

## CHAPTER 4

# *Cosmopolitans are Cosmopolitans:* On the Relevance of Local Identification in Globalizing Society

Werner Schiffauer

In this paper I want to challenge a proposition that is expressed in the idea of this conference and which—it may be added—is very much a consensus in the international debate. It reads: “Immigrants increasingly have greater difficulty and less interest in identifying with the places to which they migrate” (Friedman 1999a, 1).

This proposition is based on the assumption that the transformation from Fordian to Post-Fordian economics (i.e. information based economics) had a negative impact on the assimilative potential of industrial states: With regard to *economy*, the decline of heavy industry reduced the capacity for integration of immigrants into the labor force. This resulted in new forms of inclusion and exclusion and the formation of superfluous classes (Dubet & Lapeyronnie 1994).<sup>1</sup> The *political* consequence was the declining importance of the classic “integration-machines” like labor unions and labor parties. All this resulted in a growing division of society which had dramatic *cultural* consequences, the most important of which is the radicalized segregation of educational system, setting apart the schools of the rich and the schools of the poor. This cultural division of society was furthered by the development of communication technology. The easy availability of television programs produced in the country of origin and new possibilities of direct communication across countries facilitated direct contact with relatives and acquaintances back home and thus reduced pressures for cultural assimilation. The combination of all these factors had structural consequences for the relation between

immigrant minorities and dominant society. The assimilation process seems to have slowed down and migrants seem to establish themselves as more or less permanent diaspora communities. These develop their own patterns of cultural dynamics by creating stable political, religious, economic, and social networks with diasporas elsewhere as well as with the country of origin. In this scenario the gap between immigrant community and host society widens; while at the same time inter-diaspora relations between communities intensify.

At first glance it appears that this situation is prone to bring forth two types of transnational migrant identity. The first is a communal, reassertive identity. By re-inventing culture or religion, a diaspora community develops a representation of itself and stresses its categories of sameness to diasporas elsewhere. This often goes hand in hand with a strong emphasis on boundaries both with regard to the majority as well as with regard to other ethnic and religious communities. The claim to shared values makes possible empowerment and mobilization for collective action (see for example Schiffauer 2000). The other type of transnational identity appears to be extremely individualistic (see for example Schmitt-Hornstein 1995). Whereas communal identities emphasize a positive belonging to an ethnic or religious group and stresses boundaries, the extreme individualists define themselves primarily negatively and reject boundaries. They tend to voice statements like: "I am neither X nor Y, I am I." These individualists are sometimes characterized as cosmopolitans who enjoy plurality and heterogeneity, and as "prone to articulate complex affiliations, meaningful attachments, and multiple allegiances to issues, people, places, and traditions that lie beyond the boundaries of their resident nation-state" (Vertovec 2000).<sup>2</sup> Thus the new situation of migration seems to bring forth two polar types of collectivities: A radicalized communal identity merging the individual with a (transnational) collective, and a radicalized individual identity, stressing the independence from all kinds of collective identities. What seems to be difficult in a transnational situation is the development of an "integrated" identity, balancing in a meaningful way the aspirations of the individual and the demands of the society he or she lives in. The field seems to be divided between communalists who reify identities and draw boundaries that stress transnational loyalties on the one hand, and "homeless" cosmopolitans emphasizing no loyalty at all on the other.

In this case the consequences for a national civil society would be grave. Civil society is based on the basic acceptance of heterogeneity

and would be threatened by a rise of fundamentalist or communalist tendencies. However it also relies on a generalized commitment to society. One cannot build a civil society either with reassertive boundary drawers or with evasive individualists.

This scepticism towards the new migratory situation and its consequences (which is most clearly articulated by conservative communitarian philosophers) would be justified, if there would be nothing but community or oneself for the migrants to identify with. I want to show, however, that the statement I quoted in the beginning—"Immigrants increasingly have greater difficulty and less interest in identifying with the place to which they migrate"—is empirically not true. While it is true that immigrants have greater difficulty and less interest in identifying with the *nation* to which they migrate, the very opposite is often true with regard to the place to which they move. I want to show that this has an important impact on the processes of identity formation. My argument in fact consists of three parts: 1) Under the surface of transnational identifications migrants develop strong local ties to their place of residence; 2) This type of local identification usually complements other possibilities of identification like descent or religion but sometimes also competes with them; and 3) Local identification means a chance for civil society—in particular in times of globalization and growing migrant population. Although I restrict myself in the following to the individualist fraction of the transnationals (because they are more articulate on this issue), the argument might also hold true for the communalists.

