*) opened up a new world in which she underwent biographical metamorphosis processes and developed a new biographical agency. She was accused by her peer group and ethnic community of becoming too Germanized in this process. Gaining access to a new life world provides her with new resources for developing a biographical action scheme: *Upward social mobility through education becomes the central strategy of her new biographical action scheme*. Through education, Samira acquires discursive tools that help her in interpreting her experiences in a new framework and in envisioning her life in the future, and in developing argumentative strategies to justify and legitimize her life choices against the social pressure exerted by the groups above and to get empowered. These argumentative skills can be also understood as a type of linguistic agency (*sprachliche Handlung*; Geulen 2009).

The central biographical experience of multicultural contexts also enables her to resist the assumed monoculturality of biographies. Furthermore, if one accepts the multiple affiliations as “lived normality”, the irreconcilability of identities such as “German versus Muslim”, “Moroccan versus German”, or their assumed conflicting in-between nature, are put into question. In addition, Samira sees being

Moroccan and being Muslim not as constitutive for her whole identity but just as parts of it. But these parts are located in “family roots” which she does not want to forget or abandon; but just a part (cf. Apitzsch/Gündüz 2012). This provides further evidence that life experiences play a more important role than *origin* for the construction of multiple affiliations and in the interpretation of biographies. But still, Samira cares about a good relationship with her family, and she does not want to break ties with her family. On the contrary, upward mobility and the claim for an autonomous way of life do not contradict with her maintenance of intensive bonds and solidarity with the family<sup>15</sup>. Even the *argumentative crossover* from an ethnic minority position to a position in the majority society does not build an obstacle to the close relationship with family. Neither does she fear the uprooting. I will even argue that her stable family identity empowers her in such a way that she is even ready for uprooting in the form of becoming acquainted with new distant places or living in another country.

Samira’s boundary crossing cannot be conceived purely in terms of alteration from one ethnic/cultural identity to the other. On the contrary, the crossover from a minority position to the majority should instead be grasped in socio-economic terms and in this sense it is a result of her new biographical action scheme: an upward mobility strategy through education. Through education, Samira does not only collect argumentative tools and discourses to assure her right for an autonomous sphere of action against the restrictive gender norms of the minority groups, but she also eagerly participates in leisure activities, gaining experiences and skills through contact with different social worlds, social environments, and cultural groups, thus accumulating experiences, relations, knowledge. Together with learning about different consumption styles and techniques of self-management all these result in the development of a cosmopolitan worldview. The argumentative/discursive work she undertakes accompanies her biographical action scheme, not only empowering her in conflicting multicultural social contexts, but also protecting her against the hierarchical gender norms and disciplining attempts put on her by members of the minority culture.

Ruptures in her school life and in migration experiences have also taught her not to rely on “safe identities”, and the gender practices, future plans, and life projects dictated by these *safe identities*. In this sense, ethnic and religious identities might have restricting effects on one’s agency. Her discursive positioning, “identity as something not fixed, not unitary and as unfinished project”, and the lessons derived from the ruptures, “being open for different options, new experiences, future plans without the fear of losing one’s way”, provide Samira, in terms of Maihofer’s postulations (Maihofer 2002) at the beginning, with the best devices for coping with the new requirements (flexibility, mobility, and plurality) and emotional skills (to cope with ambiguity, insecurity, and biographical ruptures) in multicultural modern societies.

## 7 Epilogue: Samira’s Solution

There is not just one solution for Samira’s Puzzle. Since she stands at the intersection of different power axes, she herself develops multiple positioning and mul-

tilayered solutions interrelated with her multiple affiliations and multicultural life contexts.

Why is Samira's biography worth studying? What can we learn from her case?

Embedded in the German migration context, upward mobility in the educational system requires Samira to change from a minority position to the majority position. In her boundary crossing, she does not question the boundary itself, but through her privilege of being able to move back and forth over the boundaries, she can develop a critical approach to "both sides". Based on the experience of multiple affiliations, central to her biography, she can pose a radical critique on the assumed unitary, fixed, homogenous, and mono cultural understanding of identities. She refuses to acknowledge that ethnicity and religion have such importance. She rejects fixed essences too, similar to Homi Bhabha's notion of the non-sovereign self<sup>16</sup>, especially when these essences form an obstacle to her freedom of action and development.

