"Tense encounters"
How migrantised women design and reimagine urban everyday life

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> "Can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or choose, different futures from what we envision as best?" Abu-Lughod (2002: 787f.)

> "My home is a place I have struggled for. I have fought in order to feel comfortable calling Berlin my home. Fighting this fight has become part of my home. In the meantime, I love it." Sharon Dodua Otoo (2019: 68)[1]

Introduction

Migrantised[2] women, especially when identified as Muslims, are routinely depicted in public discourse as an object under the control of Muslim men, as the passive recipients of a backward and patriarchal culture and familial structure. What is reproduced here is the classical colonial bias, placing white Germans 'ahead' of migrantised minorities along with the category of 'modernity'.

1 "Mein Zuhause ist ein Ort, für den ich gekämpft habe. Ich habe gekämpft, damit ich mich wohlfühlen kann, Berlin als meine Heimat zu bezeichnen. Diesen Kampf zu führen ist Teil meiner Heimat geworden. Inzwischen liebe ich es."

2 Migrantisation, here, is understood as a process of racialisation which produces the minorisation of whole groups and subjects and their ascription to the role of eternal migrants: The ones who eternally arrive, who still always have to adopt and to integrate, who always need to prove their right to be here – although they might have been born here and are formalised as full citizens (Broden/Mecheril 2010: 7-24; El-Tayeb 2011: xiv-xxvii).

Against the backdrop of the postmigrant perspective, which we combine in this contribution with María Lugones' works on decolonial feminism,[3] we aim at focusing on different practices of migrantisation and subalternisation that women with migration experiences encounter in urban public and semi-public spheres in the cities of Leipzig and Munich, and on how they deal with and resist these practices. We focus particularly on social settings created in order to foster encounters between urban residents with and without migration histories, such as neighbourhood centres or women's cafés, which are very commonly promoted as 'germ cells' for the formation and stabilization of urban societies of migration. Utilizing this empirical focus, we want to carve out the persistent effectiveness of colonial patterns of power and gender (Lugones 2010) that affect the access to social, political and economic rights. In order to trace how migrantised women resist the experiences of othering and differential inclusion (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013), we elaborate on the women's repertoire of infrapolitical practices (Scott 1990; Marche 2012) that are conceptualised within the postmigrant paradigm as "struggles of migration" (Scheel 2015; Riedner 2018) and described by Lugones as "intimate, everyday resistant interactions" (2010: 746). Hence, in our analysis, we address questions such as: What kind of practices do encounter settings enable and disable and how do migrantised women adopt and appropriate them through their manifold practices and activities? How do women reinterpret their social reality and reconstruct the urban spaces of encounter and, therewith, foster negotiations about 'migration'? Which practices of reimagination – of society and the relationship between majoritarian norms and migrantised (Muslim) women – do they perform? Which city spaces do they create? In sum: how does coloniality (of gender) come into play within these sites of encounter?

Theoretical approaches: Combining postmigrant perspectives with Lugones' 'coloniality of gender'

The postmigrant debate has initiated several epistemological shifts in critical migration studies that were highly inspired by post- and decolonial studies, such as the commitment to (1) the "perspective of migration" (Mecheril 2014; Yildiz/Hill 2015; Hess/Näser 2015) as a point of departure for social analysis and (2) the reconceptualisation of 'migration' as a social relation which mirrors society's transformation as a whole (Labor Migration 2014: 7). These shifts signify for researchers

3 The Argentinian sociologist and philosopher focuses amongst other questions, on how colonial rule has erased histories and relationships (spiritual, social, sexual, political) in formerly indigenous contexts through the enforcement of binary constructions such as 'man' vs. 'woman', 'human' vs. 'nature'.

that they should engage with the movements of migration and, drawing on de- and post-colonial studies, with marginalised knowledges and the manifold visible and invisible practices of interpreting and appropriating spaces of the dominant society. The approach of critical/urban citizenship (Isin 2008; Hess/Lebuhn 2014) focuses on the interdependent processes of differential recognition and inclusion, as well as on the various public resistant acts of performing citizenship by (re) claiming rights, (re)imagining and (re)producing society and urban space – and, therewith, scrutinizing majoritarian and, hence, nationally bounded understandings of belonging. Meanwhile, the notion of "struggles of migration", as advanced by Scheel (2015), highlights the autonomy of migrantised subjects (Bojadžijev/Karakayalı 2007) and their manifold tactics enacted in spaces of everyday life, such as offices, private apartments and working places (Scheel 2015: 4). These struggles take place at the social, political, economic and affective borders of society and are neither affecting nor visible to everybody. These tactics, following de Certeau (1988: 77-97), subvert the spaces of the powerful – the dominant society – by making use of their tools and inverting them, for example, through jokes, irony and reinterpretations. Similarly, María Lugones, with her focus on "everyday resistant interactions to the colonial difference" (2010: 743), refers to the notion of "infrapolitics" advanced by Scott (1990: 183) in order to describe "acts, gestures, and thoughts that are not quite political enough to be perceived as such" (Marche 2012: 1). Lugones' approach helps us to deepen our understanding of how migrantised women deal with the neglect of their particular histories and interpretations. It enables us to focus properly on "the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world" (Lugones 2010: 746) and, thereby, discern how colonial patterns of gender shape the researched urban spaces of encounter for and with migrantised women. Along with her notion of "tense encounters" (ibid.), we analyse how hegemonic 'seizures' of the non-Western, female subject, and hence, practices of subalternisation, are countered and resisted, constituting a "subjective/intersubjective spring of liberation, both adaptive and creatively oppositional" (ibid.).