I refer to immigrants of the second generation living in Berlin. Before going into the case it may be helpful to sketch briefly some particularities of the German situation. One crucial fact is that there is no symbolic space defined for migrants in the German national discourse.<sup>3</sup> This again is related to the strong emphasis on culture, which characterizes the German discourse on citizenship. It is a widely shared opinion that migrants should adapt (which mostly means assimilate) to German culture before they are granted citizenship.<sup>4</sup> There are complex historical reasons for this emphasis on culture. An explanation would have to consider the particularities of German nation building in the 19th century and the related idea of the *Kulturnation*. But also the early loss of the colonies in 1918 meant that Germany did not have to deal with decolonization after World War II and therefore never had that special category of immigrants from former colonies; rather it had to integrate millions of German refugees from Eastern Europe. The ethnic cleansing during

National-Socialism and the loss of the German East with a strong Polish population after World War II meant that post war Germany turned out to be the ethnically the most homogenous German state in history. All that led to the development of a latent but strong ethno-cultural identity in the Federal Republic. Immigrants were and are naturalized all the time (laws permitted that), but due to the strong culturalist encoding of citizenship, naturalization became easily viewed by both sides as a kind of conversion, and migrants were often hesitant to apply for it. Because of the comparatively greater difficulties with regard to political integration the ground for the development of diasporic identities seems to be more fertile in Germany than elsewhere in Western Europe.

After these general remarks let me now turn to the concrete case. I want to start with a quotation taken a from group interview, which was conducted in 1997, with young immigrants from Sri Lanka, Turkey, Greece, Kosovo-Albania, Lebanon, and Croatia, living in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> In the course of this interview Dimitra (19, Greek nationality, high school-student, born and raised in Berlin) said:

Relatives at home do not accept anything which happens here in Berlin, and they see everything in an unfavorable light. It's really drastic. I cannot communicate with people there, ordinary people I mean. And many of my relatives are conservative, extremely conservative. And I feel at home (*zu Hause*) in Berlin.

Statements like that come up in very different settings. Let me quote just one other example I came across recently:

I am a Berliner. Not because I was born here—no, but because my whole life took place here. My friends, my family, my education, my career, my catastrophes, and everything that happened. I know the problems of this city, its positive and negative sides. That's why I am a Berliner. (Aziza A., rapper)<sup>6</sup>

All statements concerning identities are of course contextual; we define who we are always in relation to some specified other. The group interview quoted above was conducted in Germany and the interviewer was an ethnic German. The participants thus defined themselves in Germany *vis-à-vis* a German. When emphasizing the fact that she was a "Berliner", Dimitra mentioned however first her relatives at home who disapproved of everything happening in Berlin. It is very likely that this disapproval went hand in hand with a criticism directed at her that she had become "German". It was pointed out by different participants in the interview that this criticism was not only voiced by relatives in the country of origin but

also (and even more so) by their parents in Germany. There was a common complaint that parents are quick in interpreting all kinds of activities of their children as "germanizing". This reduction of complexity by the parents is quite understandable; it results from fears widespread among members of the first generation to become alienated from their children in a foreign environment. This fear makes them screen the activities of the second generation for signs of *germanization*. Defining oneself as Berliner thus answers to an ascription of being German by relatives and parents. On a first plane it thus reads: "No I am not a German but I am a Berliner."

The insistence on an identity as Berliners answers to yet another dimension of ethnic stereotyping. The participants in the group interview were all students at the *Otto-Hahn-Gesamtschule* in the borough of Neukölln in Berlin. Teachers at this school like in other German schools tend to make a clear distinction between migrants from the South and the East and migrants from the West and the North. The former are depicted as the "immigrants" ("Ausländer") proper: They come from the poorer regions of the world and are primarily perceived as "problematic." The teachers tend to interpret actions of their students or their respective parents (e.g. a refusal to participate in school trips) not as attempts to cope with a structurally difficult situation, but rather explain them as "Islamic conservatism" or "traditional mentality". So the statement might also be interpreted as saying: "No. I am not an *Ausländer*. I am a Berliner."

