

Chapter 12

“...it’s important ... to open your senses for situations, for people, for circumstances.”—Developing a Habitus of Tolerance of Complexity and Openness for the Alien—Nina F.



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Nina is a 26-year-old student of social sciences. She is the only child of a bi-cultural marriage, her mother German, her father from South America. Born in her father’s home country in South America, her parents moved to Germany when she was a baby. At the age of seven, the family moved to another South American country where they lived until Nina was 13; then the family moved back to Germany. Referring to the early and disruptive changes of her social environment, Nina states that she has always had a hard time establishing long-term relationships with other people. She sees the reason for this being, on the one hand, that she does not know anybody who has accompanied her since childhood; on the other hand, there are the consequences of having spent her childhood in another country that she experienced when she came back to Germany as an adolescent. Speaking the language but not the code of the peer group was a big challenge in a time when “identity” was the predominant developmental task (see e.g., Erikson, 1950, on psychosocial development). Neither the slang used by the other teenagers nor linguistic styles like irony were familiar to her which made her “the odd one out,” even though she was raised bilingual¹ and has always spoken her mother tongue, German, even when she lived in a Spanish speaking environment. During the interview, she gives vivid descriptions of important relationships and openly discusses them, including difficult situations. She shows a high amount of empathy, especially when talking about her parents, even when discussing conflicts. Therefore, her attachment style can be characterized as “secure” which goes along with both a positive concept of self and others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Nina seems to have established a solid social environment that leaves room for actively shared recreational activities as

¹See also her own reflections on the different ways of how the German and the Spanish language “work for her” in the section “Nina’s Challenge: Interpersonal Relations.”

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well as for social commitment. Taken together, this qualifies Nina as a good example for Type 2 within our typology (see Chap. 10) that deals with the challenges of alienness primarily in the dimension of “interpersonal relations.”

Nina’s Answers to Selected Questions in the Survey

To go into more detail regarding Nina’s profile of attitudes and worldviews and prepare the triangulation of the answers and narratives in her faith development interview (details on the interview are given below) with her responses in the questionnaire, we now present Table 12.1 which contains Nina’s individual scores on selected variables in comparison to the mean values of her quadrant group. For plotting all interviewees of our study in the space with *openness to change* and *centrality of religiosity* as coordinates, see Fig. 10.1 in Chap. 10; there Nina is located in Quadrant 1—the quadrant with high scores for *openness to change* and low scores on *centrality of religiosity*.

The selection of variables in Table 12.1 includes the majority of measures in our questionnaire that can be regarded as dispositions for xenophobia respectively for xenophobia.² Self-ratings as “religious,” “spiritual,” and “atheist” together with the *centrality of religiosity* scale (Huber & Huber, 2012) constitute basic information about Nina’s religiosity. A more differential perspective on Nina’s religiosity is presented in the subscales of the Religious Schema Scale (Streib, Hood, & Klein, 2010) together with the *ideological fundamentalism* scale, which is based on the items from the Religion Monitor. Other, non-religious, dispositions are the values (assessed with the PVQ-10, Schwartz, 2003), the *tolerance of complexity* scale (Radant & Dalbert, 2007), and the *violence-legitimizing norms of masculinity* (Enzmann & Wetzels, 2003). And, finally, Table 12.1 presents Nina’s scores on the inter-religious prejudice scales. Now we go into more detail and discuss Nina’s scores in comparison with her quadrant group.

Nina’s Religiosity and her Attitudes toward Religions

Looking at Nina’s religiosity, it is obvious on first sight that Nina refuses to identify with anything vaguely connected with religion. Her scores for self-rated religiosity and spirituality are the lowest possible, both nearly a standard deviation lower than her quadrant group. On the other hand, she obviously self-identifies strongly as “atheist”; here Nina chose the highest possible rating.

²See Chap. 4 for a detailed description of the measures in the framework of the research design of the entire study.

Table 12.1 Comparison of Nina F. with respect to the "Rather not Religious, Higher Openness" respondents on the most important scales in the questionnaire

	Single case variable values for Nina F.	Values for "open to change & low religious" Quadrant Group	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-rating as "religious"	1	1.60	0.77
Self-rating as "spiritual" ^a	1	1.99	1.03
Self-rating as "atheist" ^a	5	3.00	1.52
<i>Centrality of religiosity</i>	9	9.79	2.66
Religious schema scale (RSS)			
<i>Truth of texts & teachings</i>	5	9.72	4.05
<i>Fairness, tolerance & rational choice</i>	23	19.60	3.82
<i>Xenosophia/inter-religious dialog</i>	18	15.49	3.66
<i>Ideological fundamentalism</i>	14	21.65	6.83
<i>Ideological pluralism</i>	13	10.50	2.91
Values			
<i>Universalism</i>	5	4.15	1.30
<i>Benevolence</i>	6	4.60	1.05
<i>Tradition</i>	2	3.05	1.47
<i>Conformity</i>	4	3.35	1.29
<i>Security</i>	2	3.16	1.23
<i>Power</i>	1	3.49	1.40
<i>Achievement</i>	5	4.08	1.28
<i>Hedonism</i>	6	4.71	1.03
<i>Stimulation</i>	4	3.83	1.27
<i>Self-direction</i>	6	4.77	1.07
<i>self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence^b</i>	1.42	-0.12	1.03
<i>openness to change vs. conservation^b</i>	-1.85	-0.83	0.68
<i>tolerance of complexity^a</i>	95	83.67	11.28
<i>violence-legitimizing norms of masculinity^a</i>	9	13.66	4.85
Inter-religious enmity			
<i>Anti-Semitism</i>	4	6.69	3.00
<i>Islamophobia</i>	4	8.63	3.72
<i>Anti-Christian enmity</i>	8	7.84	2.58