Our empirical material

The material which will serve as the basis of our analysis was collected within our participant observations[4] that we carried out in 2017/18 around a café initiative in Leipzig and in a neighbourhood centre in Munich.

4 Our research was realised within the research project "Locally Stranded, Globally Embedded? Dealing with Diversity on the Margins of the Postmigrant City" at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, funded by the DFG (German Research foundation).

The empirical analysis in Leipzig is the outcome of a multidirectional fieldwork process with the aim of tracking negotiations – in very different sites of engagement – around the notion, or rather the 'problem' of 'refugee women'. In order to carve out the 'coloniality of gender', reproduced within the spaces of encounter, the focus here is laid on a very particular moment documented within the research, namely: the negotiation of a micro-social conflict situation.[5]

The participant observations of the work and talks with the women who are employed in the Neighbourhood Centre (henceforth, the Centre) in Munich create the basis for focusing on (1) how they interpret and reconsider the relations and negotiations between German majoritarian society and migrantised population, and (2) which tensions they address within their work.

The two sites of encounter we describe disclose three main differences: firstly, the status of the women in the Centre in Munich differs from the one held by the women in the Leipzig café, all of whom have applied for asylum and find themselves in a position of waiting for the authorities' decision. The women in Munich while having their own migration experiences, are some of those who, from the outside, would be described as "integrated". Secondly, they are the ones actively conceptualising and designing the tools and initiatives of 'help' and social integration. Thirdly, in contrast to the Leipzig setting, the degree of institutionalisation of the Centre is more pronounced. Therefore, an important point in the analysis of our material was its relational conceptualisation (Hart 2016), which entails three central points: first and foremost, to analyse and describe the differences between our two case studies appropriately. This demanded that we apply different approaches at times or use the same approaches to a varying degree. Secondly, we should be sensible of commonalities in a broader understanding, i.e. to focus additionally on the trans-scalar entanglements between the cases, such as the impact of global, national and urban discourses, events and politics on the sites of encounter observed, as well as their impact on urban or national processes and, therewith, also on each other. Thirdly, we should think across different urban experiences (Robinson 2011), which, from the very beginning, involved a translation of the knowledge gained from one case study into questions for the other.

5 This focus entails the risk of devaluating the work, motives and engagement of the different actors involved, which is explicitly not our aim. All of them, we can say, pursue the highly valuable target of strengthening and shaping a society of migration beyond delimitating fixations on belonging and integration in fostering interactions and communications 'at eye level'. What we aim for within this analysis is to shift the focus from the actions of particular people towards the effects and workings of a particular discursive setting.

Empirical insights: resisting the 'coloniality of gender' in encounter settings

a) The Women's Café in Leipzig: a fragile ensemble

The ethnographic material we base our analysis on in this section is concretely embedded within the relaunch of a Women's Café,[6] organised by two associations in Leipzig with the aim of creating a space of encounter and fostering so-called 'low-threshold' artistic activities for women with and without a refugee background.[7] This space stretches across different localities and subsites: It addresses mainly women who live in an accommodation for families with a refugee background which was set up in a historical apartment house located in the quiet backstreet of a very lively urban district in 2016. Activities within the Women's Café, however, are organised in another locality a few blocks and five-minutes walking distance away: an event space in a local community centre. In order to bridge the walking distance between the two spaces, which might function as one barrier to participation, the organisers have decided to pick up the women at the accommodation and walk over together.

It is the movement, temporariness and indeterminacy of boundaries (private – governmental) and functionalities (leisure time – status-related 'obedience') which shape the spatial and temporal arrangement of the Women's Café in Leipzig. It constitutes, therefore, a rather fragile, 'deterritorial' setting with a low degree of institutionalisation.

"What are your hobbies?" – A call to subj(e-a)ction

> One afternoon in November, I meet the organisers of the Women's Café and two volunteers in front of the accommodation. We are four women, most with an academic background, between our mid-twenties and mid-thirties, born in Germany

6 As we will show, this format does not correspond to a classic 'café' but rather to an informal encounter space.

7 *Association1*, as anonymised within this text, is an initiative founded in 2016 with the aim of fostering encounters between young people with and without a refugee background through arts. The association disposes of one and a half paid positions based on a funding which has to be renewed annually. The activities, however, depend vastly on the work of volunteers. Young people with refugee histories are strongly included into their organisational body. *Association2* is a cultural centre and housing project that offers various projects, also artistic, with the aim of facilitating the participation of all residents – marginalised or not – in one of the most diverse urban areas in Leipzig. The money they dispose of depends on short-term funding applications and, hence, always, on voluntary engagement.