In order to understand better this importance attached to Berlin we should discuss in some more detail some aspects of the process of identity formation among immigrants of the second and third generation. The double ascription as *germanized* by parents and as *Ausländer* by Germans creates a complex problem of acknowledgment. The compromises the young immigrants make when attempting to grow up as a Turk/Greek/Tamil in Germany tend to be misinterpreted by the parents as attempts of becoming German and by teachers as sticking to a Turk/Greek/Tamil background (and rejecting the necessity of integration). Needless to say that both *Ausländer* parents and German teachers have only a very stereotypical knowledge about each other. Even more important is the normative issue. Both worlds tend to depict each other as problematic: In immigrant families, Germany is associated with broken homes (German children are supposedly thrown out of the house by the age of eighteen), sexual libertinage, alcohol and drugs, and Nazism and violence. The Germans portray the immigrant families as backward, authoritarian if not oppressive, violent, and hostile to women. So the immigrant

children growing up in Germany find themselves in many situations in which one important aspect of their existence is devalued.

Many immigrant children in some phase of their life develop the strategy to defend German "culture" *vis-à-vis* their parents and their respective "home" culture *vis-à-vis* the Germans. But due to the rather stereotypical knowledge of these worlds about each other, the children find themselves trapped in the situation that when they say the truth, a wrong message comes across. This is a very painful situation. Even if they are linguistically competent in two languages, migrant children cannot translate from one context to the other because everything said is interpreted in terms of distorting preconceptions. In such a situation they are forced to represent themselves in a systematically distorted way so that at least part of the message gets across. Muslim girls in order to defend their families against preconceived notions of rigidity and authoritarianism were observed to argue in the classroom that they had the same liberties like all other girls, which on face value was not the case (Mannitz 1999, 302).

In a situation of mutual misrepresentation one would expect the dominant culture finally to win. In this case the migrant youth sooner or later would adapt to the majority culture and thus find a solution for his/her difficult situation. In fact the person to whom we owe the best account of such a situation, Eva Hoffmann, solved her problems in this way. She had moved with her parents from Poland to Canada in the fifties. In a very precise language she describes the feeling of loss of reality and powerlessness, which comes with such a situation. The title of her book *Lost in Translation* neatly sums up the problem I am trying to describe here. However, very few young immigrants finally end up identifying with the majority culture in Germany. The reason is discrimination, a reality many immigrant youths become painfully aware of during puberty. The timing of this realization of discrimination has psychological but above all sociological reasons. At this age, young immigrants move out of the rather protected spheres of family and school into wider society and experience rejection. This experience makes identification with Germany very difficult because it now has the sting of identification with a society that rejects them. The resulting conflict can express itself in a variety of ways: Aggressiveness, depression, and identification with radical opposition groups.<sup>7</sup> The confrontation with discrimination means that young Turks growing up in Germany are thrown back to the group from which they wanted to break away, and they are shown that they are undesired by the group to which they wanted to belong.

They thus have to come to terms with a situation that is in itself contradictory.<sup>8</sup>

It is in this situation that statements like "I am a Berliner" are to be read. They show the possibilities of a positive identification beyond ethnic and/or religious categories that often inflict pain. Let us now explore closer what it means to identify with a city.

First of all the identification with a city can be read as a refusal to be identified with national and ethnic categories. To identify with Berlin, Paris or New York means exactly *not* to identify with Germany, France or the United States. In the same group interview another participant remarked: "You cannot feel as a German ... typically German is somewhat repulsive. I mean I don't even know what is typically German." To identify with a city also means a refusal to be reduced to the ethnic background or to the place where one is born. It thus is a very outspoken criticism of *germanization* by the parents or the exclusion as *Ausländer* by the German society. But it seems to me that it also entails a criticism of categories like "hybridity", "plural identities", "hyphenated identities". All these concepts take the ethnic *vis. national* as the ultimate point of reference. A plural identity like Turko-German is conceived of as a composite of several (generally not more than two or three) basic identities. To state, "I am a Berliner", however, means a quality of its own. It is a positive claim to belonging.