Note All comparisons have been calculated with age cohorts, sex, and cultural economic capital being controlled. Analyses for the Quadrant 1 group are based on $n = 485$ cases

^aAnalysis based on smaller sample size ($n = 466$), because variables have not been included in the Pilot Study (see Chap. 4)

^bThe factor scores for the two value axes Self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence and Openness to change vs. conservation are z-standardized, i.e. their means are adjusted to 0 and their standard deviations are adjusted to 1. The factor score values for the axes are the same as in Fig. 9.7 in Chap. 9 and correspond to the way the value space is usually constructed. This means that negative values express value orientations toward more self-enhancement on the first axis or toward more openness to change on the second axis while positive values indicate value orientations toward more self-transcendence (first axis) or toward more conservation (second axis)

Not identifying with any kind of religion corresponds to the result that Nina does not score high on the RSS subscale *truth of texts and teachings* (*ttt*). In fact, she has the lowest rating possible and thereby scores more than one standard deviation lower than her quadrant group which, in itself, already has a very low score on this subscale. This shows, once more, how much Nina rejects anything that has to do with institutionalized religion. And even one step further: Nina strongly rejects *ideological fundamentalism*. Nina scores very low on this scale (with subscales exclusivism and moral dualism) and, again, her score is more than a standard deviation lower than that of her quadrant group. This also corresponds with her scores on *ttt* because this RSS subscale reflects attitudes built upon the belief that the texts of one's own religion present the one and only truth – which may be considered fundamentalist (see Streib, Hood, & Klein, 2010).

On the other hand, Nina's scores for the RSS subscales *fairness, tolerance, and rational choice* (*fr*) and *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog* (*xenos*) are higher than those of her quadrant group (about one standard deviation each). The subscale *fr*, on which Nina scores highest, is related to Stage 4 of individuating-reflective faith in Fowler's (1981) model of faith development. As we will see, this is the stage/the style we can identify in most of Nina's answers in the interview text. Her answer on how religious conflicts can be resolved is a good example for what this subscale stands for, "the concern and vision of a fair coexistence of the religions" (Streib et al., 2010, p. 158).

Also, Nina's high scores on the RSS subscale *xenosophia/inter-religious dialog* correspond with the fact that xenophobic attitudes can be found throughout Nina's interview. Nina seems to be very open to new experience and can appreciate "the alien" which, for her, seems to refer to culture and is certainly not confined to religion. These findings suggest that Nina may be well on her way to the dialogical style (Streib, 2001). Summed up, Nina is a person who is reluctant to identify with any form of organized religion, but who is open-minded and advocates fairness and xenosophia.

Nina's Position in the Value Space

Her position in the coordinate system (Fig. 10.1 in Chap. 10) shows that Nina is a person who is open to change. To measure this, we have used Schwartz' theory and measurement of basic values (Schwartz, 2003, 2012). The dimension *openness to change* is composed by the three variables *self-direction*, *stimulation*, and *hedonism*. Nina scores high on all of these three subscales, with her score for *hedonism* and *self-direction* being one standard deviation higher than the scores of her group; that makes her score on the axis *openness to change vs. conservation* in total -1.85 (the negative value indicating her orientation toward *openness to change* on this bipolar axis, see Fig. 9.7 in Chap. 9 for a visualization), more than one standard deviation lower than her quadrant group. Nina also has high scores on the Values subscales *benevolence* and *universalism* which stand for the enhancement of others and

transcendence of selfish interests (dimension: *self-transcendence*; Schwartz, 2003), on which Nina scores one standard deviation higher than her quadrant group. These quantitative results correspond to Nina's interview where she portrays herself as a very open-minded person who, despite her young age, has accumulated considerable intercultural experience.

In line with this, her results on the scale *tolerance of complexity* are one standard deviation higher than the mean values for the quadrant group. The Tolerance of Complexity Scale consists of the subscales *burden of complexity*, *challenge of complexity*, and *necessity of complexity*, and it is interesting to see that Nina scores high on the *challenge* subscale (about one standard deviation higher than the other Quadrant 1 people). This could mean that she sees the complexity of life as a challenge, but probably, given her answers in the interview, in a positive sense. On the other hand, she seems to feel rather less "burdened" by the complexities she is faced with (on this subscale, her scores are about one standard deviation lower than her quadrant group). This also corresponds with the answers she gives in the interview, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Nina's Attitude toward "Other" Religions

Nina's results for anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are below average: on both scales she shows the scale minimum of 4. This leaves her value for anti-Semitism about one standard deviation lower than the one of her quadrant group in quadrant 1; even more obvious is the deviation concerning Islamophobia. Both results suggest that Nina sees the "other," including "other" religions, as something valuable and something that she encounters without prejudices. Perhaps Judaism and Islam, for her, are not religiously determined in the first place but rather representative of cultures whose differences she experiences not as a threat but as an enrichment for her own life. It is interesting that Christianity is rated significantly more negative than the other two religions. Here, her answers approximately match those of the quadrant group.

