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Quest and Query: Interpreting a Biographical Interview with a Turkish Woman Laborer in Germany

*Nevâl Gültekin, Lena Inowlocki & Helma Lutz**

Abstract: Hülya, a young woman who came to Germany from Turkey at the age of 17 in pursuit of a better life looks back at the age of 31. In her biographical query she relates her experiences to a social commentary on the hard and inhuman conditions of contract labor. At the same time she is critical of the common sense notions that suffering and social problems are the main consequences of labor migration. In our analytical query of “doing biographical analysis” we discuss how we interpreted Hülya’s narrative and commentary in socio-historical context and also in relation to the discourse on migration from Turkey. We looked for terms to analyze agency *and* suffering within biographical accounts without giving priority to either of them. Referring to the analysis of another case and to the concept of “two-fold perspectivity” we describe how both suffering and also pursuing one’s potential are negotiated in biographical quests and queries.

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1. Biographical Quests and Queries

Biographical analysis is an interpretive research approach to understand how individuals partake in social contexts and make sense of them. The analysis of biographical interviews aims at revealing structures of personal and social processes of action and of suffering as well as possible resources for coping and change. In our practice of “doing biographical analysis” there is no pre-selection of what would be “relevant” categories; instead, we proceed sequentially in our analysis, to allow for the emergence of new terms of sociological understanding.

Interview partners are asked by the interviewer to tell their life story in relation to the research interest; thus, Hülya was asked for her personal experience of labor migration to Germany. In the course of the narration, life events unfold to reveal experience, past and present insights, and perspectives. Usually it is the interviewer who later produces and interprets the transcript. In this case, however, we interpreted an autobiographical narrative interview recorded and transcribed by other researchers in 1986; we thus could not refer to first-hand situational understanding.

The analysis of a taped and transcribed autobiographical narrative interview proceeds by careful and methodical readings of the text. In studying interview transcripts, substantive concerns and formal aspects of the narrative are interpreted in their relation with one another. The discovery of the regular occurrence of “communicative schemes” (relating, for example, how certain events unfolded, giving a commentary, explanation, or evaluation) created a sociolinguistic basis for interpretation¹. Another important discovery was that painful, threatening or traumatic life experiences are not simply rendered in a “straight-forward” single line of narrative presentation. Instead, such a narrative tends to be interrupted by inserted (argumentative) sequences about the background of these experiences (RIEMANN & SCHÜTZE, 1991). A puzzling discontinuation of an ongoing narrative and ensuing repair practices can thus sensitize the interpreter with regard to former and still acute difficulties in the life of the narrator.

Formal aspects of the biographical account reflect what might lead to a discovery of certain biographical and social processes, such as constraints on action and suffering². Formal aspects by themselves, however, are not definite indicators of biographical or social processes. The interpretation relies on the substantive concerns reflected in the account as well as on sociological context knowledge. As an empirically based research process, an interpretation requires

¹ Fritz SCHÜTZE gave an account of his discovery in developing biographical analysis (see Gerhard RIEMANN’s introduction, also APITZSCH & INOWLOCKI, 2000).

² In sociology, even in symbolic interactionism, action has been emphasized, and suffering and disorderly social processes have been neglected (see SCHÜTZE, 1987; RIEMANN & SCHÜTZE, 1991).

validity checks internally and externally. That is, it should be possible to find further support for the interpretation of a certain segment in other parts of the interview. And it should be possible to generalize interpretations with regard to other possible cases within the social and historical contexts, or “life worlds,” implicitly or explicitly referred to. In fact, the basis for theoretical generalization of a single case relies on understanding the case within its social and historical context. Interpretive researchers therefore rely on their awareness of social knowledge. In our view, this should include a critical assessment of common sense descriptions and explanations of social realities. Thus, to interpret a case, we think that researchers need to reflexively question taken-for-granted assumptions concerning, for example, social normality and difference.

How did we proceed in our interpretation of the biographical interview with Hülya³? Hülya, the biographical narrator, arrived in Germany in 1972 at the age of 17. As a young girl, her “dream” had been to earn money through contract work in Germany. She wanted to become independent and also to help her impoverished family lead a better life. In 1986, at the time of the interview, Hülya queries her quest. “Quest” and “query” denote typical features of biographical accounts in their reflexivity; that is, what is being told about one’s life story entails explanations of one’s action and self-evaluations. In the course of our close readings and discussions, we studied documents of the era of “guest workers” as well as issues and debates concerning labor immigration from Turkey to Germany. Our process of interpretation, of *doing biographical analysis*, can be seen as a quest, a pursuit of understanding a case and its underlying structures. It can be also seen as our query of how we proceeded in our analysis. The query continues every time we reconsider the case and our analysis, which can never be exhaustive. This is because a case has always more meaning than can be disclosed at any given time, and also because an analysis is always positional and cannot encompass possible other perspectives of interpretation. This is not to say, however, that case analysis is willful or deliberate. If the quest proceeds methodically and with contextual awareness, this constitutes the basis for generalization. As researchers, our query of how we proceeded is important because it compels us spell out our focus, our interest and awareness, our positionality towards the case.

The importance of retracing our steps is especially obvious when considering the contested issues of a case. Concerning our analysis of the interview with Hülya, we thus kept asking ourselves whether we had sufficiently considered the different dimensions of her account in reaction to dominant majority attitudes towards—female—labor immigration from Turkey. A striking example of the impact of common sense notions is that “honor” is generally taken as a causal explanation of the “strangeness,” or strange acts of immigrants. In analyzing an interview with an immigrant who talks about “honor,” it would be

³ We first presented an interpretation of this interview at the ISA conference in Montréal (INOWLOCKI & LUTZ, 1998), followed by a publication (INOWLOCKI & LUTZ, 2000).

mistaken to assume that we are dealing with a “natural” or naive stance instead of a reflexive use of the term which relates one’s experiences to how “honor” is commonly used as a category of difference. How matters of tradition are referred to changes with migration, just as traditions undergo transformations in the new country. Because of globalization and migration numerous changes can also occur in migrants’ places of origin.