To identify with Berlin is more than to just identify with the particular quarter where you grow up. It is not by chance that the young migrants quoted above state that they are "Berliners" and not just "Kreuzbergers", although they might prefer to live in Kreuzberg rather than in other parts of Berlin. The identification with Berlin is possible because big cities develop their own brand of cultures. The fact that world-cities are complex, heterogeneous and diversified entities exactly does not imply that they are amorphous. This is reflected in an anthropomorphous terminology. Cities, so it is said, have a character, a "personality" (or an image). What is meant with statements like that is that they might change constantly—but there are patterns of changes, ways of dealing with change, certain rhythms, certain beats (Schiffauer 1997). Under certain circumstances we can get addicted to it. "[Big Cities] embody certain ideas, opinions and attitudes, norms and values. They are no empty pages but narrative spaces, containing certain stories (of important persons and important events), myths (of heroes and demons), parables (of virtues and vices)" (Lindner 1999). Or to put it yet differently: Cities are places where strangers meet—but these meetings can take place

in very different ways with different cities, corresponding to their specific culture of public spaces (Schiffauer 1997a). Because cities have a particular character we can develop very strong emotional ties to our "own" city, be it London, Paris, or Berlin, we can love it and be proud of it. And even more, there is the experience that cities have a certain influence on the habitus of their inhabitants. As one Kurdish lady put it: "I dressed up much more in Stuttgart than in Berlin. Stuttgart is just more *chic*. It was impossible to run around there like they do here." In a way you become a "Berliner" a "New Yorker" or a "Parisian" while living in these respective places.

In fact this identification can be very pronounced. I know immigrants who expressed that they could not conceive of living anywhere else than in Berlin. Or take the following quotation of a young migrant who described his vacation. The first days in Turkey, he told me, were "like in a dream"—he was feeling immediately at home and completely at ease. "But then comes a time, a day—and you want to return to Germany. Because you live here. You start to think of Berlin, of your friends, the girls or what else. The discotheques, something that is fun, a hobby or something" (Schiffauer 1985, 166). It is clearly homesickness that is expressed in these lines. Statements like that render absurd notions of the migrant as a no-where man or bound only to transnational identities. The construction of the cosmopolitan man, who develops "habits of mind and life" through which he or she can end up anywhere in the world and be in the "same relation of familiarity and strangeness" to the local culture, and, by the same token, "feel partially adjusted everywhere" is just not true. Ethnic, religious, or cosmopolitan transnationalism can, and does more often than not, go hand in hand with strong feelings of belonging. Transnationalism is clearly something else than translocalism.

Let me add some anthropological considerations. The anthropological principle that is referred to here is "locality"—a principle of group formation that is opposed to descent (ethnicity) or religion (ideology). The three principles each have a value in their own right and cannot be reduced to each other. In contrast to descent (ethnicity) or religion (values), locality seems to be a rather "superficial" principle of integration as it has a strong aesthetic dimension. Locality means identification with a landscape. The solidarity it brings forth is based on sharing space rather than sharing values or ancestors. This has strong sensual connotations—sharing a space means sharing smells, sounds, tastes, and rhythms. We refer to a landscape through physiognomic knowledge. We appropriate it by

moving in it and we start to identify with it when we detect structures—favorite places, favorite routes, favorite stores. This is superficial—as it is concerned with the surface rather than the essence. But in a way (as among others Marcel Proust has shown), it is also more basic and elementary. We have an aesthetic relation to our environment before we have a conceptual one—and when we start to reflect about childhood and belonging, we discover very soon that it is this type of visual, olfactory, auditive relation to our environment which is essential.

This is of course true for all kinds of landscapes, for rural landscapes as well as for small towns and big cities. It is, however, with regard to big cities that the specific character of local identification becomes more apparent. Rural landscapes and small towns are not necessarily homogenous with regard to ethnic and/or religious affiliation but they are rather clearly structured. This implies that the principles locality, descent, and religion get easily conflated. A region or a village easily gets identified with one particular ethnic or religious group. This is far more difficult or even impossible in a cosmopolitan environment where things are unclear and fluid. It is in a constantly changing, complex, and heterogeneous cosmopolitan landscape where local identification emerges most clearly as a principle of its own. It is there where, we can develop love of a heterogeneous place with its characteristic sounds, lights, smells. This is not necessarily the love of heterogeneity: We still can prefer to stick exclusively with our own kind but we do so in a special setting which has its own atmosphere and its particular qualities. This type of aesthetic identification creates a relationship with social spaces that are not integrated on the basis of values. It is an identification that takes the shape of a specific biography, a biography "of catastrophes and everything that happened".