In her boundary crossing, Samira transgresses the boundaries and systems of categorizations that are constitutive of inclusion and exclusion mechanisms between minority and majority belongings; systems which reduce social inequalities to hierarchical differences between ethnicities and cultures, all this within the normative framework of a given nation state. But still, she has to struggle against the boundaries drawn by the majority society as well as normative expectations of migrant minority groups.

Linking Samira's case reconstruction with the conceptual discussions at the beginning, the following concluding remarks can be made. The postulate of a cultural homogeneous milieu to which the child is born and gets socialized cannot provide sufficient answers to the questions of how the individual subjects come to terms with the contradictory lifeworlds and the experiences made in pluralized, hybrid, multicultural social contexts; nor to how they incorporate these coherently into their self-presentation and narration of their life course under the unequal conditions of globalized world. Fitting in well within a society and a particular social group implies more than a solely passive adaptation to the different socialization domains: as biographical research shows well, it necessitates an *active* social (re)positioning on the part of the individual actor (cf. Tsiolis 2012, p. 115).

With reference to the concepts of biographical knowledge, biographical reflexivity, and biographical work, the case of Samira, a young migrant woman belonging to the second generation, demonstrates well how this repositioning has taken place in connection with the development of a new biographical action scheme. Through the central experience that the minority prejudices toward the life forms and cultures of members belonging to the majority society do not hold true, Samira comes to recognize that identities cannot be conceived of as finished projects, but that they rather should be considered as open-ended, leaving space for further development. By reflecting on the biographical knowledge gained from the new experiences in the context of a college preparatory high school, she can develop a new biographical action scheme that also includes a new understanding of her gendered identity. In this process, she has continuously been exposed to the contradictory normative pressures exercised by various social contexts. The reconciliation of her multiple loyalties and sometimes conflicting senses of belonging is a product of long suffering (feeling of uneasiness) and a negotiation process and, in this sense, is an accomplishment of her biographical work as a German and Muslim, a Moroccan and German, and a migrant and well-educated young modern German woman.

Samira's case also shows well how negotiation on gendered identification practices constitutes a central aspect in multicultural social processes and how struggling against hierarchical gender norms becomes central in understanding the biographical work undertaken by the migrant women both in majority and minority contexts. In this frame the biographical agency developed by Samira, drawing on the familial resources especially the support of her "traditional mother" pose a basic challenge to the alleged traditionality of migrant family<sup>17</sup> and proves even to be false. Returning to the more general reflections of theoretical nature at the beginning, one can underline one more time the importance of contextualized research that combines the valuable insights of biographical method and a subject centered socialization approach for the investigation of gendered, ethnicized migrant biographies within the multicultural settings of European societies.

## Notes

- 1 Please see the article by Erika Hörning (2000).
- 2 Please see the article by Dieter Geulen (2009).
- 3 The interview with Samira (name changed) on whose life story this article is based, was conducted in the framework of the research project "Family Orientations and Gender Differences in Intergenerational Transnational Migration Processes", directed by Prof. Ursula Apitzsch (Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main) and financed by the Ministry of Science and Arts of Hessen (HMWK). In 2011, my colleague Robson Marques and I conducted 18 biographical narrative interviews, mostly with women of Kurdish, Moroccan, and Turkish origin from the first, second, and third generation. My participation in the Binational PhD-Colloquium over a number of years developed my awareness of the key concepts in socialization and biographical theory also for the analysis of this interview.
- 4 But that does not mean that the biographical approach and socialization theory can be thought of as opposites. On the contrary, in their discussions on lifelong socialization processes (Geulen 2009: 16; Hörning 2000:1), the authors talk about biographical socialization research (Hörning 2000: 8) and the necessity of subject-oriented socialization theory (Geulen 2009: 27).
- 5 Biographical work is defined as the work undertaken by individuals to build coherence and continuity between their experiences in the past and present and their future plans.
- 6 For a definition and an application of the concepts "biographical work", "biographical knowledge", and "biographical resources" in the study of transcultural identities, see also the article by Giorgos Tsiolis (2012: 115).
- 7 Please, see for the four biographical process structures that might appear in one's biography (Schütze 1984; Schütze 2007).
- 8 For the latter, see the following part.
- 9 For an explanation and an application of the terms "internal and external biographical resources" to the adolescent biographies in a migration context, please see the article by Marga Günther (2007).
- 10 In the interview, she does not mention her father often except for sentences like "My father is very old, despite his age he is actually rather easy going. He has never said anything about my appearance, never said 'Do not come too late home.'" [P. 3, L. 103–106]
- 11 The scholars who look at the relationship between educational achievement, socioeconomic mobility, and the usage of social capital among migrants have found that migrant youths and women combine their family and ethnic networks (and the social cap-

