

## 7. Some practical thoughts

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In this chapter, I formulate a few practical thoughts about the findings of this research and the concept *Exploring Transversal Solidarities*. I do not pretend that I am the first or only one to have these thoughts. All the contrary. The very basis of my research are the knowledge forms I was allowed to encounter and learn about through the activists and groups in and beyond Hamburg. I learnt so much from activists from various contexts and from activist scholars with lived experiences that I have not all met personally—in particular BPoC, feminist, migrant and post-colonial activists and scholars. I want to give credit to all this knowledge!

In the following, I want to present some practical thoughts that I developed based on these knowledges and my analysis.<sup>1</sup> The practices I discuss here play an important role in many activist groups and are reflected on in activist and academic debates. They are in no way a prescription, have no chronological order and are certainly not all there is to say. I recognize that they are presented here in very short, potentially not sufficient, form and very directly shaped by my own positioning. They might therefore rather address privileged positionings in group contexts. These thoughts are not meant to stay fixed but ideally could change, adapt and evolve through adding further perspectives, experiences and positionalities.

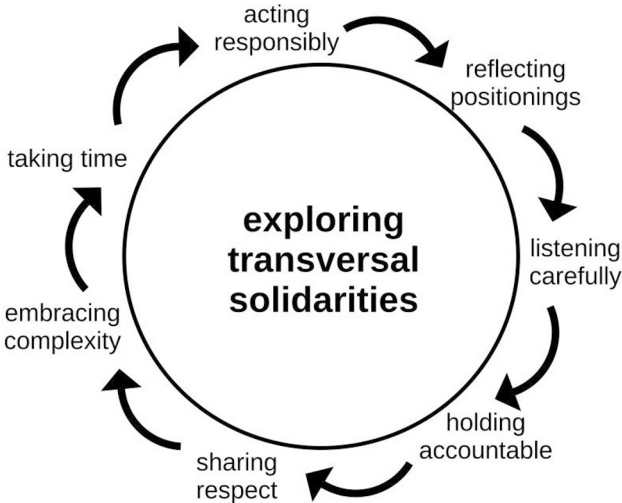
In this research, I explored how solidarities appear in migrant rights activism. My findings show that solidarities are difficult and sometimes exhausting. It is not a one-time decision to be solidary. Solidarities take a lot of

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<sup>1</sup> This publication is academic in its main purpose. Including this chapter with my condensed insights embraces that one goal of this kind of research should be to become accessible beyond academia, potentially even fruitful to movements, which potentially could still take yet another form.

communication and exchange. They include recognizing differences and embracing disagreements with the overarching aim of building solidary structures beyond these.

Figure 3: Visualization practical thoughts, by the author.



**Reflecting positionings**

“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not lead single-issue lives.” (Lorde, 1982)

We are all different from one another and each of us brings multiple positions, experiences, believes, values and goals. Some positionings come with more privileges and possibilities. I try to reflect my privileged positioning as a white, academic, cis woman holding a German passport. I have learnt how important it is to talk and think about this together. We want to fight together in a united way but there are always many struggles going on at the same time, as Audre Lorde writes, who self-identified as Black, lesbian, mother, warrior and poet. We need to consider the realities of racism, xenophobia, sexism, classism, ableism and many more. This does not mean only focusing on differences or doing all at once. If I focus too much on a difference, I might see

just that: I might see someone only as a refugee when she is of course a complex individual. Positioning stands for the various (assigned) social categories people find themselves in. It is not the same as identities, which we build as our stories, individually and collectively (Yuval-Davis, 2011). All of this is not clear-cut and can change over time. There is no better or worse. But it is important that I for myself think about what I bring and that as groups we talk about this as well. Who is here, who might be missing, who is active, who speaks, who organizes, who decides?

### **Listening carefully**

“If we had not taken our autonomy, we would not be here today. Because there really have been many organizations telling us that we could never win, that we could not win over public opinion because people were not ready to hear what we had to say.” (Cissé, 1996)

Madjiguène Cissé, an activist from the Sans Papiers movement, describes here how discouraging people who pretend to know better can be—and how wrong. I think that the quote shows that it is important to be open for understanding each other on multiple levels. Listening means not assuming that I already have the full picture. When I try to listen carefully and get into exchange with people, I try to understand and learn. Listening can also mean knowing when to shut up. This can be true for learning about people's experiences, accepting their expertise and giving space to who might otherwise often not be listened to. I think that it is valuable to create spaces where it is possible to exchange and share without being in a rush and without fear of being judged. For example, this can in a practical sense involve reminding ourselves to be patient to give translation its place in meetings and exchange. Listening can be hard. It can also be contradictory.