What might be the reasons for these findings? The low values for Islamophobia and anti-Semitism may indicate her rather open attitude toward "the unknown." With her history of migration, it is probable for her to show a high amount of openness toward other cultures. Moreover, her high values on the RSS subscale *xenos* point to the assumption that she experiences new encounters as a challenge, rather than as a burden (see her values on the Tolerance of Complexity subscales) and as enhancing her life; the engagement with "the alien" has a positive outcome for her. But why does Nina score comparatively high on *anti-Christian prejudice* then? For one thing, this might be due to the fact that Nina describes herself as not religious, and her rejection may refer to the "Christianity" she came to observe, as she spent most of her childhood in a country in which Catholicism was the state religion into the twenty-first century (it has been turned into a secular state in recent years) and has a population that is more than 90% Christian, with a vast majority of Catholics.

She seems to have adopted some of the critical discourse concerning that country's history, on which she elaborates in her faith development interview (for more details, see below):

"And for some time I have asked myself what would have happened, or what would have happened with Latin America or how Latin America would have developed if this conquest and this proselytization would not have happened. [...] See, they were robbed and during this conquest a genocide took place. And so I find that a bit odd sometimes to donate during Christmas time and to pretend to commit to (smiling) altruism. Yeah, that's why. Thus, I don't like the symbol of the cross somehow because it is a very powerful symbol. [...] and along with this cross you carry around a whole lot of other things and I'm not sure one should want to do that. See? So this symbolizes different things. So... yes of course it can stand for values and charity and whatever, but for me it also stands for... the history of which it comes from. And in what historical circumstances this symbol was carried as well. I would not want to make this my motto and display that openly."³

She describes her skepticism toward the cross when asked to name important religious, spiritual, or other symbols. The cross (and therefore Christianity) is, according to her, negatively connoted as it symbolizes the violent conquest of South America and the atrocities that went along with it. The institutionalized Christianity she explicitly rejects is connected to this specific cultural-historical background with which she may have become familiar when spending part of her childhood in South America.

Nina's Developmental Profile as Seen in the Faith Development Interview

Here we turn to Nina's faith development interview which has already been used to emphasize some findings within the questionnaire results. To understand Nina and her life, her opinions, and her development even better, we now take a closer look at her interview. Our analytic approach starts with a "classic," structural rating of the interview and proceeds by exploring different aspects as they present themselves in the dynamic of the interview. Narrative structures have proved to be an important indicator regarding world view and religion in the study of psycho-social identity

³ „Und ich habe mich eine Zeitlang so ein bisschen gefragt, so was passiert wäre oder was mit Lateinamerika passiert wäre oder wie sich Lateinamerika entwickelt hätte, wenn diese Eroberung nicht statt- und Missionierung nicht stattgefunden hätte. [...] Ne, die wurden geplündert und also so im Zuge der Eroberung wurde ein Genozid an der Bevölkerung verübt. Und dann finde ich das manchmal ein bisschen schräg, dann Weihnachten zu spenden und einen auf (schmunzelnd) Nächstenliebe zu machen. Ja, deshalb. Also das Symbol des Kreuzes mag ich irgendwie nicht, weil das ein sehr mächtiges Symbol ist. [...] Und man trägt mit diesem Symbol auch eine ganze Menge... anderen Kram mit sich rum, von dem ich nicht weiß, ob man das eigentlich immer möchte. Also ja klar kann es auch für Werte und Nächstenliebe und was weiß ich nicht was stehen, aber für mich steht es auch... für die Geschichte, aus der das kommt. Und in welchen geschichtlichen Zusammenhängen dieses Symbol noch getragen wurde. Und das würde ich mir nicht auf meine Fahnen schreiben und damit durch die Stadt ziehen.“

(cf. Keller & Streib, 2013). For identifying a meaningful, representative narrative, we rely on the definition by Labov & Waletzky (1967). These different analytical methods aim at reconstructing the biography of the participants and at identifying the most important traits of their personalities.

Nina’s Faith Development Outline

The Faith Development Interview (FDI) consists of 25 questions covering four sections: (a) life review, (b) relationships, (c) values and commitments, and (d) religion and world view. For the evaluation of the interviews, we use the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Streib & Keller, 2015, which is a carefully revised version of the 3rd edition by Fowler, Streib, and Keller, 2004). The classical structural analysis proceeds by an interpretation of the interviewee’s answers to each of the 25 FDI questions; the mean value of all 25 ratings indicates the interviewee’s faith stage score. For further, more detailed interpretation, the questions are grouped into aspects that have been identified as “windows” to the person’s faith development⁴: perspective taking, social horizon, morality, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. Figure 12.1 not only presents the scores to the 25 FDI questions in Nina’s FDI, but also shows which questions of the FDI belong to which aspect (for further details concerning the evaluation of the FDI, see Chap. 3 in this volume).

Our presentation of Nina’s religious development thus starts with a summary and overview of her responses to the 25 FDI questions. This is presented in Fig. 12.1 which illustrates that Nina’s answers in the FDI were rated in between synthetic-conventional (stage 3) and individuative-reflective style (stage 4); but the majority of her answers indicate Nina’s preference for the individuative-reflective style. This might be understood with reference to her bilingual upbringing and intercontinental relocations with her parents, who seem to have provided a “secure base,” and, later, her work in the social field, which may have helped her develop, move toward, and consolidate an open and reflective worldview. This can be seen, for example, when looking at her answers to questions that aim to explore the social horizon of the interviewee (*breakthrough, crises, current relationships, groups*)—all these are rated stage/style 4. She appears to be exploring the world from a position of inner security, widening her horizon and including the viewpoint of society and a global perspective—all these are aspects crucial for a social horizon rated stage/style 4. Looking at her answers in the aspect morality, we can see that Nina’s answers are rated between stage/style 3 and 4. Morality questions investigate a person’s understanding of moral issues, how they answer to the question, “What is the nature of the claims that others have on me, and how are these claims to be weighed?” (Streib & Keller, 2015). On the one hand, we can see that Nina is focused on interpersonal

⁴Fowler (1980; 1981) speaks of aspects as “windows” to the person’s faith development; Fowler has originally hypothesized seven aspects.