> and have no obvious references to migration histories. Five women, most of them with babies, are waiting for us in the small common room inside the café.
> We begin with an introduction round, initiated by Ibrahim, one of the volunteers, who is there to provide translation from Farsi.[8] Throughout the lengthy insight into his life – trained mechanic, implicated in communist politics in Afghanistan until the Taliban arrived, working as an interpreter in Germany for ten years – everyone in the room is listening patiently; the babies sleep or play on the laps of the waiting women. It is then Rasha's turn, who sits next to him. Like the other women, she reels off the introduction text she has learnt in the integration class: "My name is […] I come from […] I have been in Germany since […]." Magda, representing *Initiative1*, tries to get a little bit more information in each case: "What are your hobbies?" "Do you like music?" "Are there table games in Afghanistan?" "What do you like to do?" The answers are rather avoidant and do not explain much. The atmosphere is friendly, but the women also seem a bit tense and, it seems to me, uncertain, what to reply. "Sports" is the only hesitant answer – some women indicate the centre of their bodies, laughing. "Yoga" – when introduced as one of the activities offered by *Initiative1* – is something they have not heard of: "That doesn't exist in our places," Ibrahim chuckles. The meeting remains rather unsatisfactory – is it because of language barriers and a somewhat awkward mode of unclear expectations? (Fieldnotes, September 14, 2017)

This description of the first encounter with the women demonstrates how a fracture runs through our meeting: 'We' arrive, 'they' wait; 'we' ask, 'they' answer. The notion of "tense encounter" (Lugones 2010: 746) proves helpful in order to grasp the 'silencing' and 'freezing' effects produced here. The five women in our meeting seem to be 'locked' in a Western/colonial gaze, which associates their social lives with limitation (family spaces), enclosure (patriarchal control) and monotony (childcare and household). There is no need to emphasise that in addition to this external gaze, the lives of the women in the accommodation is indeed characterised by restrictions and constraints – regarding communication, the implication in familial and social networks, workspaces and, generally, spaces of appreciation and recognition. Hence, while the aim of the meeting is to get in contact and involve them in a mutual practice of recognition, discovery and approximation, the distribution of speech and the overall discursive setting produce more of a silenc-

8 One can certainly say that this eloquent and extensive 'kick-off' of the meeting performed by a man who finds himself in an established position in Germany, contributes to a rather unfavourable communicative situation for the relaunch of the Women's Café: firstly, it somehow undermines the idea of a 'women's space' and, secondly, through this 'example' of (male) 'integration success', it even widens the gap between the 'newcomers' in Leipzig/Germany and well-established residents.

ing and invisibilisation of the women's individual stories, achievements, personal desires and sense of being. This is what we hint at with the wordplay subj(e-a)ction: a gendered, discursive practice which places the women in an active subjectivity along modern Western norms – from private realms into public spaces, contrasting family spaces with those for the (social, creative and civic) self.[9] This discursive invocation combines a neoliberal imperative of activating the women with a colonial gesture of overwriting the affective personal histories present in this room.[10] Lugones refers to a similar imperative with her notion of a "fractured locus" that colonised women inhabit, – a "wound where sense is contradictory" (ibid.: 752). The 'coloniality of gender', in her perspective, produces a kind of 'split ground', or rather a "borderland" (ibid.: 753) where non-modern knowledges, intimacies and histories are in constant tension with the Western-normative calls to action/subjectivity sketched above.

Before continuing to dissect the doings and undoings of our encounter and, in a second step, sounding out the possibilities of resistance to the 'coloniality of gender', we will continue with part two of the vignette. It starts with an unexpected twist which happened when our meeting seemed to be coming to an end without any plans being made for the future of the Women's Café:

> I had asked my neighbour which kind of music she listens to at home, whereupon Ibrahim had opened a YouTube video with Persian pop music, accompanied by Afghan dancing. As all of the women, while remaining seated, joined in these dance moves, the idea started to circulate whether this couldn't be an idea for the next Women's Café – Afghan dance – and couldn't Rasha, most actively involved in our round, take the role of the dance teacher? She consents, on condition that there wouldn't be any men and using roller blinds to protect the activity from being observed from the outside. We agree on a date, all say goodbye and the organisers especially seem relieved: In the end, an idea was found. Two weeks later though, things turn out very differently. Claire, who was supposed to 'collect' the women at the accommodation, arrives alone at *Initiative2*, where Lisa, the person responsible here, and I are waiting with tea and cookies. None of the women had seemed to be motivated, and Rasha, our supposed 'dance teacher', had said she did not know anything. Besides, her husband had stood in the doorstep, "he had not left the doorknob with his hands", Claire said, and, in the end, Rasha's children

9 This dynamic mirrors a dichotomic understanding of 'public' and 'private' spaces perpetuated in scientific debates since the 19th century and critically discussed by feminist scholars in the few last decades (cf. Gal 2002).

