"Always the border, (…) you belong here, you don't!"
Moroccan students at Universities in Germany

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Abstract

For universities in the occident countries, internationality is publicity; likewise for Germany. Yet, behind the friendly welcome and the open doors, a powerful play of distinctions and prejudice, bias and favoritism remains often unrevealed. This article tackles the tension between openness and exclusion from two perspectives, from outside and from inside. First, this article reflects the dilemma of difference. Based on an empirical research with qualitative interviews to generate data and to debunk distinctions, it tackles furthermore the perceptions of international students from Morocco at universities in Germany. What suggestions could be derived from this to improve the Institution University as a place of knowledge? This was the question of a study from Kiefer (2014), which could be located between sociology, and educational sciences with a strong racism-critical accent and which wanted to bring the perceptions of international students into a serious discussion in Germany. Now, this article aims to introduce into the Moroccan discourse about migration, identity and differences some results of this study.

Keywords

Dilemma of difference, international students, belongings, racism, internationalization, othering

After terrorist attacks, the European media and the general public turn very quickly to describe the perpetrators: They live in the peripheral suburbs of Paris, or of Brussels, they are radicalized or even illegal immigrants; they are unqualified, social losers, hopeless, and poor. In individual cases this may be true, but in general, this image is wrong. On the contrary, not a few terrorists or sympathizers of radical groupings are highly qualified. The most well-known example may be Mohammed A., the head of the terrorist group of Septembers, who first seemed to be a well-integrated student in Hamburg, as well as, less well known, but more recently, at Darmstadt University, also in Germany, Malik F., an inconspicuous doctoral student with a scholarship for mathematics, who became an IS sympathizer before he was taken off the university's register and prosecuted. It is to be assumed, that the process of

"communitization", the experience of community, emotionality and belonging is more important than the educational level and the economic component. Furthermore, the fight against social injustice may also be a motive in a process of vicarious victimization, as well as the lack of perspective and participation, in short, the failure of social inclusion. Anyway, it may be worth to have a look on the situation of migrant students and their perception of belonging.

However, this article neither has the intention to give explications concerning the process of radicalization of international students or highly qualified migrants nor to formulate strategies against it. Rather, it just aims to present experiences of international students coming from Morocco to Germany. At the same time, it wants to introduce into the Moroccan discourse of migration, difference and identity a German study about the perceptions of students from Morocco at Universities in Germany (Kiefer 2014), that reflects the dilemma of difference from a combined perspective of sociology and transcultural pedagogy with a racism critical accent. Nevertheless, the pointed-out ambivalence between welcome and rejection, between openness and exclusion, may also be helpful when we talk about the feeling of belonging, participation and inclusion or vice versa, when it comes to exclusion, rejection and radicalization.

The approach to the subject of the experiences of Moroccan students in Germany is tackled from two different angles, from outside and from inside: On the one hand, the structural conditions are reflected, the barriers and the discourses that international students have to cope with at universities in the West; on the other hand, based on a qualitative research, their individual perceptions, their strategies and their capacity to act were considered. The author knows both societies, the Moroccan and the German, and argues as a (trans-) migrant with hybrid identity; yet, conscious of the ambivalence of her own privileged position. The aim was not to talk on behalf or about Moroccan students, which would have been arrogant, or naïve, but more likely to talk 'beside' them. Furthermore, the study initially wanted to make the positions of Moroccan and/or African researchers and writers visible in a debate about migration and education in Germany and last but not least to discuss in the light of this background recommendations for the internationalization of Universities.

Students from Morocco in Germany

The community of Moroccan migrants in Germany is characterized by a very big heterogeneity, from illiterate people to high qualified students and

scientists. However, since the nineties, the number of Moroccan students going to Germany increased enormously. For Germany, as for other Western countries, the internationalization of universities is also a figurehead and there is a global competition. Few years ago, the French newspaper Le Monde described this competition as "a wild, aggressive hunt for talents" [and a] "war for brains"1 (Vinokur 2008: 10). In general, international students are considered as privileged "elite migrants" (Rommelspacher 2011: 35) or as somehow "glittering wanderer" (Terkessidis 1999: 3). The idea that international students are privileged compared to other migrants and also that migration for education is a great opportunity, especially for those from countries with low per capita income, is commonly taken for granted, and it also fits well in a complacent self image of the admission of students as a form of generous development cooperation.2 However, in general, the particular national and economic interests of the destination countries, like Germany, in this case are less often emphasized, as well as the difficulties for the acting persons of migration; or these difficulties are viewed simplistically as personal deficits and not considered as structural problems.