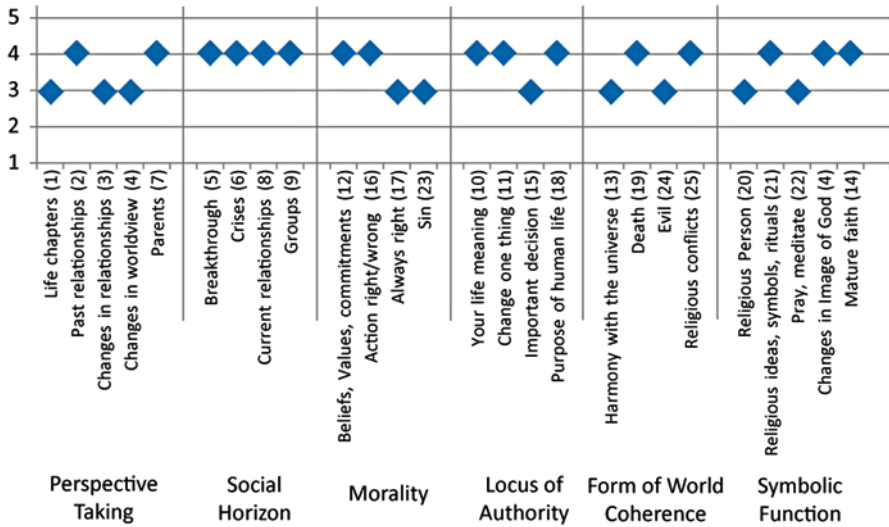


Fig. 12.1 Stage assignments of single answers in Nina’s FDI

relationships and harmonious relationships (which points to stage/style 3); on the other hand, she describes this personal involvement as important for the maintenance of society, which is considered a stage/style 4 statement. Nina is a young adult currently trying to find her place in life and to substantiate her norms and values. Thus, the transition between styles 3 and 4 is consistent with late adolescence/emerging adulthood according to the assumptions about religious development.

Nina’s Life as Displayed in the Faith Development Interview

Live Review

When asked to name her life chapters, Nina decides to do so in a special way: she names the chapters according to the countries she lived in at the time. Born in a South American country, Nina and her parents moved to Germany when she was a baby. At the age of seven, her family moved back to South America where they lived for seven years. They relocated back to Germany when Nina was 13 and she has lived here ever since.

Nina generally describes her life as being shaped by these movements and changes, the relocation at age 13 having the greatest impact so far. Those experiences of frequent changes in her environment caused Nina to develop a rather spontaneous habit which becomes obvious, for example, when she explains how

she made the decision to work on a social project in South America for some months after she was not accepted for the study program at the university and could not find another job here in Germany. While this might quite easily be offensive to a young, ambitious woman, she did not stand still but spontaneously decided to do something completely different instead which turned out to be another inspiring experience for her. Being in motion instead of standing still is what she names as one of her life mottos:

"Not standing idly in difficult situations, but searching and talking and asking people for their input; just staying in motion—a lot can result from this."⁵

For Nina, this habit of searching and not standing still has proved useful when there was danger of being stuck in difficult situations. About this Nina tells the following story that can be fitted into the classic model of narratives by Labov and Waletzky (1967), which distinguishes five steps: (a) a sort of orientation, (b) complication, (c) an attempt to solve the complication, (d) a resolution, and (e) a coda (Table 12.2).

This narrative is a key story in Nina's identity development because it illustrates her ability to switch languages and environments, to use and productively model her experiences of being alien into openness for new situations, to seize opportunities as they present themselves to her, and not to stick too much to given circumstances. The story she tells might be considered a redemption story, as McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, and Bowman (2001) call a story of a "transformation from a bad, affectively negative life scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive life scene" (p. 474). Redemption stories are more likely to occur with a high amount of generativity, the need and the responsibility to guide and to care for the next generation. Nina explicitly addresses this topic when she talks about what she would want to teach her own kids (see citation below). Her life experience has taught her to be open-minded for situations; she finds it "rather dislikable" when people have a rigid set of ideas of how things have to work. And that attitude is something she would like to see transferred to the next generation.

Relationships

The relationship with her parents has a strong impact on her at the time of the interview: Since her parents divorced a couple of years prior, Nina felt forced to re-define her own position toward each of them. And even though she claims that she did not want to be involved in their problems, Nina critically presents to the interviewer her ambivalent involvement with her parents: Nina tells that she had been close to her mother throughout her childhood. But when it came to the divorce, she felt that her father, being in a foreign country without many friends or family, needed

⁵"Wenn man nicht still stehen bleibt, also in so schwierigen Situationen, sondern sucht und redet und die Leute fragt, ob sie eine Idee haben, und einfach in Bewegung bleibt, dann kann sich da heraus ganz viel ergeben."