10 Accordingly, Lila Abu-Lughod, in her reflection "Do Muslim Women really need saving?", conceives "difference" as the outcome of "different histories, as expressions of different circumstances and as manifestations of differently structured desires" (2002: 787).

had cried out: "Mum can't dance at all!" The door had then been shut quite quickly. "It is frustrating", Claire concludes.

The violence that is entrenched is this situation unfolds even more clearly when Laura, a professional consultant who had been hired by *Association1* many months before in order to support the practitioners in attracting more women within their activities, in the aftermath of the event, finds out the following: The women had thought of their attendance in the Women's Café of being one of the conditions for receiving support and – ultimately – their residence permission from the German state. The organisers were shaken by this news. Throughout the following weeks, intense discussions took place and different interpretations of this situation were exchanged and reflected upon, most of them revolving around the question of 'the women'. Non-Western women were turned, again, into a problem – one of Western participatory engagement.

In the first place, the interactive setting described above had produced a 'colonial' encounter in the way that it had engendered a practice of imposed modernity. The process of becoming-subject, which in Western thinking is seen as tightly interwoven with becoming-citizen, is initiated and fostered here along Western feminist conceptions of womanhood, supposedly flourishing through the participation in non-domestic activities. The women, while being implicated in this practice, are set in a "hierarchical relation in which the non-modern is subordinated to the modern" (Lugones 2010: 748). Coloniality, here, appears as a relational practice that denies these women their way of appropriating private and public spaces in new surroundings, their knowledges and cosmologies, which might be "at odds with the modern logic of dichotomies" (ibid.: 748), in sum: "co-evalness" (ibid.: 749). "This denial is coloniality", Lugones argues (ibid.). It is this denial or neglect which ultimately impedes the enactment of citizenship. Bridging this reflection with the postmigrant perspective leads us to Yildiz and Hill, who argue for an "epistemological turn" (2018: 7) in dealings with migration in "uncovering marginalized stories and knowledges" (ibid.), their potential to subvert and ironise and, consequently, challenge social power relations (ibid.: 7-8). It is the postmigrant perspective's normative claim "to breach with racist allocations" (Foroutan 2018: 15) and to engage in a struggle for recognition and equal rights (ibid.: 21) that underlies the following analysis of resistance against the 'coloniality of gender'.

Resisting the 'coloniality of gender': Politics of withdrawal

What the postmigrant perspective, in combination with the 'coloniality of gender' lens, brings to the fore are the tactics and struggles enacted by migrantised citizens in order to appropriate majoritarian social, cultural and political spaces. It is precisely at this "fractured locus", which shapes colonial encounters, that,

according to Lugones, "sense is made anew" (2010: 752), i.e. that resistance can sprout. Rasha, for example, at the (awkward) beginning of the meeting described, confronts the group with the reality of life as refugees with irregular status in Germany: "In former times, before the war, in Afghanistan, dancing, music, parties were part of our everyday life. Then the war came; now we're refugees – it's difficult." (Fieldnotes, September 14, 2017). Therewith, she interrupts the unilineal arrangement of speech and confronts the group with the incongruity of conceiving leisure time activities for women who struggle to rearrange life for themselves and their children in vastly unfamiliar, insecure conditions. Resistance, however, can also be enacted in a much more hidden and less manifest way: Accordingly, we would go as far as interpreting the women's withdrawal, their non-cooperation and silence as a tactic of taking part without really playing a part, as a minimal investment while remaining at a distance. This interpretation resonates with Lugones' conception of resistance as "infrapolitical" (2010: 746): In focusing on the "everyday resistant interactions to the colonial difference" (ibid.: 743) and their liberating power, she highlights "that minimal sense of agency required for the oppressing<–>resisting relation being an active one" (ibid.).

In sum, the 'coloniality of gender' lens is made visible in two ways: firstly, the structures of oppression which forge non-Western women's placement within Western societies; as illustrated with the wordplay 'subj(e-a)ction', this placement entails an activation – along with the Western conception of citizenry – and, at the same time, a subjectivation which renders the women's individuality and plurilocal affective memory invisible. Secondly, the 'coloniality of gender' lens directs our focus onto the inconspicuous, inward-turned, subjective strategies of resistance, such as the withdrawal and non-cooperation performed by active subjects who claim an existence "other than what the hegemon makes [her] be" (ibid.: 746). The Women's Café in Leipzig turns out to be a space which, also due to its spatio-temporal arrangement, gets 'caught' within a discursive dynamic that reproduces, unwillingly, the hegemonic invocation of 'migrant/Arabic/Muslim women', who, in turn, resist through a 'politics of withdrawal'.

