

## ***I am not a politicized migrant!* Transnational studies and transversal strategies among political activists in Vienna, Austria**

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**Abstract.** This article is concerned with the questions that have been given much less attention in political and nationalism studies as how people with transnational relations and multiple belongings deal with ethnicity, nationality, and gender, and how they, given their multiple connectedness, criticize nationalism, essentialism, and racism. In this context, I am interested in biographical narrations, informal networking and political strategies used by Austrian citizens with Turkish backgrounds who are involved in local, national and transnational contexts. The multiplicity of connectedness expressed in biographical narratives and networks leads to the complexity of claims for justice.

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**Key Words:** Transnational political activists, Muslim minority in Austria

### **1. Introduction**

Whenever Austria was represented on the front pages of the world press during the last decades, outraged debates on nationalist concerns have been at issue. While, in 1986, the revelation of Kurt Waldheim's (former UN General Secretary) involvement in World War II and the gap in his memory caused attention, in 2000 it was the participation of the right-wing Freedom Party (FP) in the federal government, which entailed anxiety across borders. Though the FP has its roots in the Austrian 'Deutschnationalen Lager' (Pelinka 1990) and in the local traditions of 'frontier orientalism' (Gingrich 1998), its success is based not only on the appeal of nationalism, but rather on the 'catch-all' right-wing populism of the Post Cold War era in Western democracies. Inventing and stressing 'threats', such as immigration flows, abuse of social welfare schemes or the imminent enlargement of the European Union, the FP was successful in articulating new identities and

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splitting the society into *us* ‘decent and hard-working’ Austrians and *them* aliens, foreigners (Reinfeldt 2000)<sup>1</sup>. One of the antipodes of the ‘decent Austrian’ is represented by the figure of the ‘non-European Muslim, not prepared to be integrated’ (Harald Ofner)<sup>2</sup>. While, in 2000, the Freedom Party’s taking governmental power caused fierce critique and the imposition of sanctions against the Austrian government by the European Union<sup>3</sup>, various right-wing populist parties are rising (and collapsing) all over Europe, today.

The FP’s success, in 1999, not only re-confirmed the world’s view of Austria as a racist country, it also opened a window of opportunity and gave rise to a new wave of anti-racist movement<sup>4</sup>. A movement again and again challenged, however, by migrant and Muslim minorities’ claims for recognition and self-representation.<sup>5</sup> Political visibility and media representation of “new citizens” has increased, and all four parliamentary parties nominated a total of 29 candidates with migrant background for the national elections 2002.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the introduction, in Vienna, of

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<sup>1</sup> Reinfeldt elaborated an ideological square for his discourse analysis of the FP: us (decent, hard working, FP), them (aliens, foreigners), those (policy makers) and not those (other Austrians) (Reinfeldt 2000: 189).

<sup>2</sup> In: “Zur Sache”, Nov. 14, 1999, Austrian National Broadcasting. An “Initiative österreichischer MuslimInnen” (Initiative of Austrian Muslims) was, according to its members, triggered off by this program.

<sup>3</sup> The formation of the Austrian government in 2000 accelerated the adoption, in July 2000, by the Council of the Ministers of Justice, of the Directives accompanying Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty aiming to combat racist discrimination. (Paper presented by Vera Egenberger, Director of ENAR (European Network against Racism), Bonn 15.2. 2002)

<sup>4</sup> I would argue with Cathy Lloyd, that „we need to go beyond the commonly held concept of anti-racism as being solely oppositional, and to focus on how anti-racists organize, what they stand for and what they do.” (2000: 394, 395)

<sup>5</sup> Anti-racism was fueled, in 1999, by the death of Markus Omufuma during his forced deportation to Bucharest and, again, by the Freedom Party’s success in the national elections of October 1999. Perception of this protest movement by the public and the media was evoked by the first large demonstration on February 19, 2000 using the slogan *No coalition with racism*, and which was staged as a protest against the government. Throughout the whole term of office of the government, the “Thursday Demonstrations” constituted a continual sign of ‘resistance’.

<sup>6</sup> Racism in its various institutional and every-day guises did not disappear. A comparison of integration policies shows that Austria ranks behind the other EU countries (Davy 2001, Waldrauch 2001). Since the past legislative period, which brought an amendment to the legislation on aliens and the employment of foreigners,

the right to vote in local elections for third country nationals has been fiercely attacked by the FP. Neither are there plans to facilitate access to Austrian citizenship for this group of people.<sup>7</sup> Against all evidence to the contrary, the FP continues to maintain, in its political program, that Austria is not an immigration country, and claims that this country has a right to preserve its “occidental culture” on the local and regional levels.<sup>8</sup> Against this background, my interest does not lie in the populist discourse of the FP (Reinfeldt 2000), or in psychological or biographical details concerning Mr. Haider (Ottomayer 2000, Gingrich 2001); neither do I concentrate on the barriers to integration (Davy 2001, Waldrauch 2001) or on the anti-racist protest movement as a whole (Baker/Boyer 2002, Milena Verlag 2000). My main interest focuses on political activists with transnational biographies, their belongings as well as their agency.

Why and how national identities again and again, rouse emotions in people with different political convictions and even across borders (long distance nationalism), is one of the issues dealt with by transnational studies (Glick-Schiller/Fouron 2002, Anderson 1998, Panagakos 1998). However, much less attention is given to the questions how people with transnational relations and multiple belongings deal with ethnicity, nationality, and gender, and how they, given their multiple connectedness, criticize nationalism, essentialism, and racism. In this context, I am interested in biographical narrations, informal networking and political strategies used by Austrian citizens with Turkish backgrounds who are involved in local, national and transnational contexts. The multiplicity of connectedness

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the Austrian government has reconfirmed the ‘gastarbeiter regime’. The so called “Integration Agreement” came into force as per January 1, 2003 and contains, in addition to sanctions for migrants who do not successfully pass mandatory German language courses, also provisions governing seasonal work, which again supports ‘rotation’ of new immigrants instead of a regulation of social and political rights.