Another important example is the dominant majority view that immigration is the cause of much suffering and severe social problems. We would not dispute that migration can lead to suffering and problems. However, from a common sense view the existence of “suffering” and “problems” seemingly proves that immigration is generally wrong. Explicitly or implicitly this is to justify the reluctant acceptance, and in some cases the hostile refusal of “foreigners” by Western European societies, that need immigration economically but are still set against it in political and social terms. Similarly as with “honor,” a careful interpretation therefore needs to recognize the reflexive aspects of “suffering” in a biographical account, that is, reflexive with regard to dominant views.

In the following, we start out with a short sketch of Hülya’s life story. As part of our basis of interpretation, we briefly refer to the social history of labor immigration from Turkey to Germany. We continue with a critical perspective of the consensus on this immigration as leading to personal suffering and immense social problems. While this can certainly be an aspect of the migration experience, we argue against a quasi-automatic equation. Instead, we use a more differentiated concept of “twofold perspectivity” which goes beyond dichotomous views of migration as stories of either success or, in most cases, suffering. In contested areas of experience, such as immigration from southern and eastern to western Europe, it might be impossible to tell a story “straight.” To explain this point, we shall refer to an autobiographical interview with another Turkish immigrant woman, Serap, who presented two versions of her life story within one interview. It was in the interpretation of this interview that the concept of “twofold perspectivity” was developed (GÜLTEKIN, 2003). We then apply this concept in our interpretation of Hülyalya’s interview. First, we give a brief summary of her life story.

2. A Summary of Hülya’s Life Story

Hülya was born in a rural area of southern Turkey in 1955 as the youngest of five children. When she was eleven years old, her father became very ill and her family soon was impoverished. As a young girl, Hülya had a “dream” of earning a living in Germany when she saw migrant workers on their home visit in their nice car. Since the minimum age for acquiring a contract was eighteen, she persuaded her father at the age of fourteen to convince a doctor to change

her birth certificate. At the age of seventeen, she finally succeeded in changing her official age to eighteen. She first had to endure extensive and degrading health-checks at the Istanbul recruitment office under German supervision. Working in a chicken factory was then presented to her and other successful candidates as a clean, quasi-automatic task, and Hülya signed a contract.

After a strenuous train journey to a German city she was taken to an old school building in a village where she shared a room with four young Turkish women. They were living in complete isolation from the village around them. Work was extremely hard and dirty, lasting up to eleven hours per day without paid overtime. In addition to slaughtering, Hülya had to clean the greasy and bloodied iron transport racks and the hall with ice-cold water. She wanted to leave but she saw no way she could break her contract and go back. During the one year she stayed on the work-floor of the chicken factory, labor regulations were repeatedly disregarded. Injuries were not properly attended to. When her year's contract was over, Hülya found out that her residence and work permit had expired and that her employer had not provided the necessary papers to the police. It was only by quick action and a cooperative civil servant that her permits were extended. With the help of distant relatives contacted by her mother, Hülya found a new job as a shift worker in a metal factory near Hamburg. Again she stayed in a room with three other women, but the conditions were worse than in the previous dormitory where her friends had become "family" to her. Hülya developed health problems; she suffered from insomnia and became depressed.

Her first visit home was in 1974, two years after she had left. With Hülya's consent, a marriage was arranged with her mother's nephew, a post-office clerk whom she married two years later. He and his family agreed that she could work for one more year in Germany to be able to buy some household appliances. On her return to Germany she had further health problems; within the following five months she had three serious operations. In these months she suffered constantly from diffuse pain; the doctors hardly gave her any information about the origin and character of her illness. There was nobody to take care of her.

Still feeling unwell and exhausted, Hülya went to Turkey and visited her mother without seeing her husband first. Her husband summoned her, but Hülya refused to go because in his letters he had demanded her immediate return while she was ill. After her vacation she went back to Germany. When she returned to Turkey a year later, the family tried to reconcile the couple. Hülya was convinced by then that she could not live with her husband, who was too unlike her. She sought and obtained a divorce in 1980, after her mother's death.

As a result of her extended illness, Hülya was given notice by her employer in 1978. She sued him. Now that she had begun to learn German, she was able to deal with the administration. Without any help from the trade union, she

partly succeeded in the Labor Court and received some compensation. After six months of unemployment she found a job in a restaurant kitchen. The wage was low, she had to work weekends and as she still shared a room with women who were working shifts, she could not get any rest. Five months later she started working in a metal-packaging factory, doing the same work as her German colleagues who had formal qualifications but earning far less.

From 1979 until the time of the interview in 1986, Hülya had been working in this factory. She now lived by herself. Even though she had bought a flat in Turkey, she was convinced she would not be able to earn a living there and be socially accepted as a divorced woman. Some day she would like to find a suitable partner and live a good life, ideally in a place that would combine the positive aspects of living in Turkey as well as in Germany.