Indeed, "[f]or the intellectual an exilic displacement means being liberated from usual career [⋯]. If you can experience that fate not as deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovery in which you do things according to your own patterns [⋯]: that is a unique pleasure" (Said 1994: 46). However, on their way, international students also have to overcome important barriers and difficulties, as shown by the results of a large-scale quantitative social survey of the German National Association for Student Affairs (DSW) about the internationalization of studies in Germany, according to which the orientation in the study system, the financing and the contact situation are perceived as the three main difficulties among students from abroad (Isserstedt 2008). It remains to be noted: In Germany and elsewhere, internationality is publicity, universities promote it, but at the same time it encounters structural, financial, immigration and bureaucratic obstacles that make it difficult for international students to study successfully there. As it is shown below, in addition to these university-related aspects, social self-images also play a role, which means that migrants are placed in a

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1 « un braconnage agressif des talents (….) une guerre des cerveaux » (Vinokur 2008 :10)

2 Development can also be understood as « a semantic heritage » (Bessis 2001:126) of colonial terminology: « D'emblée, il est fait l'héritier sémantique du terme de la civilisation, à la connotation coloniale désormais trop marquée, et le sésame de l'entrée dans la modernité, l'autre synonyme contemporain de la civilisation» (Bessis 2001:126).

position of non-belonging. As a result, one of two international students drops out of studies in Germany. (Isserstedt 2008).

Because of this, intercultural trainings are often recommended, for instance by Bouchara (2010), according to him preferably even before the migration for study. However, I think of this critically, because such trainings need the 'others' as a basis for work and to be reproduce again and again. Instead of giving students theories about foreign cultures, we should rather talk about making the power transparent, that once there will turn them into 'others', and about addressing the assumption that Europe is the center of all knowledge: "Intercultural work must therefore question and challenge the Eurocentric perspectives – knowing as well that a non-Eurocentric perspective is an impossibility" (Castro Varela 2010: 118). From this follows the simple demand that I would like to put, before the following chapters on the dilemma of difference and the perceptions of Moroccan students in Germany: In principle, the Universities should ask how to learn from whom we don't believe, that 'we' could learn something (Castro Varela 2010: 127).

The Dilemma of Difference: 'Forget that I'm different'; 'never forget that I'm different'.

"Love for the homeland instead of Moroccan thieves"[3] – this slogan placarded the Austrian FPÖ party in an election campaign in 2012, clearly before the general shift to the right in the Austrian (and European) politics and public debate. Although it can be assumed that racism in today's political and public life in Europe may be rarely so exclusively related to a particular group and at the same time so frighteningly open, clear and easily identifiable; it is interesting to keep in mind the racist slur and how it manifests itself and the effect of that slogan: While 'Moroccan' here becomes synonymous with criminal, 'we' are automatically characterized as honest and good, and while 'we' should love 'our homeland' 'we' are advised to protect ourselves from the 'dangerous others'. Of course, there was an outcry and legal consequences, but meanwhile, the term 'homeland' also has experienced a veritable renaissance in political and public debate of German-speaking countries.

However, exclusion is not only to be expected in open racism, but also in the subtle, suggestive and hidden aspects of everyday life. Because after all, the core of racist thinking is the figure of a mostly derogatory and discriminating binary distinction between a socially constructed, national-ethno-cultural, 'us' and 'not us'. (Scharathow 2011: 11). These are individual,

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[3] „Heimatliebe statt Marokkaner-Diebe", so the orignal slogan, which rhymes in German, on a FPÖ election poster in Innsbruck, Austria 2012

institutional and structural practices of making or reproducing images, mindsets and narratives about groups of people, but they are largely normalized, commonplace and banal, and therefore they became invisible. In addition, the cultural difference is, according to Wieviorka (2000: 36) more frightening when it is postulated by poor people than by the rich one. It's clear, that the concepts of race, class and gender intersect with cultural implications. Cherkaoui (2012), a former student of electrical engineering, in Aachen; writes as a tip for future students from Morocco: "You will notice some things immediately. Most Germans behave reservedly. They are not so sociable and talkative – especially in public (⋯). When you meet people, you are often asked the following three questions: Where are you from? What are you doing here? Do you return home afterwards? Do not let that annoy or confuse you. It may also happen that people would not want to sit next to you, but rather look for another place or stop. Hidden or open discrimination is not uncommon. You have to find a way to live with it" Cherkaoui (2012:1). To put it clearly, it must be noted that even international students, despite their allegedly privileged position, may be affected by racism and not least because racism, although largely hidden, has become an everyday phenomenon pervading the whole society.