<sup>7</sup> On the analysis of citizenship and suffrage in the immigration society see Bauböck (2002), international comparison of citizenship see Cinar (1994). Austria still has requirements of renunciation of a previous citizenship, sufficient income, the loyalty towards the Republic of Austria, and of no damage to law and order before naturalization. The required period of residence is 10 years and due to the principle of *ius sanguinis* children born in the country have no entitlement to citizenship.

<sup>8</sup> FPÖ Party Program 2003, see <http://www.fpoe.at> (download Jan. 28, 2003).

expressed in biographical narratives and networks leads to the complexity of claims for justice<sup>9</sup>.

I will introduce one of three case studies I worked on during the last few years.<sup>10</sup> All of them comprise interfaces of overlapping but separate political and social contexts basically representing 1) laical cosmopolitanism and anti-discrimination policy, 2) transnational Islam and claims for recognition, and 3) left-wing (Kurdish) internationalism and redistribution. Activists in these contexts share interests in the fields of migration policy, citizenship and nationality. They combat nationalism and racism in Austria and are also dealing with questions of nationalism, human and minority rights or humanitarian needs in Turkey. In this paper, I will first sketch my theoretical framework and then address Nihal Aybar's *biography of belonging*, her transnational social relations, her *transversal networks* as well as an example of anti-essentialist *strategies of place making*.

## 2. Transnational studies and grassroots politics

As a matter of fact, national institutions (not only) of Western immigration countries are increasingly confronted with claims for recognition of differences and the diversification of political communities. Apart from uncontrolled global economies, supranational organizations, international human rights debates, and transnational NGOs' claims for the recognition of multiple belongings and transnational political relations also question the sovereignty of nation-states and raise doubts about normative principles of democracy.

Following the core insights of anthropological studies on political transnationalism from below, 'transmigrants' were expected to challenge the nation-state by their translocal identities, and unpredictable movements (cf.

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<sup>9</sup> Wimmer/Glick Schiller point to the history and importance of methodological nationalism and warn against the danger couched in the perpetuation of nationalism by scholars in the field of transnational research, which, it is true, does not assume territorially bounded, integral entities, but nevertheless pays too little attention to differences and new forms of power hierarchy in transnational relations and, consequently, contributes to homogenization. (2001: 26)

<sup>10</sup> Field research and interviews took place between October 1999 and November 2002, the period between two national elections, and thus the Austrian Freedom Party's rise and fall.

Kearney 1995, 1996; Appadurai 1996). Transnational approaches did reject assumptions of assimilation of migrant minorities and pointed to new social and political formations such as ‘new neighborhoods’ (Appadurai 1996), ‘transnational migrant circuits’ (Rouse 1991), ‘transnational communities’ (Portes et al. 1999) or ‘deterritorialized nation-states’ (Glick Schiller 1995). Recent contributors (living in a world still dominated by nation-states) are suspicious of assumptions of postnational memberships (Glick Schiller 1999), and are rather hesitant to celebrate empowering and liberating effects of grassroots globalization (Smith 1994, Mahler 1998, Mahler/Pessar 2001). Main contributions to the field of transnational studies concentrate on the complexity of global flows, dynamics of nation-states and interconnectedness, but rarely include feminist theoretical approaches toward multiplicity and intersectionality. Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001), concerned about this development, aim at offering a framework for feminist methodological research strategies in the field of transnational studies. They define gender as a process experienced through institutions from family to state and intersected with ethnicity, class and nationality. For the term ‘transnational’ they follow Glick Schiller and discuss “*political, economic, social and cultural processes that extend beyond borders of a particular state, include actors that are not states, but are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of states.*” (Glick Schiller 1999: 96) Mahler and Pessar focus on ‘gendered geographies of power’ to grasp new social relations, situatedness, and agency in multiple social and spatial scales, in which conceptions of the body, the family or the state are reconfirmed or reconfigured, respectively. Following Doreen Massey’s (1994) concept of ‘power geometry’, Mahler and Pessar discuss power over transnational flows, access to resources, mobility as well as individual skills. They claim “*for analyzing people’s social agency – corporal and cognitive – given their own initiative as well as their positioning within multiple hierarchies of power operative within and across many terrains.*” (Mahler/Pessar 2001: 447)

While the authors take into account the complexity of these issues in their framework and are well aware of the twofold meaning of social and spatial positionality as well as of agency in ‘gendered geographies of power’, they ultimately re-emphasize the “*particular circumstances that a particular group of people experience*” (Mahler/Pessar 2001: 447) as the field of investigation of transnationalism. However, in my opinion this exclusive preoccupation with groups necessarily homogenizes (even though across borders) various forms of positionality and experiences. Social,

political, or cultural relations across borders show not only collective but also individual peculiarities and keep changing on account of certain events, junctures and disjunctures, delightful moments and frustration in the paths of lives and across borders. What is more, it is not only national identities and various forms of nationalism that are upheld or reshaped across borders, but also non- and anti-nationalist perspectives that develop through social, political, or family relations across borders (depending on and varying with class, gender, and nationality). As I am interested in feminist approaches to situatedness and agency as well as in the constantly shifting intersections of differences within transnational contexts, my contribution addresses transnational relations and political mobilization not from the perspective of communities or groups but rather from the perspective of contextualized biographical narratives.