Table 12.2 Nina's Narrative segment: "Open for Unplanned Circumstances"

	English translation	Original German interview text
Orientation	Two and a half years ago, I had finished my BA and my probation year. And I wanted to start studying at university.	Vor zweieinhalb Jahren hatte ich meinen Bachelor abgeschlossen und mein Berufsanerkennungsjahr abgeschlossen. Und wollte eigentlich anfangen, an der Uni zu studieren.
Complication	I was not accepted, I searched a lot. I could not believe I did not get into university. I was so adamant about that. And I thought: "This just can't be true." I did not have a plan B.	Ich habe keinen Platz bekommen, habe ganz viel gesucht. Ich dachte nicht, dass ich keinen Platz an der Uni bekomme. Ich bin so felsenfest davon ausgegangen, so. Und ich dachte irgendwie: „Das kann überhaupt nicht wahr sein.“ Ich hatte keinen Plan B.
Evaluation/ Attempt to solve	Then I searched to find an alternative, rather desperately. And then there was this possibility to go to [a country in South America], to work there on a project. And within a short time, I packed my things and flew there.	Dann habe ich ein bisschen verzweifelt gesucht, irgendeine alternative zu finden. Und dann hat sich halt über Umwege die Möglichkeit aufgetan, nach [Land in Südamerika] zu gehen, in einem Projekt arbeiten. Und ich habe innerhalb von kürzester Zeit meine Sachen gepackt und bin da hingeflogen.
Resolution	When I was there, I got along really well with all those people and really enjoyed it there.	Also, und dann, als ich da war, habe ich mich mit den Leuten da total gut verstanden und es hat mir super gut gefallen.
Coda	And that was like: "Phew." that encouraged me so much because I was like: "Okay, this evolved out of a situation I had not planned", see? It evolved out of a difficult situation. And then it turned out to be better than I could have maybe planned it. That encouraged me, like: Not standing idly in difficult situations, but searching and talking and asking people for their input; just staying in motion—a lot can result from this.	Und das war so: „Puuh“, das hat mir so total viel irgendwie Mut gegeben, weil ich dachte so: „Okay, das ist aus einer Situation heraus entstanden, die ich so überhaupt nicht geplant hatte“, ne, es ist eigentlich aus einer schwierigen Situation heraus entstanden. Und dann ist es aber schöner geworden, als ich das vielleicht selber hätte planen können. Das hat mir so ein bisschen so Mut gegeben, so in die Richtung: Wenn man nicht still stehen bleibt, also in so schwierigen Situationen, sondern sucht und redet und die Leute fragt, ob sie eine Idee haben, und einfach in Bewegung bleibt, dann kann sich da heraus ganz viel ergeben.

her more now than her mother did, and so she felt obliged to stand by him—which annoyed her mother to some degree. Here, we see an indication that Nina decides to identify with the person who is more in need, or “more alien” in a respective environment.

As for other relations, Nina admits that it is difficult for her to establish long-lasting relationships, because she has grown up with the awareness that people “come and go”; thus Nina has come to the conclusion not to attach herself too strongly to others. Nevertheless, she does have friends and a partner, too, and she is now, for the first time in her life, making the experience of sharing a significant

period of time with the same group of people. She elaborates on that when talking about the girls she knows from her hobby: "...yeah, and that's kind of... funny or rather interesting to see how things change in the course of years or even decades." Nina says that relationships to other people are what give her life meaning, "to know this is what I can be for other people, what role I can play in other people's lives." It is noteworthy nonetheless that there is a strong "I" in a lot of her statements, a striving for independence or, rather, self-dependence and autonomy.

Values and Commitments

In regard to values, Nina shows a fair amount of altruism, which is also expressed in her professional identity: she is studying to become a social worker and is engaged in voluntary work. She spends quite some time in the interview explaining her decision to study social sciences. She had been working with children with disabilities since high school and, when it was time to decide what to do after school, Nina considered the fields that she was best in, which were "languages... and doing something with people." But as languages themselves are but an instrument for her, she soon came to the conclusion:

"Well... okay, but what I have always done... like, always, was work with people and that's what always gave me joy. And then... I figured out... like, it was very obvious for me then: I'm gonna do social work. That's only logical."⁶

While her commitments and interests include aid to developing countries, she is at the same time very critical, pointing out a lot of difficulties and criticizing well-meant attempts to help that are not actually helpful at the end of the day. Interestingly, Nina spontaneously associates an example from politics:

"I care a lot about development aid, but they are endlessly controversial, really. Fair Trade, for example, sounds great, the intention behind it and all, I can totally go with that. But when you... like, dive further into the topic you see that this also generates new dependencies. [...] The more you learn about it, the more difficult it gets. And I have that with a lot of topics. [...] But to find something that does not generate new dependencies and that I can really... support and say 'Yeah, that's a good thing and I will support that', —that's very, very difficult."⁷

⁶"Naja okay, aber das, was ich immer gemacht habe, schon immer, war mit Menschen arbeiten und das hat mir immer viel Spaß gemacht. Und dann... habe ich mir überlegt,... also dann war mir irgendwie total klar so: ‚Ja... Dann mache ich Soziale Arbeit. Das ist eigentlich nur logisch.“

⁷"Mir liegen zum Beispiel so entwicklungspolitische Themen sehr am Herzen, aber ich finde die unendlich kontrovers. Also zum Beispiel Fair Trade könnte man sagen, klingt nach einer super Sache. Oder die Absichten, die dahinter stecken, kann ich total unterschreiben. Aber wenn man dann... wenn man... so da weiter in die Thematik geht, dann sieht man halt, dass das neue Abhängigkeiten schafft. [...] und je mehr man sich damit auseinandersetzt, wird es immer schwieriger. Und so geht mir das in vielen Themenbereichen so. [...] Aber da was zu finden, was nicht neue Abhängigkeiten schafft oder wo ich wirklich... dahinter stehen kann und sagen: ‚Ja, das ist eine gute Sache und dafür werde ich mich einsetzen‘, ist sehr, sehr schwierig."