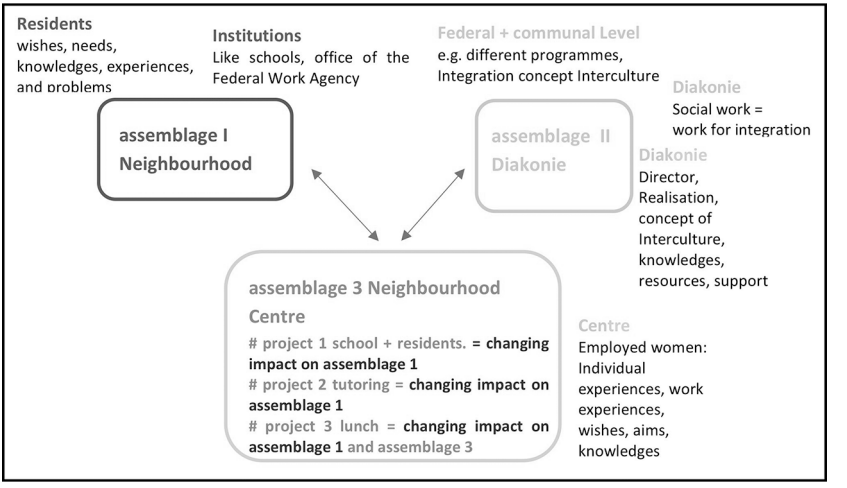
b) The Neighbourhood Centre at Munich's northern edge: Reimaginations of urban everyday life

In this part, we will present the descriptions and analysis of the negotiations around 'migration' within the Centre by reconsidering the different elements that shape its structure. For the analysis of the negotiations, we will apply the concept of assemblages[11] as a tool to shed some light on how different elements constitut-

11 Assemblage is here understood as the process of gathering and 'co-functioning' of heterogeneous elements which according to DeLanda (2006) is blurring human/non-human, near/far,

ing the 'Centre' – through their interaction – engender a process of reimagining and re-creating the Centre as an urban space. For the purpose of this chapter, we will mainly focus here on three central elements of the assemblage: (1) the women employed at the Centre and their manifold experiences of migrantisation and subalternisation in their everyday lives; (2) the Centre as a material urban space in the process of being (re-)imagined and (re-)constructed; and (3) the permanent activities and temporal projects realised at the Centre which represent the women's acts of citizenship with the aim of reshaping society (e.g. consultations, room renting possibilities or school tutoring for pupils).

Fig. 15.1: Sketch of the assemblage 'Neighbourhood Centre'.



The women: Labouring from a "fractured locus"

The women working at the Centre, are at the heart of the assemblage, and one of its central agents. Some of them have experienced migration themselves, which forms the foundation of the transnational understanding and organisation of their families and everyday lives. All the women are highly skilled; most of them have an academic degree. The women who came to Munich with a foreign degree, such as C.[12] from Turkey, O. from Belarus and E. from Hungary, have experienced

structure/agency, material/social divisions) engendering a temporal, provisional, sometimes fragile and/or contingent non-homogeneous grouping. With the help of the notion the stress is put rather on emergence, on how trajectories cross and engage each other (Anderson/McFarlane 2011: 124-127).

12 According to their wishes, we have used the initial letters of their names for anonymisation.

a professional devaluation typical for people who become subjectified as migrants by the dominant society. O. and C., for example, have attended several additional courses in order to be recognised as professionals by potential employers.

> C., one of the consultants, told me, "I myself had to make so many requests, so I asked God, as he gave me this ability, please, help me to share it. I am very satisfied with my job [at the Centre, M.P.], it makes sense […]. I came as a migrant, and now I can help other migrants." (Talk with C., February 6, 2018)

For some others, like E., the work in the Centre was an entry into the labour market, while for N., it was a possibility to escape from sitting at home. However, for most of them, the work is more or less based on precarious conditions: a few women work half-time or less on the basis of a regular contract from the institution Diakonie,[13] which runs the Centre. The temporary projects, particularly, incur only a few hours work per week. Working under these conditions makes it necessary to cope with the future insecurity and economic dependence of the family or of the government's welfare institutions. In addition to these economic barriers the women face in their everyday lives, all of them have stories to tell which illustrate how their different experiences of migrantisation form a powerful part of their lives and of the public by delegating its expression relationships towards the majority society.

During our first meeting, S. told me that during her studies, she went as an exchange student to Italy. This stay was very important for her, as she experienced there what it was like to be recognised as a student from Germany instead of as the 'other', the Turkish girl. Once O. told the story about her neighbours, who are grumbling loudly when they meet that she does not belong here. M. tells several school stories of her sons: Once, for example, the teacher insulted her six-year-old son in front of the whole class calling him a dirty pig.[14] The teacher of her elder son (of the German remedial classes, which he attended of his own choice) sent a letter to the local school authority notifying it of the son's inability to speak German. The teacher's preoccupation was caused by his quietness, which was interpreted as inability, but was due to the boy's shyness to say that he should be transferred to a higher level. N. remembered one day with a German friend, how at school in Munich's northern part in the 1980s they learned the German racist canon: "C-a-f-

13 Diakonie is the social welfare organisation of the Protestant churches in Germany and is responsible for all kinds of social work with all people regardless of age, sex and religious affiliation. Regarding the Centre's work, the respective headquarter of Diakonie offers additionally creative, technical and partial financial support to the projects.