Biographical narratives across borders and boundaries offer insight into various meanings and dynamics of translocal belonging and migrant minorities' politics in receiving as well as in sending countries. *The distinction which is commonly made between participation in a host state polity and practices directed toward transforming the home state is an artificial one.* (Adamson 2002: 155) Biographies seem to be an appropriate approach to avoid this artificial distinction in migrant minority politics.

### **3. Translocal ethnography: constructing the field**

According to Vered Amid (2000) anthropology is still validated as a separate discipline through fieldwork, an activity in which the ethnographer is expected to "enter" and "leave" a certain field. But since "the field" in the context of globalization is translocal and dispersed, it is not simply there to be entered but it has to be constructed. Since February 2000 I interviewed political activists with Turkish backgrounds on several occasions to learn about their biographies and their localizations. I used "Biographies of Belonging" to draw up the ethnographic field of "transversal networks", and field research within these different networks seems appropriate to understand their "strategies of place making".

1. *Biographies of Belonging* are meant to offer insight into intertwined processes of belonging along gender, class, nationality and ethnicity as well as into translocal connectedness. How do individuals with multiple belongings represent their complex situation? Where in their social spaces across borders do they locate themselves and where or how do they feel at

home? How do they build common paths and alliances, how do they experience conflicts, subordination and dominance along a shared knowledge at different sites? How can we understand political strategies through narrations of desire, ruptures and disappointment? Biographical narrations make visible social connectedness and thus local and translocal social and political “sites” for fieldwork.

2. *Transversal networking* of activists expresses positionalities as well as claims for recognition and assertion. Against what background and according to which interests are those networks built up, and why are certain existing networks more and others less attractive to certain migrant activists? Which of their desires and disappointments are represented by which nodes of these networks? How do shared experiences or different positionalities strengthen or weaken nodes, links, and the different networks as a whole?

3. Formal and informal political networks aim at criticizing different faces of oppression (exclusion, discrimination, subordination, assimilation, homogenization, and maldistribution), and claim for recognition of their identities as well as interests. What kind of *strategies of making place* are important within the different networks? Are social and cultural identities at the core of their interests or do they strategically use collectivities for their individual and shared interests? Do they even reject ascribed identities and performatively reconstruct them? Under which conditions do they long for acknowledgement of group identities or aim at individual human rights or redistribution of wealth? How do they tackle dominant patterns of normality and attract public support or sympathy? How do their activities question naturalized isomorphism of cultural and territorial entities; and do they challenge right-wing populism?

*Biographies of belonging* in this approach are used to contribute to the construction of the ethnographic field in a world of motion. Narrations offer insight into representations of connectedness and nodes of meaning. Field research in these nodes or *transversal networks* pointed at in narrations are expected to represent examples of multi-stranded strategies of migrant minorities’ political, social and cultural participation in different local contexts. The study of *place making* may reveal different and similar strategies of claims. The present contribution is not meant to follow all the questions mentioned above, but to give an example of positionality, agency and transnational connectedness and thus to push forward arguments for the

inclusion of feminist theories as well as of biographical approaches to the frame and fieldwork of transnational studies.

#### 4. Nihal Aybar: Differences as normality

A Greek turn-of-the-century house on the Turkish Black Sea coast (*Soğuksu*), an owner-occupied apartment in the kemalist-bourgeois center of Istanbul (*Gümüşsuyu*), close to the home of her mother and sister, and a rented apartment in the solid middle-class eighth district of Vienna; all this Nihal Aybar can call her own. In her biographical narratives, Nihal, again and again joins these places to construct one single space and tries to obliterate the geographical distance between these places. When in Vienna, she scans the headlines of TRTint (the Turkish channel on cable TV) at least once a day in order to be sure that her family is alright. Her mother has a residence permit for Austria and spends several weeks per year in Vienna. When her mother stays in Istanbul, Nihal calls her rather often to discuss everyday issues or the latest theater and movie programs. She exchanges job-related and private news with her sister via e-mail or telephone, often goes to Istanbul, even for a few days, and spends between three weeks and three months per year on the coast of the Black Sea, the *paradise* of her childhood.

The Aybars usually spent winters in Istanbul or abroad and summers in their Greek house in Trabzon. Men still are involved in local politics and in social and cultural life, whereas female relatives tend to live in Istanbul or European cities. Nihal went to the Austrian college in Istanbul at the age of 11 and came to Vienna University in 1985.

#### *Vienna or Schönbrunn castle lost*

In Nihal's expectations, Vienna had always been a city of castles and parks. She never had been particularly interested in the country and its history, although she went to an Austrian high school, but acquired some knowledge during tourist trips with her parents. She had a perfect command of the German language, her plan to stay in the country only for the duration of her studies was absolutely definite, and her interest in Austria was rather limited. Her first experiences nevertheless caused a crack in her personality: *When I came to Vienna, I was an absolutely self-assured woman [...] I felt rejected, [her voice breaking] somehow put 'in my place' by people. Meaning, I'm not from here. That's what made me feel uncertain in Austria. As class and school spokeswoman, she was used to speak in public. And now, what I'd*

*like most is to be invisible.* At the university, though, she met with sympathy again and again: One professor suggested she should sit in the front rows of the lecture hall, so he can better understand her; after all she was a foreigner, she certainly would have problems with the language. When she presented a paper in a seminar, the other students did not ask any questions, probably thinking:

*Oh dear, this poor girl has a hard time, anyway!  
No matter how you get involved, how good or poor your performance, it's got nothing to do with your reality; it's the image he's made for himself, his projection, and you can't change it.*

The year in commemoration of Austria's *anschluss* to Nazi-Germany 1988, the Waldheim affair, and seminars at the institute of philosophy aroused her interest in National Socialism. All of a sudden, this became the only topic she was interested in.