Her conclusion therefore is: One can only see ahead a limited distance, and people cannot always take into account everything that might possibly happen. The only thing you can do is “to keep your eyes open and decide to the best of your knowledge and conscience and then that’s alright to start with. And you can always correct, adapt, change your actions.” This reflects her openness for change that was also clearly visible throughout the questionnaire. Moreover, this general attitude could be described as awareness for the “relative uncertainty of life and its management” which Staudinger, Baltes, and Smith (1994) identify as one of the criteria of wisdom, describing it as follows:

“Even with incomplete information, this person is willing to trust his/her own judgement, and in case of an unexpected event, to reconsider a decision and to incorporate that event in a constructive manner.” (Staudinger, Baltes, & Smith, 1994, p. 25)

Nina has, at a relatively young age, learned a lot about uncertainties, and she has also learned that she can trust her own judgment, since she has, as she says, “never regretted a decision so far, well, at least not a big decision.” This gives her the readiness to cope with new situations and to even actively seek new, alien situations as she, so far, has always benefitted from them: Nina’s developing xenosophia is based on the positive experiences with the alien, the unknown she has made in her life.

Religion and World View

Nina describes herself in the questionnaire (see Table 12.1) as neither “religious” nor “spiritual”; instead, she chooses the highest rating on the rating scale as “atheist.” In the interview, she tells about her parents’ will to let herself decide whether or not she wanted to be baptized, a decision she never felt the need to make. She does mention a sort of belief in God or “something beyond,” especially when she was younger, mostly in difficult situations. But believing in a good God with all the bad things that happen in the world seems difficult, if not impossible for Nina. She substantiates this attitude with a personal experience accounting of her grandmother’s death when Nina herself was 14 years old, which was characterized by a lot of pain and suffering, leading her to ask:

“Oh, is that necessary? Such a nice old lady, is it really necessary to let her endure so much pain? If there was a God, why could he not just... let her die. Like that. Could that not have been avoided? And that’s when I got really kinda annoyed.”⁸

What we see here is Nina’s critical engagement with theodicy questions and a hypothetical reference to an image of an almighty God. Psychoanalyst Rizzuto sees the development of the God image as related to the identity formation across the life-span. For late adolescence/emerging adulthood, Rizzuto (1979) is aware that this is the time where doubt and critical questions such as theodicy questions arise,

⁸“Oh, muss das sein? Ne, so eine nette Frau: Muss das sein, dass sie so viel leidet zum Ende der Krankheit, so? Wenn es einen Gott gäbe, warum könnte sie nicht einfach... sterben. So. Mh... kann ihr das nicht erspart bleiben? Und da habe ich mich... geärgert quasi.”

and therefore she proposes as helpful God representation for adolescence "a being that can tolerate questioning and doubt while believers face the contradictions of life and the evil in the world" (Rizzuto, 1991, p. 56). For Nina, such a helpful God representation is not available. Her development is rather one that leads to disbelief as she rejects a God allowing needless suffering.

But refusing to describe herself as religious or spiritual does not leave her as a person with a mind for nothing but rationality. When it comes to the question of what happens after death she admits that she sticks to the belief of a paradise-like afterlife. She admits that this idea may be "childish, naïve," but states that she chooses to believe that anyway because the idea of just rotting away in the earth after death is rather depressing for her and the thought of something lying beyond is comforting, "makes it easier [to deal with]." She seems to refer to what Winnicott (1971) has named the intermediate area, an inner space created "between" phantasy and reality. Winnicott saw the intermediate area as offering relief from the ongoing task of reality acceptance and as the origin of arts and religion. Alluding to Winnicott's seminal paper "Playing and reality" (1971), Fonagy and Target have, in a series of papers (e.g., Fonagy & Target, 2007), discussed "mentalization" or "reflective functioning," which develops as the young child, protected by secure attachment, learns to move back and forth between acting "as if," or pretend play, and reality, eventually realizing that there is an inner life and that all experience is mediated by inner processes. Nina acknowledges the tension of her private belief in an afterlife with her rejection of religiosity ("But... yeah, I have asked myself... how that fits together"). She shows advanced reflective functioning when discussing the "as-if" notion of her faith. Her awareness of the comfort created in this intermediate space also feeds into her understanding of "other" or "alien" religious beliefs or world views (see below).

Nina hopes that there is "something good, but that, for me, is definitely not a god in the sense of any religion." The rituals she refers to are rather worldly, and "sin" for her is a traditional and antiquated Christian concept which she rejects. It is therefore rather consistent that, being asked what to do when people disagree on religious questions, Nina says that she does not see any reason for people to fight over that. For her, religious beliefs are there to give comfort and to rely upon in times of need, in existentially threatening situations, something deeply private. Therefore, she sees no reason for anybody to take offense in other people's faith as long as it does not hurt anybody. Conflicts arise when people do not grant each other their beliefs. She ends the interview with a plea for tolerance for different perspectives:

"Both or all [ways of dealing] are not the ultimate truth. But they are just one way of looking for security for oneself. And why the heck should I deny people this? [...] When I only say: 'Yeah, that's just my... my concept of it and that's how I explain things' and when I, at the same time, leave room for other people's explanations, then there would be no reason... for these conflicts."⁹

⁹"Also weil... so die Wahrheit ist das beides- ist das alles eh nicht. Ne, sondern das ist einfach eine Art und Weise, Sicherheit für sich zu suchen. Und warum zum Teufel soll ich die anderen Leuten absprechen wollen? [...] Wenn ich einfach nur sage: 'Ja, das ist halt meine... meine Vorstellung davon und so erkläre ich mir das', und aber auch Platz dafür lasse, dass man sich das auch anders erklären las-se, dann bräuchte es... für mich diese Konflikte nicht zu geben."