3. Interpreting Hülya's Account

When analyzing a case that has to do with highly contested issues, such as immigration from Turkey to Germany, a critical perspective is important in order to discern general opinions and explanations of the issues at stake. The decisive difference is whether such ready-made opinions enter the interpretation unnoticed, or whether we consider the narrator as an agent who is confronted with and encounters those ready-made opinions. We would further argue that through biographical analysis, there is a possibility of discovering in which ways such encounters with dominant opinions and explanations constitute acts of resistance. These may not always be marked as such. When Hülya, for example, describes how she proceeded in the labor court against being dismissed from work because of her hospital stays, this is a clearly marked case of fighting back. However, when she tells the story of her recruitment and first employment, her perspective of agency remains hidden and becomes recognizable only implicitly. As Hülya recounts her original plan to leave for Germany in her quest for personal independence and better material security, she does so as the person she once was. In contrast, telling these stories with a twist⁴ reflects the utter discrepancy between normal expectations and what turned out to be the reality of contract work. This corresponds to an act of confronting her then-quest with her later query, when she had already seen and understood what she was up against. The narrator's activities in telling her experiences represent her resistance to what she was subjected to. It is certainly not blind suffering; on the contrary, clearly criticism and protest are expressed.

⁴ This would be the case, for example, in the story of the man checking on future employees in the Istanbul office (II.255-258), of getting one free meal of chicken legs upon arrival at the factory (II.262-269), of the municipal clerk looking at her and the other young women without papers in disbelief (II.436-437).

In our group's discussions⁵ of the interview, we first exchanged overall impressions of the text before going into more detailed analysis. One of our first observations was that Hülya's account constitutes a *social commentary*. Her personal account of experiencing migration and contract labor also generalizes from her own situation. What she describes and explains are generally problematic issues she recognizes in these contexts. Already the introductory comments to the interview transcript written by the two interviewers, Heike KAHLERT and Christa NOACK⁶ hint at this. They state that Hülya invited them to have dinner at her house before the interview: "She said that when German people visit a Turkish woman she wanted to prepare a Turkish meal in any case⁷" (field notes of the interviewers in the Appendix).

The explicit characterization of the meeting as a German-Turkish encounter shows that mutual images of oneself and of the other are at stake. It could be argued that for the meeting with the interviewers, Hülya taps the resources of "traditional" hospitality—a tradition that became important in a new way in the course of settling in Germany. Hospitality and Turkish cuisine can be seen as strong statements against the conditions "guest workers" were exposed to in Germany and against a general lack of respect for Turkish immigrants and "their customs."

Our initial observation was confirmed when we discussed the interview in sequence and in detail. Hülya's descriptions are very specific in a personal sense, and at the same time contain historical and social dimensions. She refers to these dimensions when she describes the medical examinations she and the other applicants were subjected to at the recruitment office in Istanbul under German supervision, the conditions of the train ride, of work and housing, and the relations of Germans towards her and the other immigrant women laborers. While her narrative contains reproaches and accusations for what she was made to endure and suffer, she mitigates the account with comic episodes, punch lines and outside perspectives. She communicates her experiences to her interviewers not primarily as a victim of the hardship of contract labor, but equally as a witness to social injustice. In other words, she would want them to understand her story, and she would want them to gain an understanding through her story of the situations and conditions of immigrant workers in Germany, specifically of women workers. She understands what happened to her within a larger social context, and this is where she *bears witness* to exploitation and discrimination, even when, or especially when her tone is light and joking to enable her listeners to follow with empathy and comprehension.

⁵ From late 1997 until summer 1998, the three authors regularly met at Frankfurt University to interpret the interview. Serin ERENGEZGIN was the fourth member of this group.

⁶ The two interviewers were students of the sociologist Christa HOFFMANN-RIEM (see Gerhard RIEMANN's introduction).

⁷ Instead of "in any case," we would translate the German "auf jeden Fall" here with "no matter what."

Giving an implicit and explicit social commentary as well as bearing witness against injustice can be characterized as key activities and central concerns of the narrator. In our process of interpretation, we focused on these concerns by reading documents of contract labor immigration from Turkey that had recently been published (ERYILMAZ & JAMIN, 1998). This context of Hülya's experience will be outlined in the following.

4. The Era of “Guest Work”—a German *Sonderweg* of Immigration History

Even though migration is by no means a new phenomenon in Europe, since World War II it has given rise to political debates and legislative action in Western Europe. We briefly want to map out some of the most significant aspects in which German post World War II migration history differs from other Western European countries. For example, in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and in France, migration was a result of the de-colonization process that originated in the collapse of old empires and led to significant changes of state borders as well as a re-definition of national identities. As each empire had created its own colonial system of hierarchical “belonging,” the question of who had to be admitted to the “motherland” became a question for all state bureaucracies of the nations involved. Admission was often based on perceived differences between those who “belonged” or “fit in,” and therefore were assumed to be capable of assimilation, and those who did not belong because of real or imagined cultural and ethnic differences (LUTZ, 1997). Although the selection criteria on the whole were following racist biases, it nevertheless became clear that the composition of the population had changed for good—it was only a question of time to acknowledge the presence of an “ethnic” (in Dutch terms) or “racial” (in British terms) diversification of the population⁸.

A look at migration development in post war Germany shows that diversification of the population has only very recently been acknowledged in debates and legislation. Broad social acceptance of diversification still has a long way to go, as in all European countries. West Germany admitted twelve million people between 1949 and 1961 on the basis of the conviction that these were “ethnic” Germans, that is, that they originally ‘belonged’ to Germany by *ius sanguinis*: nine million were predominantly expelled from East European countries (called *Aussiedler* after 1951 when their migration to West Germany was regulated on the basis of bilateral treaties) and three million refugees arrived from the former GDR (called *Übersiedler*). This assumes that nationality and culture are inherited from the parents. The *ius sanguinis* principle, which is at

⁸ Diversification of the population is, of course, not an achievement by itself; decisive are processes of recognition and political representation in a plural democracy.

the heart of the citizenship debate in Germany, is contrasted with the *ius soli* principle supported by the French republican tradition, according to which migrants have the right to citizenship after a certain period of residence in a nation state, and that children are considered nationals if they are born in the country.