*When I think back I have the impression, this obsession that had seized me clearly was caused by how I felt here: definitely not good. Well, of course, I did sense the exclusion, this omnipresent attitude here, then still called xenophobia; and I guess, I was desperately looking for something that would legitimize my anger about my being excluded. Something proving to me, I am right, I do not only imagine that they treat me bad in this country; now, quite crassly, these Austrians are terrible people anyway: okay, just look at what they have done. And, whenever I learned something new to me, in literature, films and so on, [whispering] there you are, so brutal, even more brutal, even more brutal, - well, they were horrible, - quite natural that they still behave as they do.*

She insinuated that Austrians shared a xenophobic and racist potential, which, as was the case during the Nazi regime, might have fatal consequences. This enabled her to free herself from her position on the fringes of society by means of acting. She considered this interest, this 'obsession', and her way of looking at these issues a remedy against the exclusion and debasement she was experiencing. It was then that she started to show visitors from Turkey (friends and family) the 'death stair' of Mauthausen concentration camp instead of Schönbrunn castle and its parks.

The Gulf War of 1991, racist riots in Germany (Möln, Solingen, Rostock-Lichtenhagen), the letter bombs against human rights activists in

Austria<sup>11</sup> led her deeper and deeper into the study of racism. This *obsession* enabled her to digest her situation and to develop a personal strategic ‘action plan’. Her criticism of a largely indifferent public, but also of her fellow activists in the anti-racist movement grew harsher. Her friends started teasing her and called her *anti-racism police squad*. She noticed that she appeared ridiculous to others and tried to adapt to the demands of her friends and to enjoy *the beautiful things in life* as well. However, again and again, she stumbled upon evidence of racism in institutions and day-to-day life. And instances of right-wing extremism flaring up in Germany and Austria, Markus Omufuma’s violent death on May 1, 1999 and the result of the negotiations prior to the formation of the government in January 2000 seemed to confirm her perspective.

Apart from the large-scale demonstrations and the ‘city walks’<sup>12</sup> in Vienna, new initiatives and associations against racism and discrimination were founded in Austria. Nihal actively took part in the protests, participated in the organization of rallies, and intensified her public appearances. Together with other political activists, she denounced the anti-racist movement as always looking upon migrants as objects, not as subjects of the extra-parliamentary opposition.<sup>13</sup>

***Transversal networks: Between political home and the network of the migration industry***

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<sup>11</sup> Between 1993 and 1996 several persons were injured by letter bombs; a pipe-bomb placed at the village of Oberwarth, province of Burgenland, killed four Roma. Accompanying letters were signed by some “*Bajuvarische Befreiungsfront*” and “*Graf Rüdiger von Starhemberg*”, leader of the fight against the Turkish Siege of Vienna in 1683.

<sup>12</sup> After the formation of a government by the OEVP and Haider’s FPÖ in February 2000, several thousand people took part in demonstrations each Thursday, walking through the City on constantly changing routes; information on the routes was made available mainly via Internet and private radio stations. On account of the fact that the FPÖ was able to increase their share of the votes through an ‘anti-alien election campaign’, anti-racism, in addition to the more general concept of ‘resistance’ (against the government) became a crucial element in the mobilization of these demonstrations.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Format Nr. 25, June 18, 2001.

While still studying at the university, Nihal began to work as a “Turkish speaking adviser” in an advice center for female migrants. First, this was just another job for her, which she could do without special training and without major commitment. Being bilingual was considered a sufficient qualification, at the time; in addition, Nihal had her own experiences with applications for visa and for citizenship, respectively.

She liked working with the women of the team, but she did not feel at home in the field of social work, and, compared to her colleagues, not suited for the job. When, after the completion of her studies, she decided not to go back to Trabzon, Turkey, she wanted to stay with the advice center and was looking for new goals and new tasks.

An invitation to participate in an anti-racism workshop for a feminist conference for young women confronted her with a double challenge. It was the first time she was to lead a workshop, on top of that a workshop on *her* topic. In addition, her feminist colleagues invited her explicitly as *migrant woman*. *This proposal, “A migrant woman should be in it” is still haunting me to this day.* Nihal feels similarly reduced by the demand that it is imperative that a woman or even a Turkish woman participate in the meeting.

*Well, actually, it is positive that they always say: “Please, do come, we need a migrant to take part.” But, whenever this happens, my feelings are like: “They invite me only because I am a migrant woman.” [...] They do not invite me as Nihal, but as a migrant woman. Emotionally, I have problems with this situation.*

Today, she sees her work in the advice center for women migrants as political activism against everyday, structural, and institutional racism. She does not work with the women affected, but with the majority of society. Workshops for the staff of advice centers, women’s refuges, or the police serve to *open people’s eyes, to confront participants with their own attitudes and hidden assumptions. Without self-reflection and conscious perception of one’s own entanglement in racist power relations any work in the field of anti-racism will yield no results whatsoever*, she states. Nihal not only turned the power relations that had caused her exclusion upside down and, as senior employee, informs and instructs representatives of the ‘majority’, she also is head of an NGO and substantially defines the tasks to be implemented. On

account of this specific involvement, anti-racist work acquired a prominent position it does not have in any other comparable NGO.