Therefore, it is important to reflect on how this situation can be dealt with in order to enable a more professional and contemporary approach to differences. In fact, it is a dilemma: Not paying attention to differences or going over them would not do justice to the particular situations or lives of people; at the same time, talking about differences solidifies precisely these differences. Much more poetically, the black poet Pat Parker states this as an "advice to the white woman who wants to know how she can be my friend: First, forget that I am black. Secondly, never forget that I am black" (Parker 2001: 66). Forget that (....); never forget that (....), also means, that I'm foreign, female, Jewish, Muslim, or just somehow different. This basic dilemma between inevitability and impossibility has to be endured and in everyday life at university and beyond, it must not lead to a paralysis, in the sense of 'I do not want to do anything wrong' nor to the arbitrariness in the sense of 'it does not matter, I cannot do it right.' (Foitzik 2011: 66). There is obviously no way out of this dilemma. However, the recognition of ambivalence in the sense of a self-reflective transgressive opening may be a viable option inside of this dilemma, although it is a balancing act that demands a lot of reflexivity, exact perception and sensitive communication. Therefore, an interweaving of different disciplines and approaches is necessary: The inter- or transcultural pedagogy and diversity work, which

stands for the appreciation of differences and various belongings, postcolonial studies and migration research of various provenances to understand the backgrounds and interests of individual students, the approaches of social inequality, racism research and critical whiteness studies because of their awareness of discrimination. All in all, it could be concluded so far: "(⋯) Difference is an engine for testing the functioning and legitimacy of institutions. This is an interesting challenge if you do not consider confrontation and change as something fundamentally bad" (Terkessidis 2010: 73).

Perceptions and Experiences: "Always the border, (⋯) you belong here, you don't!"

The subjective perceptions of students from Morocco in Germany also reflect an ambivalent image, ascertained by using problem-centered interviews according to Witzel (2000). The focus in this connection was primarily on the difficulties that these international students have or had to deal with during their stay in Germany. As for the procedure, the intention was to find out transindividual common experiences and to illustrate them in narrative portraits (Meuser/Nagel 1991). As expected, there were, especially at first, very substantial questions of concern, such as the access to the university system and the associated legal status, as well as the financing and the housing search. But in addition to these easy to detect hard factors, more difficult to grasp soft factors such as perceived attitudes and unpronounced judgments of 'the others of the others' played an important role. Nevertheless, it can be anticipated that all seventeen respondents, regardless of the duration of their stay, were satisfied or very satisfied and described their migration for studies as a succeeding of successful project or at least as a positive and enriching experience, which they would also recommend to friends and acquaintances. However, it should also be noted, that not all could be said, (it is not sayable) and that not everything is even in the range of what we can imagine ourselves potentially saying. Thus, many experiences are probably not articulated or they are relativized in advance, out of respect for the host country or out of gratitude to be allowed to study there at all.

Nevertheless, it has become obvious that international students are still often perceived as 'other' students and tend to be labeled with deficits, for which cultural patterns of explanation are used. "You have always the border, they make always the border, you're a buddy, you belong here, you don't" (Tarik, ib.: 304). The experience of exclusion affects both the everyday life and the study at university, for instance, when it comes to group work:

"Everybody thinks, (···), why should I do it [the seminar paper] together with a foreigner? He does not master the language and after good marks, they will say, but he didn't do anything, we made it" (Zakaria, in: Kiefer 2014: 308); as well as outside the university, such as in housing or job search, e.g.: "But first, where are you from? – From Morocco! – Yes, we call you back, yeah bye, like this, I already know this, this is a bit, what bothers me here" (Yassir, ib.: 284).