In practice conscious attempts are often made to conflate these different principles of group formation (and with it, of constructing belonging, identity and solidarity): Nationalist thinking, for example, can be described as the attempt to merge the principle of locality with descent and/or ideology. It is not by chance that classical nationalist imaginary always referred to the peasant landscape (where conflation was easier) and rarely to the big city (where it is hardly possible). But there were of course also conscious attempts in big cities to colonize the local in the name of ethnicity/descent of religion/ideology. All of us know that locality sometimes lost this battle of principles. Cosmopolitan cities like Sarajevo, Belgrade, Beirut, Belfast, and others could be easily added, broken apart on ethnic and/or religious lines. And of

course this was also the case with Berlin in the 1930s. But exactly the same cities also prove that locality (and the identification with a city) is not just a phenomenon of secondary importance to descent or religion: The spirit of cosmopolitanism, the love of a place in all its heterogeneity, has a certain tenacity. It can be defeated from time to time, but it certainly reappears sooner or later. Locality is a potential but not necessary an actual source of identification. Its realization requires representational efforts.<sup>9</sup> Sensual experience is only the "raw material" for an identification with a city. In order to become effective it has to be expressed in one way or the other. It has to be objectified in stories or pictures. Art plays a crucial role in this process. It finds expressions for the volatile and hardly tangible atmosphere, which results from the coexistence of heterogeneous elements. One might mention Hubert Selby's Brooklyn, Godard's Paris, or Zaimoglu's Hamburg as examples.

In my opinion there is a great potential in this type of local identification, because aesthetic integration is in a way both superficial and basic. It allows integration/loyalty/ solidarity without conformity. It is therefore particularly attractive for the migrant. In a situation in which he easily gets lost in translation the love to the city in which he lives serves as a positive anchoring. It is, after all, the place where he lives his life; where he goes to school, falls in love, marries, where his children grow up. It becomes his own place, inseparably tied up with his biography. This allows for identification without suppressing opposition. The cosmopolitan is not the homeless person having his identifications everywhere except in the place where he lives as nationalist (and often anti-Semitic) propaganda have tried to suggest. The existence of local identification shows also that the communitarian position, which sees value integration as the prerequisite for loyalty and solidarity, is simply not true. We can identify with a city, can be proud of it, boast about it, without sharing the values of the great majority of our co-citizens. The love for one's place allows for integrating society without integrating value systems, because it is *here* where we want to make the best out of our lives (including that of our children). *Cosmopolitans* (in the sense of *Weltbürger*) are in fact *cosmopolitans*—inhabitants of world cities.

## Notes

1. At the moment at least I seems to be more than doubtful whether the growing importance of the service sector provides enough jobs to counteract this tendency.

2. To call them cosmopolitans makes sense because of the political implications of this term. It allows us to conceive bilinguality and the competence to move in different spheres as an asset rather than a deficit.
3. It is telling that history books only reserve a very passing note for migration (Schiffauer *et al.* 1999, 58 ff).
4. A comparison with France is telling. France also articulates strong demands on assimilation but not in the name of a (particular) culture but in the name of (presumably global) civilization. The French discourse invites migrants to participate in a cosmopolitan project and thus assigns a symbolic space for them.
5. The interview was conducted by Sabine Mannitz in the context of the research project, State-School-Ethnicity, financed by the Volkswagen foundation. The results are published in Schiffauer *et al.* 1999.
6. Although I restrict myself to the discussions of immigrants to Germany I might mention that similar statements are also heard in other contexts. Take the following example from Keya Ganguly: "Being a child of Indian immigrants, I find it very difficult to identify myself with that sort of ideology of difference, especially since the identification might occur at another level. For instance I choose to be identified with Philadelphians rather than with Indians from Bombay" (Quoted in Schmidt-Hornstein, forthcoming).
7. For a precise description of a conflict resolution of this kind see Schmidt-Hornstein (1995). See also Tertilt's (1996) excellent study of a Turkish gang in Frankfurt am Main.
8. I showed elsewhere that this type of problems is not restricted to "cosmopolitans" but that they also explain the attachment to communitalist groups (Schiffauer 1999).
9. The same holds true for the other two principles of solidarity. Loyalty can be based on descent and religion but does not result by itself in solidarity. Relatives who meet feel some obligation because of the feeling of amity, but we know that this is just a basis and no guarantee for solidarity. It is a claim, but it has to be actualized and brothers sometimes become the fiercest enemies. The same holds true for religion.

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