When the new Austrian government was formed in February 2000, Nihal felt that this form of political work in the service sector did not satisfy her anymore. Now, an increasing number of people ask her for interviews and want her to organize workshops; however, with the increasing interest on the part of the public Nihal's commitment to the job is waning. Her interest concentrates increasingly on political involvement, public intervention and anti-racist strategies, which she is able to realize through her work in a transversal protest group and a transnational pressure group. As far as her jobs are concerned, she keeps looking for new challenges and currently is working on an EU program on anti-racism. Her involvement through her own experience of racism and, as a consequence, her way of acting give a new orientation to the life of this self-assured woman from the Turkish upper class; this orientation cannot be understood without taking into account Nihal's positionality in her transnational biography.

### ***Cosmopolitanism and class issues***

Nihal Aybar comes from a well established family living in an Eastern town of Turkey. Her mother's family was involved in the nation building process in the early 30s in Ankara and is still dedicated to Atatürk's traditions of education, cultural norms and social behavior. Her father's family has been interested in international trade and education for generations. They were less concerned with the Turkish nation, but rather interested in local and translocal trade. The dividing line between republican nationalism and Ottoman cosmopolitanism ran right through the family.

The Greek turn-of-the-century house represents Nihal's place of longing, *not Turkey, not Istanbul, and not Trabzon; it is this house. If I have a longing for a particular place, it's this house with this garden.* This house in *Soğuksu* constitutes the center of long-distance relations for the Aybars. It was planned, like some other Greek houses southwest of Trabzon, around the turn of the century by Konstantin Kapayanidis. He was banker and ship owner and, at the time, was considered a possible candidate for the

presidency of a potential Pontic Republic<sup>14</sup>; he was then one of the richest tradesmen of the seaport and, like all Pontic Greeks<sup>15</sup>, had to leave the country when the Ottoman Empire declined and the Turkish Republic was founded.<sup>16</sup>

The friendship between the grandfather and the Greek – at a time of military conflict between the various ethnic-religious groups in the region – can be understood only if shared economic interests and ideological roots of Ottoman upper classes are also taken into account. The extended family in Trabzon represented local upper classes orientated towards a multi-ethnic empire, while the mother's family in Ankara stands for the young nation and its further development.<sup>17</sup> The close ties between the two families were

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<sup>14</sup> After the capitulation of 1918, the Allies envisaged the foundation of a Greek-Pontic state around Trabzon. (Keskin 1981: 51).

<sup>15</sup> Data on the size of the Greek-Pontic population (*Rum*) of Trabzon and the Pontus diverge widely. Kiepert, in his maps of 1890, gave a number of 4090 households for the province of Trabzon; official statistics of 1901 counted 51,029 persons (Trabzon Salnamesine, annual report); at the Paris Conference Hrisantos, Metropolitan of Trabzon gave a total population of 500,000 for the province. Ilyas Karagöz (1998: 126), after analysis of all data estimates that some 47,000 to 48,000 *Rum* lived in the province and some 600,000 on the Pontus, at the time. According to Clogg (1997: 121), approx. 600,000 Greeks lived in Southern Russia and on the Pontus.

<sup>16</sup> On Mai 15, 1919 Greek forces, with the support of the Allies, occupied Smyrna (Izmir). This further fueled Turkish nationalism and triggered the war of liberation (1919-1922). The Greek troops suffered a crushing defeat; the Allies who had declared themselves neutral during this military conflict sought to re-establish peace through "ethnic unmixing". Only in the face of territorial losses did Anatolia become the mother country of the Turks, and being Turkish became a national identity. National independence movements by the Armenian and Greek population on the Pontus aggravated tensions, which finally vented themselves in the cruel *Kurtuluş Savaşı* (War of Independence) (Mardin 1997)

<sup>17</sup> After World War I, Anatolia was still divided into two camps, on the one hand, there was Istanbul with the Sultan, supported by local, Islam-oriented notables and, on the other hand, there was Ankara, the center of the independence movement, which was supported predominantly by Turks, Kurds, and bureaucrats oriented towards the West. All of them wanted democracy, however, the question whether such democracy should be based on the will of God or on the will of the people remained contested. (Mardin 1997) The differences between these orientations prevailing within the upper classes manifested themselves again and again even after the return to a multi-party system. The ideological fight between the CHP and the DP in the 1950s is an expression of these differences as is the repeated seizure of

mainly based on their shared interest in ‘western’ education. In the subsequent generation, the two families came still closer to each other on account of their belonging to the Turkish upper classes. Mobility, translocal positioning, and the special importance attributed to the education of young women, which has existed for generations, are conspicuous in the biographies of the families; however, this matrix constitutes a normality in the Turkish upper classes. While the gender relations in Turkey are clearly hierarchical, the Turkish upper classes are particularly concerned about the education and the job opportunities of the daughters. The high proportion of women lawyers and physicians, too, shows the effects of Kemalism, in particular in the Turkish upper classes.<sup>18</sup>

A glance at the history of the Aybars also shows how ‘good taste’, especially education and a western orientation, helped to secure the privileges of the upper classes. The alliance of the ruling class as opposed to the “uneducated villagers” (*köylü*), the Turkish tradition of “subtle differences” leads to a long-term schism in society, which expresses itself in the construction of political antagonism: laical-Kemalist upper classes, Islam-oriented middle and lower classes, and discriminated or persecuted minorities.

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power by the military, which tried to keep the state on a Western capitalist, though Kemalist course.

