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## Duygu Aloglu (FU Berlin):

### „Invoking boundaries and blur borders“: A reflection of my research experience with Turkish women (associations) in Berlin

#### Introduction

*“This is an article written from a sense of failure”* (Rose 1997:307). No other sentence reflects my feelings and experiences in the process of my field research as well as the one from Rose. Feminist discussions about the politics of fieldwork are mainly concerned with the power relations between researcher and research subjects in knowledge production, positionality (Haraway 1991) and reflexivity (England 1994; Rose 1997) of researcher, the dualism of being insider or outsider, and questions of differences or/and sameness in research processes among other issues (Wolf 1996; Rose 1997; Moss 2002). For sure, fieldwork is not a “bed of roses”; fieldwork can provide many unexpected challenges for researchers. According to Katz, “the question raised by conducting fieldwork in human

geography at once invoke boundaries and blur borders” (Katz 1994: 67). From the beginning, my fieldwork experience was shaped by negotiating boundaries and borders. My “the sense of failure” is closely linked to these experiences of dealing with boundaries in the research process. In this paper, I reflect upon my experience with the aim to critically engage with central debates in feminist methodology.

#### My Research Context and Fieldwork

I am a PhD candidate researching on the topic of the socio-economic integration of Turkish women and women with Turkish migration background in Berlin. I aim to explore the exclusionary processes, these women face in the German labour market (such as being a woman, and

being a migrant). On a conceptual level, I engage with issues of gender empowerment from an intersectional perspective in order to counterbalance the tendency to generalize migrant women stories and reduce their identity to certain categories such as their religion or gender.

Turkish women associations and migrant women associations play a crucial role in facilitating women's access to the labour market. I assumed that working with those associations would give me legitimacy to conduct research with the women and help me to obtain information and direct access to my research partners. As I am a (trans-)migrant (Turkish) woman myself, living in Berlin for my postgraduate studies since 2011, I assumed that my own positionality and shared interest for 'mutual recognition' (Gilbert 1994, cited in Nast 1994: 59) between myself and these associations would facilitate my entrance into the field. When I tried to make an appointment with these associations, however, I encountered serious problems. The associations were reluctant to talk to me, presenting every time new excuses why they couldn't talk to me (such as being so busy, having no time for an appointment, need of getting permission from their boss to make interviews [which seemed impossible to get] etc.). The way these associations built boundaries between themselves and myself has affected the development of my research. I did not expect to encounter these difficulties when developing this research project; therefore I have started to think about the reasons why these asso-

ciations in Berlin built these barriers that make my access to the field difficult?

### Reflections

Before starting the 'phone and email rounds' in order to make an appointment, I positioned myself as one of the migrants, thinking that our "sameness" in the sense of Valentine (2006) predominated our relationship. I thought that I am a *woman*, and even I am a *migrant woman* but specifically I am a *Turkish migrant woman*. Valentine mentions some studies which state that being a woman in feminist fieldwork is helpful in order to gain trust of the interviewed women, i.e. my female research partners, and facilitates the interviews (*ibid*: 117-118). But that is not the only similarity. I speak more or less the same language as the employees of these associations and my research partners (mostly in Turkish, sometimes in German). I thought that my migration history, my cultural background and even nationality would facilitate my access to the field. I thought that our shared emotional bond to Turkey would make them want to help me and hence I hope they would participate in my study. In short, I was convinced that it would be easy with my performed identity to engage with the Turkish community in Berlin.

While trying to contact with the employees of these associations, my positionality became increasingly challenged through their rejections to talk to me. I started to question my *own* position with the help of the term of "reflexivity" (Falconer Al-Hindi&Kawabata 2002: 113). It

was like trying to “describe reflexivity as a process of ‘self-discovery’” (England 1994 cited in Rose 1997: 309) because I wanted to know what the problem was. I asked myself who I am for those people; how do they perceive me; who they are for me; how do they see or position me; and whether I am able to speak for them or with them (Kobayashi 1994).

My position as a researcher might affect the power relations between me and the employees of these associations. The power relations that constitute the field and the power asymmetries in the process of knowledge production (Schurr&Segebart 2012: 147-8) became soon visible. The feminist postcolonial debates questioned the position if the researcher as a speaker for other (e.g. Spivak 1988; Mohanty 1986). So I have aimed to produce knowledge about those women but would that be really *their* knowledge or just a translation of my words trying to understand their knowledge? While questioning my position, I felt evaluated by workers of the associations when making the effort to make an appointment. I got the feeling that they tried to figure out “from which side I am talking and approaching the issue”; “Am I like them” or “not like them?”. At the end, I felt myself powerless because of this- at least imagined- evaluation of “my own subject position” (Katz 1994: 70) and emotionally rejected. Inspired by England, I am looking for ways to overcome the difficulties by seeking for our shared experiences, as she mentions “the intersubjective nature of social life means that

the researcher and the people being researched have shared meanings and we should seek methods that develop this advantage” (1994: 82). I considered the concept of intersectionality for offering one such a method to facilitate this ‘advantage’, since it might help understand the multiple aspects influencing power relations in the research process such as my migration history, professional position, civil status, lifestyle, language and other.