The migration process of the ethnic Germans was seen as re-settlement, an act of repatriation to the “fatherland” of their ancestors, from which some of them had been absent for more than 300 years. The most significant difference between this post-war immigration flow and the simultaneous “guest-workers-immigration”—involving the recruitment of workers from Italy in the 1950s and from Spain, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, Portugal, Morocco and Tunisia in the 1960s—was the fact that ethnic Germans were granted citizenship from the very day of their entry, while this possibility was and still is denied to the majority of the labor migrants and their children⁹. Instead, “guest-work” was perceived as a temporary phenomenon, as a system completely centered on the needs of the labor market. Therefore the recruitment of “guest-workers” was intended to be rational. Adhering strictly to a rotation system, however, proved to be undesirable and too complicated for many employers, since a new workforce always needed extra time to become acquainted with the work. In addition, it was usual to recruit workers’ family members in order to reduce expenses, thus to avoid the fee of DM 3000 per recruited worker the companies had to pay to the German employment office.

Between 1961 and 1973, 865,000 workers from Turkey entered the Federal Republic of Germany, many of whom later returned to Turkey (JAMIN, 1998, p.149). Of these migrants, 21.4 percent were women (ERYILMAZ, 1998, p.134), a fact often overlooked. As a result of the oil crisis, Germany as well as other Western European states stopped the official recruitment in 1973. Unintended and undesired by the German state, the halt in recruitment was followed by a settlement process: many “guest-workers” became immigrants, despite the fact that they were denied citizenship rights by the German state. After 1973, the main way to acquire admission became the so-called family reunion-regulation granted to workers’ children and spouses¹⁰.

It is striking, however, that at the same time, another immigration flow was not banned but officially facilitated: between 1961 and 1988, another 1.5 million ethnic Germans (now called *Spät-Aussiedler*) arrived in the FRG and since then the number of those coming from Russia, Romania, Poland, and other parts of Eastern Europe amounts to approximately 250,000 persons per year

⁹ One important legal reform has to be mentioned in this context: Since January 1, 2000 every child born to legal migrant residents is entitled to German nationality and registered with two nationalities; between the age of 18 and 23, a decision for one nationality has to be made.

¹⁰ Presently, there are 2.05 million inhabitants of Turkish origin in Germany.

(RUDOLPH & HÜBNER, 1993; RUDOLPH, 1996; MOROKVASIC, 1993; MÜNZ, 1996).

Looking back at the development of immigration to Germany, it has to be stressed that no other country in the world has experienced comparable immigration after World War II, consisting of the immigration of “ethnic” Germans as well as the guest-worker-immigration. For both flows there were different regimes, different citizenship treatments and different integration procedures. Contrary to other European states which faced considerable immigration movements and actively dealt with their consequences for at least three decades, Germany’s development can be characterized as a “*Sonderweg*,” in which immigration and diversification of the population was de-emphasized or negatively evaluated rather than focused upon in realistic and accepting ways. This is not only true for politics and policy making, but also for much of social science research on the topic of immigration and its dominant “problem consensus,” particularly on immigrants and their families from Turkey. We think it is necessary to consider this consensus to understand Hülya’s interview.

5. The Problem Consensus on Immigrants from Turkey to Germany¹¹

The social science discourse on immigrants from Turkey can be reread as a history of constructing “images of the other,” by emphasizing “differences” while at the same time ignoring “sameness.” Whereas for Western Europeans geographic mobility is usually described as modern and dynamic, this is not the case with migrants from Turkey—to the contrary, their migration is completely separated from the positive evaluation of movement and mobility. Labor migration is seen as merely escaping poverty, and leading to failure and loss (GÜLTEKIN, 2003).

From the 1970’s onwards, a clear tendency towards the “orientalization” of migrant men and women can be identified: the debate on foreign men and women became a debate on “Turks” (see LUTZ, 1991). The “Turkish peasants,” bound to their traditions and Islamic culture, were seen as transformed through the hardships of migration as “guest-workers” into archaic authoritarian patriarchs and repressed and muted housewives. During the 1980s, the culture-difference paradigm and, with regard to the second generation, the culture-conflict paradigm gained influence and developed into the dominant social scientific narrative. Altogether men were portrayed as unable to adapt or assimilate, acting toward their children as despotic fathers; whereas women, as wives and mothers, were portrayed as unprepared to raise their children accord-

¹¹ With “families from Turkey,” or “Turkish families” we mean all Turkish citizens who emigrated to Germany, including different minorities, for example, the Kurds.

ing to the standards of a modern society. A new field of social work and pedagogical interventions in migrant family life was established over time. While the first, the “lost generation,” was caught between tradition and modernity, their children were seen as trapped between their parents and the host society—especially daughters continue to be seen as suffering from this situation (see LUTZ & HUTH-HILDEBRANDT, 1998; COLLONI & LUTZ, 2000). Altogether, the Turkish migrant family is not only portrayed as problem ridden, but as constituting social problems. Social science researchers and the news media have made the unfounded claim that the second generation in Turkish families have turned to Islamic fundamentalism as a “result” of family and social problems arising from their parents’ immigration (see INOWLOCKI, 1998).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, these stereotypes were identified and criticized as the “creation of ethnicism” (BUKOW & LLARYORA, 1988; GÜMEN, 1994; LUTZ, 1996) and as the creation of a new clientele for educational and social work (LUTZ, 1991). Despite this criticism, the perception of immigrants of Turkish background in social and educational science has hardly changed. Researchers continue to operate with stereotypes. Rereading the literature shows that one stereotype has led to another, and it has become increasingly difficult to trace their evolution and decipher them. Maintaining the dichotomy of migration vs. mobility or tradition vs. modernity blocks clear perception of social realities and their generally contradictory and complex developments for all families and individuals in modern industrial societies (GÜLTEKIN, 2003). Instead, migration biographies are ethnicized and also characterized in terms of losses, failures and suffering. Actors in migration are seemingly driven by outer forces rather than acting intentionally.