ital available to them through these networks) in different ways with their extended social networks in order to enlarge their spheres of action and degree of autonomy in migratory processes. These studies have revealed that making use of the social capital and the benefits of the social networks cannot be understood independently of the gender inequality and power relations characterizing these intergenerational ethnic networks. Consequently, the scholars highlight especially the limitations in the use of such networks by 'weaker' subjects, such as youth and women: In striving for a higher degree of autonomy, women and youth try to circumvent the restrictive roles and hierarchical gender norms imposed by these ethnic networks (Saint-Blanchot and Zaltron 2013: 798; Shah 2007: 31).

- 12 Looking at the gendered processes of upward social mobility and getting autonomous in a migration context, Ursula Apitzsch questions the simplistic assumption that the traditional structures of the migrant family represent an obstacle for the integration of the younger generation, resulting in a weaker social power position in the new social setting (Apitzsch 2009: 84). On the contrary, with reference to her thesis called "dialectics of family orientation", Apitzsch is able to show that identification with the upward mobility project of the migrant family by young women can transmute into increasingly individualized educational aspirations, which in turn might trigger the processes of self-transformation (ibid. 85). In such processes daughters are often supported by their mothers (ibid).
- 13 For instance Turkish migrant women have been the target of homogenizing and essentializing representations in migration literature. Not only that "the debate on foreign women became a debate on Turkish woman" in which she is represented as "oppressed by her tradition and (Islamic) culture" (Inowlocki/Lutz 2000: 307), but also no differentiation is made among the women from Turkey regarding their different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. See also Beck-Gernsheim (2007) for a comprehensive discussion on how the Muslim migrant woman is depicted in public debate as well as in scientific research.
- 14 Drawing on the biographical reconstruction of Samira's case, the author suggests that one should rather develop dialectical ways of thinking and grasping the interaction between the modern ways of life and traditional ways of life, and critically rethink our accounts of what is modern and what is traditional (cf. Salih 2000; cf. Apitzsch 2003). In this case, in her research on headscarf-wearing young Moroccan women in Italy, Ruba Salih shows how, contrary to expectation, Islam can be modern as is revealed in the narratives of "Islamist" young educated Moroccan women compared to the traditional religiosity of their uneducated "Muslim" mothers who do not wear headscarves (cf. Salih 2003).
- 15 Contrary to the common perception that an upward social mobility through education necessarily leads to a distancing from the family of origin, Andreas Pott (2009) shows, on the basis of a narrative interview with the daughter of a Turkish migrant family, that both upward mobility of the second generation and maintaining strong ties with the family is possible.
- 16 In the work of Bhabha, the notion of a non-sovereign self refers to a non-essentialist notion of self, which recognizes the fragmented nature of identity and alienation of the self as a positive factor in the construction of solidarities in political struggles. The notion of a non-sovereign self also implies non-assimilationist claims of cultural difference (Rutherford 1990, p. 212).
- 17 For a contestation of the alleged backwardness of Muslim migrant family and an emphasis instead, on the importance of the intergenerational transmission processes between the mothers and daughters for the construction of gendered biographical narratives in transnational migration context see Al-Rebholz (2013).



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