While an extensive pre-test among 160 applicants in Morocco had shown that, before their migration, they were afraid of getting homesick, most of them apparently coped well, which even surprised themselves sometimes (Kiefer 2014: 303). It may be an indication that the students have arrived well and participate in their new environment. "Why should I feel homesickness", Tarik (ib.: 303) asked for instance, stressing that he was very happy with his German girlfriend. Revealing was also a student, who spoke of 'parentssickness'[4] (Omar, in: ib.: 302) instead of homesickness. Homesickness, so can be presumed, is felt less than a yearning for Morocco or a missing of friends there, as experienced in the replacement of the parents, combined with the challenge to have to do everything without the support of parents: "(...) – and suddenly you are alone, you have to cope and so on" (Omar, in: ib.: 302). However, it also became clear that all respondents made great efforts, for instance to make contact with Germans: "(They do not come to you (···); they always need time to get used to others. (...) the first step always must be done by you" (Abdellatif, ib.: 305). In view of the described difficulties it is astonishing and deserves respect, how quickly and decisively many of them, develop successfully appropriate strategies and manage their situation with firm will, perseverance and networking – as well as with wit: "With all these blondes .... Slowly you will also become a potato; I am like them, now" (Amina, ib.: 302) and elsewhere: "It's really a different world, (...) – but it's worth going there and studying (...), but you have to stay who you are" (Amina, ib.: 313). All in all, it is possible to observe how new identities emerge, which are, to a large extent, transcultural or transnational in nature, but also that identities continue and, especially when it comes to religion and gender aspects, that identities are enforced by being labeled as 'others': "And the first question she [the teacher] asked me, was why are you wearing a headscarf" (Amina, ib.: 310). While she had to justify herself for it, another student reported how she felt overstrained, as she has to explain perennially why she does not wear a headscarf and why she wants to study as

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[4] In German: 'Elternweh' instead of 'Heimweh'

a Muslim woman at all (Sana, ib.: 310) . So, the female students in Germany are also confronted with the image of the oppressed Muslim woman. At this point, the experiences of the interviewed women differ from male students, while they are similar in many aspects in terms of concrete study experiences. Nevertheless, it became clear, that the subjective positioning is influenced by several separating lines of differences which intersect each other.

University as a space of transgression: "(···) movement on the border and across this border"

What is now to be learned from those who we don't believe 'we' could learn anything from? For the first time, Glick Schiller (1992) defined connections across different borders as "(···) processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated 'transmigrants'. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations (···) that span borders. Transmigrants (···) develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies" (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 1). But at present, encounters engaged at 'eye-level' which really recognize differences as potentials of a diverse society in their entirety, are obviously not reality.

However, migration for studies represents an opportunity not only for the acting persons of migration or possibly for their countries of origin but also for the aspired university and the post-migrant society of destination. Because, the institution University as a place of knowledge is fundamentally a space of transgression: "University is movement on the border to the (un)usual and across this border. (···) University is compelled to transcend or at least to want it" (Mecheril/Klinger 2010: 86). So to speak, the transgression of different borders, not just origin-related, but also technical, epistemic or Eurocentric ones, belongs to the mode of functioning of universities, and at the same time, can be regarded as a preparation period for a transgressive way of life. Thus, a university that appreciates differences is useful for all students and contributes to no less than an improvement of the University as institution. Then, however, one should no longer ask what could be done to facilitate the integration into 'our' university and 'German' society for these 'other' students from abroad. Rather, it would be necessary to reflect what a university, a town and a society in Germany or elsewhere that want to be international, could do to meet the special needs of international students. Of course, when discussing this question, 'delicate' aspects such as the financial and legal sphere should not be left out or put aside as a personal

problem that does not concern the study in the strict sense. In addition, I would like to propose with Mecheril/Klinger (2010: 110) a diversification of the forms of learning and the delimitation of the study time, as well as courses of the scientific language for all students and in general, more attention to the introductory phase of studies as well as the institutionalization of monitoring.

Last but not least, it should be added also that this article and the sketched study (Kiefer 2014) with the suggested approaches are certainly not free of unwanted effects and paradoxes. I, too, am in the dilemma between inevitability and impossibility of understanding when approaching the issue of openness and exclusion. Understanding always remains an illusion. Nevertheless, I hope that the perceptions of international students in Germany will help raise awareness of the situation of high qualified migrants and that their suggestions and hints will contribute to a more active implementation of transnationalization or transgressive openness and will thus offer perspectives for a more subject-oriented internationalization.

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