### **Holding accountable**

“[W]e see scholar-activism as productive and constructive, not critically distant. We acknowledge the challenges of movement building and the always negotiated and situated positionality of scholar activists within such processes. However, we believe that [...] scholar-activist practices [...] provide

opportunities to make positive contributions to an everyday politics of contention." (Routledge & Derickson, 2015, p. 404)

Structural privileges of all kinds can be problematic. However, it is not someone's individual fault to have them. The important thing is be(com)ing aware of them and trying to use them. In this quote, Paul Routledge and Kate Driscoll Derickson, two scholar-activists, describe their idea of this position. Using privileges is an on-going individual and collective process that probably never ends. I cannot expect anyone to educate me on my privileges. Holding accountable here mainly means trying to hold oneself accountable: what privileges do I have and how can I use them for sharing resources and changing things? It can also include being open to criticism, also when it is not comfortable. Questioning oneself about this and being receptive to be questioned about it is important. I think it is an opportunity to figure out and find ways of contributing and fighting together. Of course, it can be uncomfortable, challenging and destabilizing. But this is mostly how it is experienced by white, German, cis people. People with the lived experiences of all forms of discriminations face and experience these every day.

### **Sharing Respect**

"The solidarity called for is a solidarity that recognizes and respects their action as political participation, and as a radical demand for change. It enables a relationship of mutual support and protection that uses the security of the citizen, but does not reduce or subordinate the power of the migrant. Such solidarity is not easy; it requires a rethinking of protection, equality, and of protest itself." (Johnson, 2015, p. 16f.)

As this quote by researcher Heather Johnson raises, respect and solidarities have to do with mutuality. It means taking one another seriously and valuing the knowledge, exigencies and skills that each of us brings. If I do not have a certain experience, I should not pretend to know what it is like and cannot speak for it. If I do not agree with someone's view, I still respect her right to have and formulate it. If I have a certain idea of what is of value, I don't assume that there are no other valuable contributions. I think that this can mean naming differences and inequalities to understand how they influence our interactions. It can also mean, learning about them, even if they might

not be present in a certain setting. It means respecting many kinds of knowledges (e.g., not just academic). It also means that I try not to reduce people to just one of their characteristics: everyone contributes things and seeing and strengthening this is what fighting together is about.

### **Embracing complexity**

“Whereas binary thinking is central to systems of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and sexism that focus on sorting and ranking populations into non-overlapping categories, relational thinking emphasizes connections among and across these categories.” (Hill Collins, 2010, p. 23)

The world is obviously not simple. It comes with contradictions and ambiguity. Patricia Hill Collins says here that most systems of oppression are based on building two different categories that are presented as excluding each other, for example: Black/white, male/female, citizen/non-citizen, rational/emotional. Embracing reality means accepting that nothing is that easy. I can be discriminated in one way and be privileged in another one. Everyone unites various identities and they can change over time. Embracing this also comes with accepting feelings that might cause in me: fear, anger, uncertainty, surprise, etc. I have seen groups do this by addressing feelings and giving them space, by not avoiding disagreements. It is important to accept various ideas but engaging them in constructive ways. I think that embracing complexity means building an atmosphere of trust. But it also raises that we are often unaware of complexities. Just because someone engages in a certain context and is open to learn about one issue, she is not automatically aware of or open to various other struggles. This is where it goes back to being open to learning through exchange with many people and embracing that there is no *one* solution.

### **Taking time**

“That internal critique is essential to any politics of transformation. Just as our lives are not fixed or static but always changing, our theory must remain fluid, open, responsive to new information.” (hooks, 2000b, p. xiii)

All of this takes energy, willingness and especially time. bell hooks writes here that in order to change things in the world, we must be willing to change

ourselves. That's not easy and it takes time. There is always too little time. Because there are urgent pressing issues and situations, needing priority. Because there are too many things happening at the same time. I think that it is very valuable to take time for taking care of ourselves and each other. This does not only take place in groups, but it can be part of them. For me, taking time means taking time for multiple things and valuing them by explicitly *making* time, even when there seems to be none. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that people have distinct times and urgencies. As a privileged person, I cannot expect anyone to sit and reflect with me when there are urgent living situations needing action and practical change. This tension cannot really be solved. Taking time involves being aware of this and valuing the time everyone makes.

### **Acting responsibly**

"[I]t is not enough to think about political subjectivity traversing frontiers. It is not enough to document acts that institute subjects without frontiers. It is not enough to interpret these acts through histories (or by giving them histories) that open up ways of enacting citizenship beyond the state and nation. My aim is also to participate in creating or constructing a field in which a new figure can acquire capacities to act as a citizen." (Isin, 2012, p. 9)

Practices are not just about reflection and communication but also about acting. Acting can take very different forms depending on where you stand. First, it can be the decision to act. It can be speaking up about an injustice or creating public visibility, for example through art. It can be trying to change my personal situation. It can be contributing my own expertise to a group. It can be building relationships with each other. Above all, it means seeing that I have a place in this and becoming active. Engin Isin is a scholar who, among other things, writes about political acts of citizenship beyond borders. In this quote he says that thinking, documenting and analyzing is not enough because he wants to participate in bringing political change, which he works on by linking academia, art and activism. Acting can take many forms and maybe these differ for people. I think that all the previous elements are part of and needed for acting. Doing this responsibly means that, before and when acting, I should pay attention to how I interact with others. Acting also brings acting in wrong or bad ways sometimes, making mistakes. This does not limit the importance of acting. Actually, acknowledging mistakes and learning from

them even reinforce it. Solidarities need acting to develop and always take new shapes.