Nina takes a more radical position toward Christianity as an organized religion. When asked for her beliefs, values, and commitments, she explicitly rejects the term “belief” as it is for her associated with the church as an institution. As Nina has been working in the social field for a long time, she profoundly criticizes the fact that a lot of social institutions are administrated by the churches. She feels (and actually is) excluded as a potential employee because she is not baptized and church-run institutions demand a formal membership in their churches¹⁰. She states:

“And I personally just cannot accept that. It even annoys me to some degree, I think. Because I mean... Christians have not invented charity (smiles).[...] And I think, of course, if they want to pursue the Christian idea they are free to do so, but I think for myself: Me as a person could do valuable work with the people in these institutions without... [being a Christian on paper].[...] No, I really cannot accept that. It’s the institutions’ own fault then.”¹¹

Nina’s Challenge: Interpersonal Relations

Nina’s interview offers much information concerning her attitudes toward others. It shows how she handles strangeness and how this evolved in the course of her life: Nina had to completely switch her social environment more than once. Her relocation to Germany as a teenager was especially difficult, as she had to figure out first how to belong to a peer group. She describes difficulties based on different cultural backgrounds in a very reflected way:

“Yes, and I felt completely out of place. I did not even understand the German colloquial language. See, I did speak German, as first language, but I did not understand the German youth slang. And I think that was odd for my classmates, thinking: ‘But you are German. You speak German. Why don’t you understand us?’ [...] Spanish as a language works totally different for me. It’s more like paraphrasing, more exaggerating. And German for me is very precise, a bit ironic, a bit cynical. And that’s what I did not understand. [...] And then there were those like girl stories, you know, I tried to attach myself to the girls that I had known before. And then once I walked into a room and overheard them bad-mouthing me. And I was like ‘Phhh.’ I had not anticipated that. I wasn’t used to things like that from

¹⁰In Germany, many hospitals, child care facilities, and other social institutions are administrated by either the Catholic Church or the Protestant Church. These institutions make the membership in their specific Church a mandatory requirement for their employees. Thus people who do not belong to this specific Church will not be employed, and leaving the Church, and even switching denominations, during employment may result in immediate termination of employment.

¹¹“Und das sehe ich persönlich aber überhaupt nicht ein. Also es ärgert mich auch ein bisschen, glaube ich. Also weil... ich weiß nicht, die Christen haben die Nächstenliebe auch nicht erfunden. (schmunzelnd)[...]Und ich glaube- also natürlich, wenn- wenn sie... den christlichen Gedanken weiterführen wollen, dann... können sie das ruhig machen, aber... ich denke mir: Ich als Person könnte für eine Einrichtung auch eine gute Arbeit mit den Menschen machen, ne, ohne [auf dem Papier Christin zu sein]. [...]Nein, das sehe ich aber gezielt nicht ein. Also dann sind die Einrichtungen selber schuld.”

[country in South America], to such bitchiness. [...] But when you get into such an enclosed group of girls – they just don't need you..."¹²

Noteworthy is the combination between cultural factors and the dynamics that are characteristic for the negotiation of social identity in adolescent groups. Taking up the discussion on bilingual language acquisition and psychological development (cf. Amati-Mehler, Argentieri, & Canestieri, 1993), we might ask here if growing up in two continents and languages has ambiguous consequences: On the one hand, Nina has developed a wider "potential space" sensu Winnicott, which supports her openness toward the alien. On the other hand, this leads to her feeling and being perceived as well as treated as "alien" by the German peers when returning as an adolescent.

Therefore, she enjoyed sharing her "alien" experience with a friend who used to live in the same South American country. With her, she could share, recollect and socially validate her own past and the experience of being the person with the "alien" experience:

"And she had been to [country in South America] for one year as well. And for me it was impressive to see that because: I cannot really share these experiences I had in [country in South America] here in Germany. I can tell about them, of course, but I get the feeling for some people it sounds like I was reading from a history book or from a geography book because you can't really imagine that. You know, and because I made such experiences that sound totally strange in a German everyday life. And I have asked myself whether people think I was making these stories up. Hardly anybody that I know has ever been to [country in South America] and so they (smiling) can't really reconstruct whether what I tell is true or whether I am exaggerating in retrospect or whatever. And it was totally different with her. But it's the same for her."¹³

¹²"Ja, ich habe mich völlig unpassend gefühlt. Ich habe auch so deutsche Umgangssprache nicht verstanden. Ne, also ich habe deutsch gesprochen, so als erste Muttersprache, aber so deutsche Jugendsprache habe ich nicht verstanden. Und ich glaube, das war für meine Mitschüler auch seltsam, dass sie denken: „Ja, aber du bist Deutsche. Du sprichst deutsch. Warum... warum verstehst du uns nicht?“ [...] Spanisch funktioniert für mich... also... glaube ich in der Sprache ganz anders. Es ist so mehr umschreibend, mehr übertreibend, mehr... so. Und deutsch ist für mich so sehr... sehr präzise, ein bisschen... ja, ein bisschen ironisch, ein bisschen zynisch. Und das habe ich nicht verstanden. [...] Ja, dann so Mädchengeschichten, ne, dann habe ich mich natürlich an die Mädchen gehalten, die ich von früher noch kannte. Und dann bin ich mal in so einen Raum rein und habe gehört, wie sie so schlecht über mich geredet haben, als ich da rein kam. Und dachte so: „Pf!“ [I: (lacht)] Damit hatte ich nicht gerechnet. Das kannte ich aus... [Land in Südamerika] so auch nicht, so eine Bissigkeit. [...] Aber wenn man so in eine geschlossene Gruppe kommt an Mädchen, die brauchen einen nicht..."