While trying to find an answer to this “rejection loop”, I thought about how identities affect my research and my interactions with the workers of the associations. I sensed the complexity of the employees’ feelings in order to understand their reflections of my own identity (or position). Taking their standpoint, I was wondering whether some of them might be jealous or have prejudice about my position as I am:

- A high-skilled Turkish woman who is occupying a good position in a university?
- A temporary migrant /a global transmigrant or a migrant whose still imperfect German is not considered as a problem?
- A native Turkish speaker who is not stuck between two cultures?
- At the same time, the employees might position me as an outsider as...
- A Turkish woman from Turkey (which means I am not a German-Turkish woman)?

- A person who is doing a PhD about migrant women without sharing a common history or life-style?
- And other specifications such as my age, my dressing, my words, my pronunciation etc.

At the end I contemplated about two perceptions about me. I might be seen as a privileged migrant that could be the reason of rejection. I am close (sameness) and different at the same time. Or I might be evaluated as an outsider who is working in a different cultural context; hence they could think that I am not able to understand and analyze their lives (which could be considered as a normal power relation between researcher and researched).

I realized that, while initially I thought of myself in terms of sameness, I had to acknowledge that I am also different from my research subjects. And I was upset about being rejected as an outsider although I used the same dichotomy myself. I did not comprehend that I was reproducing the basic dichotomy as "We/They" or "We/she" or "I/They". Valentine criticized these dichotomies, which are based on the 'sameness' and 'differences' and lastly creates the terms of "insider" and "outsider" (Valentine 2006). Being a woman, speaking the same language, having the same cultural background were the factors of my "sameness" but I experienced that "differences" were the main conditions in the interaction with the associations and in the rejection loop: such as being a Turkish Turk and being a German-Turk. At this

point Katz's term of "space of betweenness" (1994) can seem appropriate for my case. Theoretically, yes, we were different but we did not occupy a wholly distinct standpoint- 'there is/was also common ground,' (Katz 1994: 70) which is based upon similarities. I was in 'a position that is neither inside nor outside' (Mascia-Lees et al. 1989:33; cited in Katz 1994: 72). Nevertheless I felt emotionally rather as an "outsider" (out of this country, out of this city, out of those women's problems, out of their world) than being in-between.

My position was shaped by shifting power relations between employees of the associations and myself. My embodied identity, which implies my differences, determined the course of my fieldwork. The way they positioned me in our interactions made my position even more visible. As England notes (1994: 85) the fieldwork is *personal*, therefore I was affected emotionally which influenced my research progress. I felt myself "rejected" and "hopeless". This rejection loop made me feel "sad" because of the feeling of being "displaced" or "placed as an outsider". I felt criticized and that my identity and position were questioned. I felt losing my power and will in order to go on with my research because of the possibility to have to confront another rejection. I disheartened to go further because I felt myself "insufficient" and "failed". I have still lack of courage and shyness to try to get an appointment and do interviews. I questioned my words, my performance in order to find out what is wrong (with me).

Finally I became alienated to my research project.

### Lessons Learnt

Instead of writing a conclusion, I would like to address some reflections of my fieldwork experience. Insider/outsider dualism creates strict boundaries which limited me in my case and it also might exclude diversity of viewpoints and positionalities. Hence, "just being a woman" or "just being a Turkish migrant" might cause the possibility to miss the complex and multifaceted identities and experiences of both researcher and researched. I concluded for myself that I had to stop making these dichotomies that I mentioned above and to start experiencing that borders as dynamic, unstable and permeable. Permeable because differences between both sides in age, ethnicity, life styles, class and so on, can cause some barriers, however they can lead to new intersections in order to 'open up the possibilities for a creative engagement' (Schurr&Segebart 2012: 153) between researcher and researched. The concept of 'intersectionality' is very helpful to comprehend my 'positionality which can interconnect with the intersectional positionality of the ones researched' in the concept of the reflexivity of the researcher (*ibid*: 152). Also intersectionality helps in discovering new similarities, besides gender and cultural background. Taking the concept of 'intersectionality' (Davis 2008; Winker&Degele 2009; Lutz et al. 2011) into discussions about feminist fieldwork may create new possibili-

ties in research processes since differences between researchers and researched partners are believed in social science to create some barriers (Falconer Al-Hindi&Kawabata 2006: 106). Those differences can influence 'the researcher's access to and experience in the field' (Schurr&Segebart 2012: 150). I have recognized intersectionality as a tool for analyzing the multiple power relations in the research process.

Besides I realized that fieldwork is a process of learning and also a process of "constitutive negotiation" as a performative process (Rose 1997: 315-316). I have become more reflexive through experiencing the boundaries in my fieldwork. Communicating about those "differences" openly with the research subjects may create visibility, consciousness and transparency. These dialogues can result in the possibility to transit the borders and transformation of research relations between researcher and research subjects. And I believe, it may transform me as a researcher and also a person. Inspired of the suggestion of England, I decided to address it in my conclusion; since she notes "it is important to be more open and honest about research and the limitations and partial nature of the research. We need to locate ourselves in our work and to reflect on how our location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research, and how we write our research"(1994:87).

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## Heidi Kaspar (Zürich) und Carolin Schurr (Bern):

### Spass im Feld? – (k)ein Thema für emotionale Geographien

#### Einleitung

„There is now common recognition of the way in which ‘a researcher’s positionality (in terms of race, nationality, age, gender, social and economic status, sexuality) may influence the ‘data’ collected and thus the information that becomes coded as knowledge’ (Rose 1997, 308). Yet

*while writing emotions into accounts of the research process fits very much within this reflexive tradition, discussions and critiques of the research process to date have rarely involved any articulation of feeling“ (Widdowfield, 2000: 200).*