14 This was also very harmful to the boy because, as M. told me, this is a very strong offence in the Muslim understanding. The boy was picking his nose.

f-e-e- Do not drink so much coffee. The Turk's drink …"[15] She reported her friend's reaction who considered the teaching of this song to Turkish kids at school as racist. (Talk with O., July 31, 2018; talk with M. and N., November 23, 2017)

Following Lugones (2010), we interpret the women's point of departure as a "fractured locus". It is fractured socially between their highly skilled professional background and their usually precarious, sometimes fragile integration into the labour market, which increases their vulnerability in front of familial and institutional power structures. The fracture produced by their experiences of being subjectified as the outsider (S. and O.), or the inferior (M.'s sons), or the exotic and uncanny (Turkish 'coffee'), on the one hand, and their subjective feeling and knowledge of being treated wrongly, on the other hand, is highly entangled. The women do not use the term racism to express these experiences, but they are aware of the affronts, of the stigmatizing othering — resisting it by ignoring it, such as in the case of O., or M., who is negotiating her son's situation at school, or N., who brings the critique into the public by delegating its expression to a German friend. These examples depict some of the women's everyday life "struggles of migration" (Scheel 2015), which they conduct almost silently and indiscernibly as a political action for others. They are dealing with the question of how to negotiate the dominant society's different practices of migrantisation in an "infrapolitical" way (Scott 1990: 184; Lugones 2010: 746), such as the refusal to recognise their foreign qualifications, the pressure to accept precarious contracts or the necessity of facing racist attitudes. It illustrates the women's permanent challenge to deal with the fractures determining their social lives after migration.

The Centre — as an urban space

The materiality and atmosphere of the Centre[16] created by the women's activities form the second element of the assemblage we will focus on here. The rooms' organisation, their design, such as the coloured walls, the furniture, plants and pictures, all is imbued with their imaginations and concerns, well-balanced between functional needs and their wish to create a welcoming, cosy atmosphere.

15 Our own translation of the original German text: "C-a-f-f-e-e- Trink nicht so viel Kaffee, nicht für Kinder ist der Türkentrank… " which was first published by Carl Gottlieb Hering in 1846.

16 The Centre is situated on the first two floors of a building constructed in the 1990s. It was built together with the whole neighbourhood on the northern edge of Munich reproducing the style of a garden city and, considering Munich's social housing construction regulations, offering equally social and middle-class as well as luxurious housing combined with different forms of ownership (private, corporate and communal).

> When residents come to have a consultation, book a room for a meeting or a private event, they sit in the main room around the big table quietly waiting to get help — like in a public office — but still different. When one of the women is passing by, she asks if everything is fine or she offers some water. The residents can come with each problem,[17] will hear about different possibilities, the demands and pitfalls of German administrations and will never experience any sanctions here. When I asked C. what she can do better than employees in public offices, she replied that she has no pressure of time and the staff in the public offices lack cultural knowledge. She is able to solve misunderstandings, language problems […] and she understands that German bureaucracy is difficult for most people who are not used to being confronted with so many letters and different deadlines. (Talk with C., February 6, 2018)

This short description illustrates that the residents' needs and the women's openness towards their problems come together in the Centre. The women's intentions to welcome, mediate and help, contribute to create a kind of safe space in the Centre, where the residents' problems will not be turned against them. We experienced a very paradigmatic example of the women's ability to imagine and create space in the Centre with the lunch gatherings: they were open to everybody, offering a healthy meal including the wide gastronomic possibilities between east and west for a fee depending on age and income.

> Usually a few more than 10 people are gathering around the table in the main room. Apart from the women and the cooks from the Centre, some children come around and some pensioners from the neighbourhood. Different languages go around the table, mostly Turkish and German, but, at the moment, Russian and Hungarian too. Other people come with boxes to get their ordered lunch for home. At one of the gatherings, one girl starts to talk about her math test and some of the lunch 'guests' starts to discuss her annoyance of having to study each day and encourage her. A. is praising the rice and asking the cooks for the Turkish way of preparing it; she admits that her husband is always joking about her rice. Everybody shares her rice cooking experiences and the way in which they organise the dinner preparations during the week, some together with their husbands, others more or less on their own. W. is a pensioner and is talking about her granddaughter, and is asked, which one. She replies, astonished, that she is talking about the Syrian refugee girl. A woman from the group of Turkish women joins the table. The group meets each

17 As C. and M. told me, the variety of problems people come with is big, including psychological and familial problems, problems with rent payments, dismissal from their flats, finding new affordable housing, getting a public rent subsidy or problems with making requests to and corresponding with public offices.