This perspective on migration analytically *seems* to correspond to a concept within biographical research: the concept of biographical trajectory (RIEMANN & SCHÜTZE, 1991), which is a refinement of Anselm STRAUSS’s concept of trajectory developed in analyzing institutional processes connected to severe illness and dying (e. g., STRAUSS et al., 1985). Gerhard RIEMANN and Fritz SCHÜTZE later illustrated an example of a biographical trajectory with an account of the migration experiences of a young French couple whose first phase of migration to the U.S. turned out to be exceedingly difficult and led to a temporary return to France. To be sure, the trajectory concept is part of a highly complex understanding of biographies with their dominant and latent processes of action and suffering. The example of unsuccessful migration efforts, however, can be misunderstood as constituting a “typical” case of a trajectory of suffering.

As a sequel to this example of a failed migration, it is noteworthy that Ursula APITZSCH (2000) criticized the case analysis and the perception that migration biographies generally consist of extended suffering and the loss of locus of control. She points out that the story of “Pierre and Pirette” does not end with their unsuccessful remigration, but that the young couple emigrates

again, this time successfully. As it is left open how they overcame their first set-back, APITZSCH assumes that this may be connected to their intellectual and moral potentials which came to bear in overcoming suffering and loss of control. Having to deal with “disorderly processes” (in this case related to pregnancy and child care) which led to the failure of settling down in the U.S. in their first migration attempt may have indeed constituted a resource for their eventual successful emigration. In this context it is important to emphasize that the gendered dynamics of biographies are overlooked in many studies of migration, which is typically seen as a male effort¹².

To continue in our quest of adequate concepts for both suffering and agency in biographical narratives we now turn to a brief case study in which a strong dynamic of both failure and success came to the fore. This led to the concept of a “twofold perspectivity on migration biographies” (GÜLTEKIN 2003).

6. Towards a Non-dichotomous Concept of Migration Biographies: The Concept of Twofold Perspectivity¹³

Serap’s Life Story

Serap is one of ten children of an East Anatolian Kurdish family. Her father immigrated to Germany and five years later his wife and children joined him, except for three of the children who stayed in Turkey. Both parents had to work hard to look after the family and to support relatives in Turkey. The small children were neglected, the older ones had to work and take over family responsibilities. Life was constantly stressful. Serap’s twin brother was taken away from the family to a state institution because the father was beating him. Later in his youth he got involved with drugs. The mother became severely ill. Several years later, Serap fell ill and had to give up her education plans; she started to work in a factory. She then got married, had a son and started training as an office administrator. It was around this time that her twin brother was shot and killed in Turkey in the army. Serap suffered immensely over his death. At the same time, one year before the interview, she started her vocational training. Serap’s sisters all had unsuccessful partnerships, with two of them getting divorced. One of them finished high school and started studying at the

¹² There are a number of studies, however, that take gender into account, see, for example, HOFFMANN-RIEM, 1994; MOROKVASIC, 1987; APITZSCH 1990; TOKSÖZ, 1991; LUTZ, 1991, 1996, 2000; GÜLTEKIN, 2003; INOWLOCKI and LUTZ, 2000; INOWLOCKI 2000.

¹³ The case study and the theoretical explication of the concept “twofold perspectivity on biographical processes in migration” are taken from the doctoral work of Nevâl GÜLTEKIN (2001, 2003). She analyzed autobiographical interviews with young Turkish immigrant women, mostly of the second generation.

university while caring for her two sons. Serap's youngest sister also returned to school to complete her education.

Serap presents her life story in two versions with two different themes within one interview, each version ending with a coda¹⁴. Her first version of biographical presentation results from a perspective of conflict and discontinuity in the family. In this version, her father is depicted as a destructive force, causing more harm than good in the family. Serap relates several instances of his negative influence on the family; in one central episode he "declares" two of his children dead and one as not yet born, because having too many children would have been problematic for his application for migration. All the other details about family life underline the perspective of discontinuity. Her twin brother's removal from the family to an institution, her elder sister's conflict with both parents during adolescence and in consequence her escape from home are part of the details. After a brief statement about her twin brother's death, during which she is close to tears, Serap finishes this version abruptly with the words: "*((clears her throat)) that was my life ((brighter voice)) or that still is! ((laughs faintly)).*"

After this coda, and after the short answer to a few questions, Serap starts telling about her father's migration. Without any interruption she unfolds a second version of her family life up to the present. In this second version of her life story, the father is reinstated. His false declaration about three of his children now seems not an arbitrary act but a means to bypass a legal barrier to the application for migration. He is now seen as the initiator of family migration who "makes" his dead children "alive" again and unites the family. He becomes a constructive force in a double sense. By presenting her mother as an equal partner of her father, Serap weakens the perception of the absolute authority of her father that was presented in the first version. His loss of authority during his eldest daughter's divorce, and in fact in relation to all his grown children, underlines the children's gain of a certain autonomy in perspective. In this version there is no mention of her twin brother after the migration to Germany. Instead, Serap gives a detailed presentation of the changes her three sisters went through. In this context she tells that her elder sister, who had gone through many crises in her youth and later had a problematic marriage, has now started to study at the university. Serap further states that she has started school again, and so has her youngest sister to complete her education. She ends her presentation by mentioning "school" as a synonym for education and as a bridge to autonomy: "we all wanted to go to school long enough." The perspective has now changed from destruction and discontinuity towards autonomy—at least for the daughters—and an aspiration for education. She finishes the second version with the words: "*is there anything else I should tell, ((cheerful*

¹⁴ Two interviews were made; the first interview lasted for about an hour, the second one an hour and twenty minutes. The two versions appeared in the first half hour of the first interview (see GÜLTEKIN, 2003, pp.59-112).

voice)) in fact there is a lot to say ((laughing)) yet I can't think of anything at the moment."