<sup>18</sup> Ayşe Öncü (1985) attributes this above-average proportion of women in highly qualified professions to the low level of industrialization in Turkey, which entails a lack of jobs for women from lower social strata. Turkish and Kurdish women from lower classes compete with each other for low-wage jobs in the households of the upper classes. This cheap workforce provides women of the upper classes, in addition to a better point of departure for university studies and professional training, with an additional scope for developing their abilities and better career opportunities. In the course of the past few years, women from post-communist countries, especially from Moldova Turkic-speaking Gagauz have increasingly ousted women from Turkish and Kurdish lower classes from these jobs and work virtually round the clock (even after the economic crisis of 1999) and for still lower wages as nursemaids or old people’s nurses in the households. Migration, in particular from neighboring countries in the East, has set off debates, in Austria, as well, on the importance of migrant (women) for domestic work, for the career opportunities of women, and for gender relations in Europe (Momsen 1999, Anthias/Lazaridis 2000), and particularly in Austria (Boidi 1999). As naturally as families tend their houses and gardens in Soğuksu, Nihal Aybar does her household chores in Vienna by herself. She mentioned this fact only after I had explicitly asked her about the division of labor in her Viennese household.

Nihal's experience of exclusion and her political strategies of transnational and local policies in Austria are interlaced with her positionality in Turkish society. The driving beat of imaginations in everyday life through unexpected encounters (Appadurai 1996) itself is intersected by habitual continuities such as a history oriented towards cosmopolitanism, a Europe constructed as a superior entity, an elitist system of education awarding tickets to the key positions in society, and various forms of nationalism with certain, differing images of *the* Turkish Woman. While gender differences within the upper classes can be neutralized, more often than not, by shared privileges, the distance to local lower classes keeps increasing on account of a nationally uniform, but highly selective system of education. The intellectual Turkish group in Austria can be sure of the privileges they enjoy as compared to migrant workers, however, they are also painfully aware of these privileges. For them, migrant workers form a "reference point" for their "being Turkish" in Austria. "Intellectual migrants" from Turkey are confronted, in Austria, with mutually contradicting subject positions, which, depending on place of residence, economic situation, and political anchoring have to be rearranged or re-scribed again and again.

### ***Belonging and nationalisms***

Nihal is an Austrian citizen, speaks Turkish, German, and English, travels a lot and has been living in Vienna since 1985, but she is certain that she still is a Trabzonian. There, she is accepted as the daughter of a respectable citizen whom everybody knows. *There, I am somebody!* Owing to her international education in Istanbul she came, at the age of eleven, to a place, which was to make her something special and, with strictness and discipline, created the basis for a successful career. She was proud of her opportunities and had internalized a western orientation and, especially, western education as superior to the Turkish one. True, in Istanbul she is not known by everybody, but she is not being discriminated against. This young, self-assured woman who comes from a good family and enjoys all accompanying privileges, for the first time experiences ignorance and debasement in Austria on account of her being Turkish – in spite of her privileged position. Not only that nobody takes great notice of her in Austria: She feels identified and compartmentalized. What is more, her name and her accent confuse people, and her being special is always put in relation to other Turks. People often comment on her clearly western clothing style, her excellent German

(for a Turkish woman) and are surprised that she is “so emancipated”. However, it is not the Austrian upper classes used as a yardstick here, but the Turkish lower classes. Nihal does not want sympathy nor admiration, what she wants is recognition of her capabilities and her achievements. She does not want to be seen as *politicized migrant* and be classed with the category of a rare species (token), but appreciated as a politically active person, different but equal.

The fact that her being special coincides with the markers of the the upper classes, which privilege her compared with other people fighting for a decent place in Austrian society, constitutes a self-evident fact not worthy of discussion. Her criticism focuses on racist politics and nationalist strategies. She does question national entities and personally criticizes and deplores the persecution of minorities in Turkey in history and the present time. However, economic equality or support on account of economic discrimination are not prioritarian issues, i.e. these inequalities are attributed to racism.<sup>19</sup> She categorically repudiates “migrant” as her identity, her “anti-racist” policy, of course, aims at legal and social equality, but her heart is dedicated to the fight for *difference as a normality*” and she concentrates on criticizing hegemonic norms.

The cosmopolitan background of her family enables her, again and again, to experience dominance, and, consequently, she is not prepared to accept discrimination as a matter of course. She perceives herself as an *unwanted nobody* and starts developing strategies against this feeling. In this process, she meets other activists who also want to make place (as women, workers and migrants during the 1980’s, as multi-faceted difference in the 1990’s, as discriminated through racism, particularly since the national elections in 1999). In the same way she encounters gendered cosmopolitan and nationalist complexity in eastern Turkey, she experiences sub- and superordinate nationalist fields and dominant classes in a western private school. The intersection of dominant class and nationalist differentiation and

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<sup>19</sup> Anne Phillips (1999) hints to the fact that economic differences in liberal democracies are hardly being discussed in the context of equality. Nihal Aybar’s belonging to a certain economic class has, however, not resulted in an unchangeable and desired distanciation from migrant workers in Vienna; she sees the old men here who have invested their lives into Austria’s economy and she would like these ordinary people to tell how they were silenced. Such narrations of silence would probably have to begin with an analysis of the power relations prevailing in Turkey, in which Nihal is embedded in a privileged position.

the categorization of her person as a “migrant” is an experience she makes in Austria, and she fights against this using anti-essentialist strategies: *I am not a politicized migrant!* She demands self-representation and, at the same time, refuses to belong simply to one category (migrant, woman, etc.); she thus claims not only recognition of the intersections and spaces in-between different forms of belonging, but – as I will show – also uses performance and strategic essentialism as political instruments for change.