¹³"Und sie war auch für ein Jahr... ja, für ein Jahr oder für anderthalb Jahre insgesamt glaube ich in [Land in Südamerika] auch. Und es war für mich beeindruckend zu sehen, weil: Ich kann diese [Land in Südamerika]-Erfahrungen nicht so gut teilen in Deutschland. Also ich kann davon erzählen, aber ich habe das Gefühl, für manche Leute klingt das so, als würde ich aus einem Geschichtsbuch vorlesen oder aus einem Geographiebuch, weil man sich das nicht so gut vorstellen kann. Ne, und weil ich... so Sachen erlebt habe, die die vielleicht in einem deutschen... Alltag... die hören sich total schräg an. Und ich habe mich auch schon mal gefragt, ob die Leute denken, dass ich ihnen Geschichten erzähle. Weil es kann ja auch... also, es war ja kaum jemand... den ich so kenne, in [Land in Südamerika] und dann (schmunzelnd) können die das natürlich auch nicht nachvollziehen, ob das stimmt oder ob ich im Nachhinein übertreibe oder keine Ahnung. Und bei ihr war das halt nicht so. Aber ihr geht es genauso."

Nina describes here a sensation of alienness that has its origin in the fact that most people in her environment lack the experience that she has had; moreover, she feels that what she has experienced is doubted by others. Plus, she describes a closeness based on the shared background that will make other differences seem small and insignificant. This friendship obviously helps her integrate her life in South America into a shared personal narrative and thus, her identity.

Nina's Response: Openness and Tolerance

For Nina, her own "alienness" seems to be the main incentive for conflicts—and for development. Her conclusion after those experiences is an independence both from circumstances and from people. She can build something new for herself and pays attention to not attach herself too much to other people because her experiences show that people "come and go like one does oneself."

All these experiences, however, result in a great openness toward other people which is explicitly expressed:

"I believe it's important to open your eyes. Or to open your senses for situations, for people, for circumstances. You know, you have ideas in your head too quickly, but instead- it should be about engaging in stuff. And about being willing to understand things. So this is the concept: If I wanted to teach my kids one thing, you know, it would be that. (laughs) Just starting by just looking at things. And not like... I find it rather disliked when people say, like 'Yes, I have a plan how things have to work', you know. I find that rather disliked. Or I'd rather distance myself from an attitude like that."¹⁴

This citation corresponds well with the high value Nina has on the scale for *tolerance of complexity* (see Table 12.1) and it shows that she is not looking for easy solutions; she can handle ambiguities and considers openness for different solutions as enriching for her life.

Conclusion

Taken together, one can conclude that Nina F. in her yet young life has experienced multiple upheavals in the form of migrations. More than once she has been "the alien," and this especially in her adolescent years in which belonging to a peer group

¹⁴"Ich glaube, dass es wichtig ist, so die Augen aufzumachen. Oder die Sinne aufzumachen für Situationen, für Menschen, für Gegebenheiten und nicht... also man hat halt so sehr schnell... Ideen zu irgendetwas im Kopf, sondern- also dass es eher darum geht, sich auf Sachen einzulassen. Und bereit zu sein,... Dinge zu verstehen.... Ja.... Also das ist so die Vorstellung: Wenn ich meinen Kindern irgendetwas beibringen wollte, ne, dann wäre das glaube ich das. (lacht) So erstmal... ja, erstmal einfach auch sich Dinge anzugucken. Unnnd nicht so... ich finde das eher unsympathisch, wenn Leute sagen, so: 'Ja, ich habe den Plan, wie irgendetwas funktionieren muss', ne. Das ist mir eher unsympathisch. Oder da würde ich mich eher von distanzieren wollen."

is particularly important for identity development. These sensations of alienness and otherness, and the rejection going along with that, have had a positive impact on Nina's attitudes: She herself is open toward other "strangers" and can integrate the novelties that come along with those encounters into her life. Her most challenging experiences were those that are located on an interpersonal level and she has learnt to deal with them: Based on a secure attachment style, Nina has been able to find her place, to make friends. Moreover, she is also able to find *new* places, make *new* friends because she has experienced that the "alien" can become an inspiration, if only one is able to be open and willing to broaden one's horizon.

Thereby, it is appealing to Nina to let the alien keep its "sting" (Waldenfels, 1990), to expose herself to new and unknown circumstances, which makes her such a good example for the concept of xenosophia (see Chap. 1 for details). Interestingly, Nina's impromptu speech even resembles Waldenfels' philosophical thoughts on the alien. Her attitude of "just looking at things" instead of trying to comprehend and "integrate" everything reflects a phenomenological approach that appreciates the "surplus of the alien" and resists the "silencing of the demand of the alien" (cf. Waldenfels, 1999, p. 50). It is remarkable that Nina is able to arrive at these conclusions, given her young age.

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