If we look more closely at the interview, we discover two different positions from which Serap unfolds the two versions of her biographical presentation. The first version starts with Serap's situated perspective as a child in Germany, and it begins with the statement on family poverty, the large number of children and the fact that Serap did not go to nursery school. The losses and failures suffered by the family in the process of immigration are emphasized in this version; the loss of her twin brother is in many respects the final result. This point of view strongly relates to an outside perspective, namely the majority consensus. The second version is set back in time and unfolds from her early childhood in a village in Turkey. It is introduced by a description of the repression which both her parents experienced from her grandparents, followed by her father's initiation of migration with her mother's agreement and her later emigration, leaving behind the small children. The perspective is the expectant view of the little girl and the rest of the family staying behind in Turkey. Soon after this Serap and two other children and later three more were brought to Germany. The result for now is the attainment of autonomy by the daughters and their access to education. This version emphasizes the gains and successes of the family through migration, as was the point of view of people living in Turkey in those days towards the migration act in general.

The first version focuses on the deficits and losses of the family in Germany, similar to that so often depicted among Germans in relation to problems of immigration. The reconstruction of Serap's life story, however, enables us to understand the structural aspects of the "failures" which seem to have been caused by her father. The twin brother's problems were first connected to being subjected to the father's violence. A close analysis reveals a different set of problems. On the first day of school, the school authorities separated the twins. The brother was put into a preparatory class while Serap could attend the regular class. This took place before there was any mention of the brother's naughtiness and the father's violence¹⁵. Furthermore, that he was taken away from home by the state authorities rather than support offered to the family in solving their problems initiated a strongly negative development in Serap's twin brother's life. The reconstruction further reveals that the father worked extra hours, on Sundays without additional pay, and that the family of five had to live in one room during the first years of immigration, thus changing our perception and evaluation of the family situation.

¹⁵ Studies of migration very often identify a seeming inability of work immigrant parents to raise their children as a major problem, while the real impact of institutional exclusion, especially of boys, remains unnoticed. A prominent example of an early dismissal from a regular school career took place in the case of "Mehmet" (see, for example, DER SPIEGEL 31/2003, pp.4-45).

In each version, there are also some aspects of the other perspective, but generally they are maintained as separate throughout the interview. Each perspective is also distinct in style and symptom (SCHÜTZE, 1987) from the coda at the end of the version. Serap ends the first version almost crying. She clears her throat and controls herself, but there is not much hope in her voice. In contrast, she ends the second version with more openness and a bright voice, encouraging the interviewer to ask questions. In the case study on Serap, losses and gains, failure and success play equal parts within a single biography. We can thus speak of a twofold perspectivity, combining two different views of the same life story.

The concept of twofold perspectivity on biographical processes in migration enables us to understand migration as a process with different phases going on beyond one generation. This also relates to how migration is experienced, rather than as a project that is individually planned, organized, carried out and completed. The concept of twofold perspectivity also presents a shift from the dualistic approach, of one perspective from within and one from without, that is, one from the viewpoint of immigrants and one from the receiving society. Through the experience of migrating from one social and political system to another, different in socioeconomic and historical terms, immigrants have come to embody more than one point of view (GÜLTEKIN, 2003). While acts of emigration and immigration separate one world sharply from the other, at the same time, they also “combine worlds” (LUTZ, 1991). Two worlds have come closer through acts of migration as well as for the acting subjects. The acting subjects are exposed to different societies, values, perspectives, and traditions. Because of their mobility, immigrants acquire reflexive biographical competence by looking at their own lives and their family members’ lives from different angles and perspectives (GÜLTEKIN, 2003).

7. Twofold Perspectivity on Biographical Processes in the Case of Hülya

Hülya presents the development of her action scheme of migration from two different perspectives. The first one shows her as an individual. It is the perspective of Hülya who already had started to work and to earn money at the age of twelve and who was equipped with keen powers of observation. She sees how because of her father’s illness and inability to work her family becomes impoverished and dependent (Il.133-143). This observation and her evaluation especially of her mother’s situation (Il.152-154) first led to her wish to emigrate at the age of thirteen (saying to herself, “oh, you will also go to Germany sometime,” l.147), then more strongly to her *intention* to emigrate at the age of fourteen (“I also want to go to Germany,” l.156).

Between her wish and her intention Hülya must have tried hard to work out a scheme in order to realize her intention. As the helpful, considerate daughter who wants to emigrate in order to support her parents, she has a better chance for leaving than if she were to emphasize her wish for independence. But to justify such a huge step as emigrating at her young age to the community is a difficult task. Hülya's noble plan to finance her brother's education increases the acceptability of such a move. Her father is now ready to accept and support her migration effort. Hülya thus constructs the self-sacrificing daughter and sister in order to warrant her scheme. Her actual scheme was: "I wanted to be independent somehow" (ll.159) "I simply wanted to get away" (ll.160-161). There is almost rebellion in these words; here, Hülya speaks as an individual for herself. Motives for this rebellion were already given in the very beginning of the interview when she described the limitations of life in the village. At this point she becomes more explicit. She received no pocket money from her brother, none at all, and she envied her friends who had money to spend for themselves (ll.162-163). Her mother's example warned her: "my mother was getting worse all the time and she was crying, and it was very hard" (ll.163-164).