Nihal was confronted with nationalism and minority issues for the first time in the house on the Black Sea, then in the Austrian school. The school had no interest in criticizing Turkish nationalism in class because it benefited from its cooperation with the state and probably would have been closed down had it “incited” the children<sup>20</sup>. The cover-up of Austria’s involvement in national socialism is typical of how the country approached its own history way up to the 1980’s. In Vienna, Nihal was “taken by surprise” by Austria’s role at the time of national socialism as well as by present manifestations of nationalism. One year after her arrival in Austria saw the beginning of the Waldheim affair and Jörg Haider’s rise in the Freedom Party.<sup>21</sup> Nihal went to all discussions concerning Waldheim and became absorbed in the history of national socialism and in books dealing with genocide. In the course of her reading she came across the persecution and expulsion of Armenians, also from the Pontus. It was in Austria that she began to tackle the issue of her social position connected to nationalism.

In Turkey Nihal Aybar was interested in politics and cultural issues, but she was hardly involved in political activism. When, in the run-up to the military coup of 1980, many intellectuals discussed Marxism and violence escalated, Nihal preferred to concentrate on theater and literature (albeit left-wing and critical). She did not participate in the students protests, she was even glad to be relatively safe and secure from the upheavals at her university (Bogazici). She has been deeply concerned about nationalism and racism (emotionally and through her positionality) only since she came to Austria; her interest

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<sup>20</sup> On the history of the Austrian “St. Georgs Kolleg” *Sankt Georg Istanbul 1882-1982*. Istanbul, 1982.

<sup>21</sup> The Waldheim-affair and the rise of Jörg Haider within the FP (accompanied by statements like: *What for did our ancestors defend our country against the Turks, if we let them in again, today?*) are particularly tale telling of the Austrian variant of frontier orientalism (Gingrich 1998), which again and again invokes the Turkish Siege of Vienna and the necessity to protect our state borders.

focuses on theories and strategies for action that analyze inequality based on ascriptions and exclusion.

When a woman like Nihal Aybar reads Franz Werfel's "40 Tage vom Musa Dagh", it is with *mixed feelings*. On the one hand she is aware of the fact that Turkish nationalists still do not acknowledge the genocide of Armenians and that the Kurd minority is denied cultural rights (language, schools, newspapers)<sup>22</sup>; but she is also aware of the discourse conducted in Europe from a position of superiority when it comes to judging Turkey.

*I am in niches you don't know*, she hurls in the face of imagined majority population, which she describes as impoverished – socially, culturally and in terms of mobility. Her *niches* consist, for instance, in a brief conversation in a group of three, with one representative of the Jewish and one of the Islamic community on the day in commemoration of Markus Omufuma, or a letter by a woman from the Islamic community thanking her for not commenting on Islamophobia herself and proposing a statement by the Islamic community instead. Contrary to the majority of the Kemalist upper classes, she does not consider practicing Muslims a threat anymore. The *niches you don't know* also include her public and critical statements on migration policies, her criticism of the Austrian movement against racism and xenophobia with a view to the way this group treats migrants, her fight for an anti-essentialist self-representation of persons discriminated against through racism. Her *niches* also encompass her friends who represent "new neighborhoods" (Appadurai 1996) with diverse (political, sexual, cultural and religious) orientations, the Viennese *Burgtheater* under the much disputed directorship of Klaus Peymann, film festivals and other cultural events. She knows these niches not *despite* the fact that she is Turkish, on the contrary, she knows them *because* of her cosmopolitan roots, her international education, and her transnational access.

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<sup>22</sup> The legal recognition of Kurds as ethnic minority on account of pressure from the EU and Turkey's endeavors towards negotiations for accession in the summer of 2002 did not really contribute to an improvement of their social situation. It seems that teaching and speaking Kurdish is accepted only in private contexts, to date, not at school. These laws (which also prepared the abolition of the death penalty) nevertheless form the basis for social change. The effects of a moderate Islamic party at the head of the country and the importance of transnational and local NGOs for Turkey cannot be discussed within the scope of this contribution.

Being a migrant woman does not constitute a political program for Nihal. She maintains that only those people should appear in public as representatives of minorities and immigrants who are up to the job. This means they should be educated and well-mannered. She advocates reverse discrimination for people at a disadvantage on account of racism, specifically when appointing high-ranking staff; she also demands self-representation in politics, but not without adequate achievement, education, correct behavior, and intellectual abilities. If somebody were assigned a official task because he or she is *a poor Kurd*, Nihal would never publicly speak out against it, but, as a matter of principle, she rather supports intellectual circles. People should not be assigned on account of their experience alone, but because he or she is able to present his/her experience effectively to the public. For Nihal, shared experiences do not outweigh achievement. However, what she thinks to be strategically correct representation has been shaped by her conception of education, social status, by a “good family’s daughter’s (iyi bir ailenin çocuğu) sense for “good taste”.

The interaction between her transnational biography and her transversal policies requires her to overcome the concept of nationality in two respects: as territory and as identity. In doing so she does not live in a deterritorialized nation-state or a system of long distance nationalism, though, she rather moves in a matrix characterized by the intersection of nationality, gender, and class and relies on anti-essentialist strategies to overcome delineations. Being under pressure through the ascribed identity of “Turkish woman” her political work focuses on the majority of the population who are not aware of their own everyday, institutionalized and structural forms of racism.

The antagonistic tendencies in her biography, i.e. to become *nobody* in spite of her knowing to be someone special, first cause her to be silent and invisible; then, however, she develops an outstanding commitment and special efforts to speak up, especially on occasions when the audience (at the university, in the migrants scene) are not particularly eager to listen. Her strategy has to be directed against majorities that refuse to treat her with respect. What is at issue here, does not refer to cultural, national or gender difference as a means of politics of identity, but rather to new positions within the “geometry of power“ through the acknowledgement of *difference as a normality*.