> week in the Centre; now they are in trouble with another group that uses the room afterwards who complained about how the first group had left it. She discusses the problem with S. and some other women from the Centre. I do not understand very much, just feel their excitement. S. gives me a summary of the debate that was about stereotypes, different perceptions of order and disorder, about mutual understanding and indulgence and the acceptance of the rules of the Centre.

These weekly lunch gatherings somehow show a very normal lunchtime gathering among people who talk about what is happening around them, their interests and dislikes. The particularity of this weekly lunch is that it brings together people with diverse knowledge of language and culture and different migration experiences. It is only when considering this fact against the backdrop of the "obsession" in the German public and politics with issues of migration and growing diversity nurturing a general public fear of its negative impact on social cohesion (Spielhaus 2018) that the significance of these gatherings can be properly assessed. The women manage to create a space where, despite all differences, it is possible to meet regularly, talk about matters of everyday life and debate common rules openly. Moments like this – emerging due to the women's imaginative and creative attitudes – are significant for the reconstruction/reshaping of the Centre into a space of emerging Vielheit, in the sense of Mark Terkessidis.[18] Different cultural backgrounds, languages, assumptions, demands and life concepts interact and shape encounters in the gatherings, characterised by the mutual interest about each other, the recognition of the other's right to alterity and the wish to act together. Emerging frictions and conflicts within the groups are taken as the starting point for negotiations about 'who one is, each of us' and 'how we want to be together'. This example is one central aspect of how the women give life to their idea of a neighbourhood centre.

Projects/resources – shaping society/performing citizenship

The Centre offers a variety of resources to the residents of the neighbourhood through its permanently accessible activities and temporal projects, such as access to information, networks and education. The assemblage, however, comprises further agents, for example, the headquarter of Diakonie in Munich's north,

18 German cultural theorist Mark Terkessidis describes the term Vielheit (which can be translated as multiplicity) as a notion to focus that society is constituted by many individuals, who themselves represent a bundle of differences, to counter, therewith, the dominant ideas of social norms, integration and deviation as mechanisms ensuring social cohesion – which makes it possible to think of a society as one of individuals acting together, negotiating and assembling their differences (2015: 126).

and the discourses, instruments and politics around migration/integration on the communal, regional and national scales. The Centre's projects and activities depend on the women's ability to gain the support of the responsible headquarter of Diakonie and the different political instruments at the communal, regional or national scale. Consequently, the ability to translate between everyday life matters unfolding on the local scale and different discourses, i.e. between needs, wishes and possibilities of the residents, and the wordings on the different scales where funding can be obtained is indispensable. This can be compared to what de Certeau describes as "to combine heterogeneous elements […] the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is 'seized'" (1988: xix), and what Scheel, following de Certeau, calls "struggles of migration" (2015: 10). Despite this "infrapolitical" way of struggle, the women's sense of 'autonomy'[19] is an important aspect. It is the prerequisite for making their own interpretations about the social reality, residents' needs, demands and wishes, and disclosing their limitations by the system of differential inclusion (Mezzadra/Neilson 2013), which is not providing all residents the same access to social, economic and political rights.

> During a talk, S. reflects on the media coverage of the quarter, which is mainly identified with "migrant" problems, which she does not consider as justly describing the residents' problem, rather their economic situation due to low incomes and scarce work possibilities. (Talk with S., June 6, 2017)

Based on these own interpretations, the projects work in two ways at the social border lines: firstly, they create offers for the small pockets – the tutoring, for example, is subsidised[20] and the consultations are free of charge. Secondly, they create jobs in the area, although temporary and precarious ones – the tutors, many consultants and the cooks are from the area. It is one part of how the women negotiate the consequences of migrantisation by creating an affordable access to knowledge, information and economic resources in the area, therewith, participating in reshaping society.

19 Scheel (2015: 9), following Samaddar (2005: 10), describes autonomy as the "liberty" to initiate a conflictive relation, i.e. producing a "tense encounter" according to Lugones, between migration and the different attempts to control it.

20 The tutoring courses in the pupils' project cost two Euros per session. The children are tutored for one and a half hours in groups of five or six in mathematics, the German language and homework.

> One day, a guest from Munich's city administration is visiting the Centre. S. presents different projects to her. After pointing to the school tutoring project for pupils from the area, the guest comments: "So the understanding of school attendance is different here." S. replies in a friendly way that it is not the understanding of school attendance which is problematic, but that people cannot afford the costs of private school tutoring if they wish it or if their children do not have grave school problems and do not belong to the group of social assistance recipients. (Observation, April 26, 2018)

The school tutoring project was a request of residents; it proves the degree of people's economic problems and their preoccupation with their children's school success, and not their ignorance – while the office worker's question is just one example of the misrecognition the women face in their everyday lives – of social problems interpreted as, in the context of 'migration', cultural or ethnic ones.

This example provides evidence of how the projects' work is dedicated to deconstructing racist argumentations and, therewith, to (re-)shaping the "tense encounters" that are produced by the process of subjectification of a part of the population as 'migrants' by the dominant majority and residents' subjectivities trying to resist the process in different ways. Hence, the women position themselves at the social fractures of the urban society with their thoughts, words, bodies and their professional aspirations, therewith, engaging in the collective *œuvre* of reshaping society and acting out their citizenship.