Her wish to get away and to be independent would never have been supported by either her family or by her community. Her father would not have asked the doctor or applied to the court to change her age, nor would her brother have accompanied her to Istanbul. And, more importantly, no one would have given her the financial means for the application procedure, if Hülya were doing this for herself. Hülya knew this as a member of her community; therefore she had to adopt another scheme of action.

At this point, we would like to refer to the analysis of Christa HOFFMANN-RIEM of the interviews with immigrant women workers, including Hülya's. In differentiating between "migration in one's own interest or in the interest of others," she shows that this is not a case of either/or:

In several narratives the 'altruistic' kernel of the decision to migrate is wreathed by 'egoistic wishes for liberation'. In the continuum between the family and self-centered migration decision there is a middle position, where the widening of one's realm of action is balanced with the interests of the collective (HOFFMANN-RIEM, 1994, pp.344-345).

Our interpretation underlines this non-dichotomous analytical view. The action scheme of migration represents a twofold perspectivity, comprehending the individual wish to migrate as well as the need to consider family expectations. While the gender specific aspects of this dynamic become apparent here for daughters, similar or other aspects might be specific for sons.

This view is supported by the fact that Hülya only speaks about helping her family or supporting her brother in the very beginning of the interview, when the pre-migration phase is discussed. Her only statement about supporting her brother ("My dream was that my brother could study further and help my par-

ents financially” (ll.151-152))¹⁶ does not reflect self-sacrifice but rather her intention to help her brother receive a university education. He would then be in a position to earn enough to support the parents, which is the duty of the son anyway. Later in the interview, Hülya emphasizes her own interest to migrate: “The reason why I wanted to go to Germany was/eh/ because I was dependent on my brother. Just because of a few /eh/ Lira” (ll.888-890).

She mentions being the victim of, or having sacrificed herself for others, twice. In the first instance concerning her divorce, and that she married only to please her mother or her parents: “I was practically a victim” (l.730). It is interesting that just after this last statement about the relationship between her marriage and her parents Hülya relates being a victim with another incident (“Always, I always sacrificed myself for other people... Well, in 78..., /eh/ I was given notice by my firm” (l.733)). There seems to be a parallel between the first incident and her being given notice by the employer. Her marriage was given notice to (“In 1980 we were divorced,” (l.726)) and her employment relation was given notice as well. In both cases Hülya emphasizes her correct behavior (in marriage ll.571-573, 675-677; at her work ll.736-737). Being a victim seems to mean having been treated unjustly, which was in fact her experience in both cases. When Hülya discusses being exploited at her present work (ll.814-831), she points out the discrepancy between her skills as well as her responsibility at work, and the very low salary she receives. The injustice clearly expressed in her words seems to culminate in the illnesses and discomforts Hülya then lists. She demands compensation and not false understanding, which is what the doctors demonstrate when they explain to her that she has psychological problems.

The second time Hülya mentions being a victim is at the very end of the interview, in the context of the question of partnership, but also in general terms (“I don’t want to live for other people, I want to ... live my life. I have given /eh/ enough of myself. I have given up enough. I have made enough sacrifices. I have sacrificed myself enough. I don’t want it anymore” (ll.1057-1060)). The fact that she has given enough of herself relates on the one side to the exploitative conditions at work, on the other side to moral norms and values. She continues with an argument about being “good” or “bad” and that the partner should be “bad” as well, meaning that she no longer cares what other people think of her, as she would have done earlier. Adapting to normative opinions she now perceives as sacrificing herself, as giving up her own self. In this sense, she has sacrificed too much of herself in the sense of not finding reciprocity, especially with her ex-husband and his family.

A twofold perspectivity is also related to the question of seeing her future in Turkey or in Germany. In her discussion of the court case Hülya clearly states: “I wanted to stay here, I wanted to ‘work’” (ll.768-769). Even though the inter-

¹⁶ Some of the quotations given in this part are translated by us from the German interview text directly and may differ from the translation given in other parts of this publication.

viewers try to fix her on only one alternative, Hülya does not concede. For her, both alternatives are equally open. Living in Germany *or* in Turkey both implies negative and positive aspects for her. The unequal payment at work in spite of her skill and responsibility (ll.814-831), the racism she experiences at work and on the street (ll.846-850), her being made not to feel at home here (ll.923-924), and the discrimination against women (ll.985-986, 1025-1032) constitute negative aspects of life in Germany. Her financial security, her independence as a single woman (ll.906-907), her German friends and neighbors who accept and love her (ll.857-861) are the positive aspects of life in Germany. The fear of being disadvantaged and excluded as a divorced woman, the lack of work opportunities for women and missing social security (ll.908-913) are the negative aspects of life in Turkey. The social life and close relationships between neighbors, family ties (ll.956-959), and the possibility to settle down in a flat of her own are again the positive aspects of life in Turkey.