***Place making: Cultural politics in Vienna***

We have come to know Nihal as an anti-racist activist, upper class, laic cosmopolitan. Her interventions usually do not support migrant perspectives, but try to tackle the majority population whom she confronts with their own everyday racism, with the institutionalized structures of racism in Austria and with the NS-history in this country. She is connected with an anti-racist network and works for or is member or even on the managing board of several local, regional and transnational NGOs. None of these organizations is exclusively Turkish, one is women only, all of them work against racism. At this point, I would like to give a brief impression of an event, which nicely illustrates Nihal's circle of close friends and their way of dealing with Austrian politics of exclusion.

Concerned about right-wing populism in 1999, Nihal began to work with "Tschuschenpower" ("Tschusch" is a derogatory term for migrant workers from South-Eastern Europe), a protest group of first and second generation academics, social workers, youth workers, local policy makers, journalists, musicians, with nationally different migrant backgrounds and committed to anti-racist activism.

"Tschuschenpower" posts e-news that provide information on discrimination, but also tell about success stories such as an award for a journalist committed to minority issues. These news are always characterized by pronounced language consciousness and often by an ironic style. One of the highlights of this group's activities was seen in winter/spring 2000, prior to the local elections in the City of Vienna. The talk show on *Occidental-Austrian Culture* entitled *Leitkultur (leading culture) light* was the outcome of an Internet 'multicultural reality satire'<sup>23</sup>. What was the background of this event: Prof. Walter Strobl (Austrian People's Party), representative of the local government in Vienna, had presented his ideas on "Occidental Austrian Culture" in a press information. This was the cue for "Tschuschenpower" to start an e-mail correspondence, in which Hikmet Kayahan (Top One) asked Strobl for a definition, or an explanation, or a concept, whatever, on Austrian culture for himself, whom he described as a Turkish citizen *prepared to be integrated* to this culture.

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<sup>23</sup> This term was used by an amused social scientist (Turkish background), expert on citizenship and racism in Europe participating in the distribution of the e-mail communication.

After five weeks of emails and remails, the person *still prepared to be integrated*, was disappointed, because he did not get satisfactory answers, and the politician made a terrible fool of himself. The questions were sarcastic, well worded, and, of course, distributed electronically every week. The talk show *Leitkultur light* was announced by a poster showing a veiled Austrian foreign minister, Benita Ferrero-Wallner, on her diplomatic trip to Iran. Experts on Austrian culture invited to the show included academics with migrant or minority backgrounds. This event got much attention among anti-racist activists because of its various forms of representation. National culture was presented as diversified (intellectual circles in coffee shops, workers' culture, etc.), the idea of homogeneity was ridiculed, and the Austrian experts with minority or migrant backgrounds did not focus on migration and integration policy, but on social, political and cultural issues in general. They refuted interventions from the audience (symbolizing the majority) and commented on Europe as a new construct, on European philosophy, Austrian cultural politics (especially the *Burgtheater*, the heart of Austrian high culture), new or global citizenship and psychology. "Tschuschenpower", in this event, claimed for the 'us' of the us/them division and used the term "experts" instead of "migrants", offered comments on the fine arts, philosophy and political sciences instead of integration policy, critique of national constructions instead of claims for recognition.

## **5. Conclusion**

Science, the media, and policy makers usually categorize political and intellectual activism by migrants or nationalized immigrants in three fields: 1) self-organization (rarely subsidized), which allegedly aims to protect or enforce rather particular, individual interests (cemeteries, folklore, head scarves, workers' rights) 2) NGOs (more or less state subsidized, from small advice centers to church or party funded large organizations) that usually have an Austrian management and represent the interests of certain target groups 3) political or intellectual participation in political parties, in the public discourse, in science or umbrella organizations; this group is usually associated with universal concerns (education, justice, anti-racism, right for difference).

While advocates of self-organization are often looked upon as separatist with regard to the receiving society (mosque communities, Turkish left-wing groups, Kurdish organizations), the migration industry is

considered indispensable, receives public funds, and is being pocketed, as much as possible, by politics. The third group is perceived as socially superior or, at least, equal, sufficiently conformist, and adapted to prevailing model roles. While intellectual, hybrid, and cosmopolitan positions usually meet with appreciation (anti-racist movements cannot do without migrants/affected persons), they also generate fear (they are quite simply competitors on the tight market of resistance and politics).

Nihal's biographical narrations, networks and strategies are an example of intellectual migrants who have transnational social relations, which connect them to families, friends and information across borders. Emotionally, economically and intellectually, they are involved in different places called "home". In their political and social strategies, they feel responsible for different countries, but act as Austrian or European citizens. They use their experience as migrants to push forward claims for democracy and challenge myths of certainties about what is Muslim, Turk, Viennese or European.

Nihal's work is not focused on people sharing a certain nationality or culture. Her political strategy goes beyond nation and is characterized by the way she brings together her experience in transnational contexts. She and her colleagues use their experience of differences to blur the boundaries of nations. So, if transnationalism as a field of research wants to follow them and go beyond "methodological nationalism" it has, in my opinion, to bring together two major strands of transnational studies, namely transnational relations as everyday social relations across borders (beyond the territorial nation-state) and transnational social formations as multiplicity of experiences and political strategies (beyond national identity). If transnationalism intends to go beyond the constraints of methodological nationalism, it has to avoid the pitfall of constructing essentialisms of its own by focusing commonalities only and not also complexity, multiplicity and intersectionality.

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