Concluding remarks: "tense encounters" in Leipzig and Munich from a relational comparative perspective

The aim of this last section is to discuss our analytical insights from a relational comparative lens. This enables us to overcome the 'classical' comparative bias which, when it comes to migration-related settings in East and West, easily reproduces a 'here more – there less' logic of linear development, being part of the overall logic of modernity. Munich, considered this way, would shine out as an example of the unfolding of an 'urban everyday diversity', while Leipzig, by contrast, would be declared as 'lagging behind' regarding migration and diversity, not as 'anchored' within the urban every day yet. While we do not deny the impact of different migration histories, durées and institutional embeddings in both settings, we, however, wish to argue in a different direction.

The postmigrant perspective addresses a particular societal tension between racialising, colonial-modernist invocations of people with migration histories as 'others' and recalcitrant/resistant acts and movements which, tenaciously, unfolding in different speeds and ways, expand participatory spaces in urban societies of

migration (Espahangizi et al. 2016: 17). As we could demonstrate, sites of encounter are revealed as sites where this tension is displayed. With the following reflections, we wish to showcase in what way the postmigrant perspective can benefit from a relational comparative analysis that allows a nuanced elaboration of how this tension unfolds differently according to (1) the settings of the encounter and (2) the discursive invocations at work.

Concerning (1), the Munich case, although being marked by temporariness, testifies to a rather firm, institutionalised assemblage within which migrantised women, their precariousness notwithstanding, play an active part in shaping the spatial and social conditions which underlie the encounters they create. By contrast, it seems as if the indeterminacy of boundaries which shapes the Women's Café in Leipzig – arranged between self-organised spaces of empowerment and the state, between precarious privacy and public political visibility – favours the reiteration of the 'colonial difference' around the Western category of 'woman' instead of fostering a space of mutual recognition and female solidarity.

Concerning (2), while the initiatives in Leipzig aim at fostering a 'welcoming space' with empowering qualities and, therewith, reaffirm the category of 'refugee women', the Munich example reveals a different practice of migrantisation, namely, the invocation of 'integrated' migrant women recruited in order to facilitate integration processes for fellow residents with migration histories. Both subjectivations, constructed along differences in status and degrees of recognition, recount colonial histories of othering in affirming the Western/European subject as the norm. Instead of mirroring different 'stages of development reached' by particular urban contexts regarding the dealing with migration, we consider that both of these discursive appellations, in their capacity to produce particular sites of encounter, intersect within our current urban societies of migration.

The "change of perspective" (Foroutan et al. 2018: 10) suggested by the postmigrant perspective, taking migration as a starting point for social analysis instead of problematising it along binary constructions, in our view, requires an analysis that departs from 'the local', understood as a "product and site of production of global assemblages" (Labor Migration 2014: 20). This "methodological 'return' into the social everyday of cities" (ibid.) allows us to retrace the range of "discursive figurations" (Foroutan et al. 2018: 10) or, as Espahangizi frames it, "discursive impertinence[s]" (2016: unpaged) that exist in parallel within our postmigrant urban societies. Accordingly, the example of Munich uncovers how different appellations, addressing 'integrated women' as well as 'migrant women', both shape the women's everyday lives, depending on the perception of their status whether as professionals or private persons. The practices of resistance used in both examples – politics of withdrawal and silence on the one hand, practices of enacting a 'normalcy' of diversity which brings forth a new space of conviviality, potentially reshaping society, on the other hand – differ not only regarding the politics of em-

powering subjectivation but equally the status the women hold in the particular setting.

Sites of encounter, beside the tensions they comprise – being "sites of both differentiation and hierarchisation" (Ahmed 2000: 167) – are, at the same time, sites of *labour*(ing): Our material demonstrates the wide range of practices that reflect the (affective) everyday labour of forging, creating and appropriating a society of migration. This labour occurs in the form of various acts of empowerment that lead to an enactment of citizenship drafted against logics of migrantisation and racialisation, as well as against acts of silencing amidst the prevalence of precarious conditions. A range of different tactical struggles are applied, such as the formulation of critique via unmarked residents or under the guise of irony, for example, withdrawal, adaptation, interruption or appropriating practices turning conviviality into a solidary and empowering practice, providing mutual support through economic resources and knowledge. Urban spaces of encounter, hence, also bear the potential of becoming affective spaces of learning and unlearning across different histories and intimacies (cf. Abu-Lughod 2010: 787). This is what the postmigrant perspective can gain from a relational analysis that integrates a decolonial stance. It is on this rather opening tone that we wish to end – instead of concluding – in quoting, once more, María Lugones, who asks: "How do we learn about each other without harming each other but with the courage to take up a weaving of the everyday that may reveal deep betrayals? How do we cross without taking over?" (2010: 755).

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