We can summarize that in the fourteen years Hülya had been living in Germany she developed many positive ties in her chosen country of immigration. From her evaluative statements about the alternative of living in Germany or in Turkey Hülya claims that each country is lacking something that the other one has: “And here I’m not at home, you ... notice it again and again. You feel that we don’t belong here” (ll.923-924), and “I cannot live there like here. So securely and independently” (ll.906-907). She is telling us that if she could, she would select all the conditions in both countries that suit her and put them together in one place and live there; she wouldn’t care which country that would be. This is in fact a very realistic view of a transnational life-world and a consequence of her living in both places. Transnational life-worlds commonly occur in migration biographies, contrary to the seemingly unquestioned common sense notion that people can belong to one place only¹⁷.

In Hülya’s narrative, there is a strong sense of both sadness and humor. This communicative style also reflects a twofold perspectivity. If her biographical experience is interpreted as dominated by her victimization, as being the one to undergo work migration in order to support the other family members, then her own efforts at changing the fate of poverty and despondency are obscured and cannot be recognized. In seeing Hülya primarily as a victim of transnational modernization processes, general assumptions about migrants’ problems and about their causing problems are uncritically supported.

We would suggest here that there is no either-or resolution possible to answer the question whether Hülya is following her own wish in leaving for Germany, or whether she is being sent by her parents as the one to be able to support the family through contract work. We think that such a resolution

¹⁷ The novelist and actress Emine Sevgi ÖZDAMAR has created wonderful literary forms and expressions of biographical transnationality. She writes in German, at her readings, however, she is typically asked whether she is a “German” or a “Turkish” writer, as if transnationality were unimaginable.

would be dichotomous and therefore unrealistic. Hülya does not want to be dependent on others like her mother; her mother would want to keep Hülya with her but does not want to stand in the way of the possibility of a better life for her daughter. The arranged marriage can be seen as a repair strategy, as an attempt to reconcile the wish for economic improvement with the stability of a marriage among relatives.

Migration, we propose, is generally a family project, even when carried out by one family member only. Other than work related geographical mobility, migrating for paid labor is a project and an effort of a collective, in most cases, the immediate family. To pose a dichotomy between “individual” and “family” would be beside the point, not only in the case of “traditional societies” but also in the case of Western industrialized states. Only in a romantic view do families seem to either form a protective shield against social change and global influence, or do individuals seem to act as lone agents who are out for their own freedom and independence. Instead, complex dynamics are at work between individuals and their families in migration projects¹⁸.

8. Research in a Contested Area

In our analysis of the biographical interview with Hülya, a Turkish woman laborer who came to Germany in 1972 at the age of 17, we are not standing on neutral ground. In Germany as well as in other countries of “Fortress Europe,” “Turkish” is mostly used to denote what is different, in an offensive, negative or even dangerous way. There is still a widespread refusal to recognize that Germany has become an immigration society. Against this reality, claims of a German nationhood are upheld. A German, Christian, European, Western culture is proclaimed, based on the general agreement that this culture is the right one in the right place, determined to play a dominant, if not exclusive, role. Concerning issues of citizenship, over time more ground has been gained by definitions of *ius soli* than *ius sanguinis* (see also CALLONI & LUTZ, 2000). Yet on a deeper structural level, there is a basic consensus that it is not normal to be other than “German” by descent. This silent consensus underlies social definitions of normality. “Difference” is noted, remarked upon or asked about and needs to be accounted for. This pervasive definition of normality and its consequences for accounts are often not taken into consideration by researchers.

As researchers in a qualitative-interpretive tradition, we are open to the findings our analysis generates; we are not out to prove a point, or a set of hypothe-

¹⁸ Some examples of studies of families in migration are: generational social and economic mobility towards “a better life” (GÜLTEKIN, 2003; LUTZ, 1998), generational work in overcoming persecution and trauma (INOWLOCKI, 2000), dynamics of family orientation (APITZSCH, 1990).

ses. Inspired by the theoretical foundation and procedures of grounded theory, we are prepared to suspend general assumptions concerning the materials of our analysis, towards attaining “descriptive and sensitizing” (GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967) concepts. We are aware, however, that our analysis cannot take place “outside of” the contested arenas of Turkish immigration to Germany. If we want to be able to understand what our interview partners are talking about or referring to, we have to take into account how they position themselves within these arenas. We cannot reconstruct their biographical accounts without also reflecting our perceptions and possible positions concerning the issues at stake. Obviously, interpretive analyses can also meaningfully proceed from other perspectives, as documented by other contributions to this issue. Otherwise, doing biographical analysis would be restricted to cases of one’s own country and knowledge of the intricacies of debated issues, or to a prolonged study of such debates in the places where interviews have taken place. Our analytical perspective is not prescriptive and certainly not exclusive. But given our situated knowledge as researchers, in Donna HARAWAY’s sense (1991), we cannot abstract from social contexts or from critically examining undisputed beliefs in general public, political, academic terms, which all coincide in that migration is basically and essentially a problematic phenomenon.

In order to analyze Hülya’s biographical experience, we have taken into account the general opinions concerning immigration to Germany, especially from Turkey. For our analysis, we found it was not enough to “suspend” general theoretical assumptions in order to avoid “importing” them into the analysis of cases. We would argue that a more committed and active research stance is needed so that researchers critically deal with general theories, especially those concerning socially contested areas. Otherwise, the way individuals deal with these general opinions and theories as a part of what they experience cannot be reconstructed and recognized. As we have tried to show, an important part of the biographical work done by individuals involves their dealing with such opinions and theories, which in itself contributes towards a transformation of biographical processes (SCHÜTZE, 1984). Beyond providing a voice to narrated lives, we think that researchers should critically counter representations of immigrants in the news media, by politicians, or in mainstream academic discourse and also create new terms for reflecting on social issues.

To conclude, we would emphasize three analytical steps in proceeding from case analysis to theoretical generalization: first, critically assess the social, historical, economic and political aspects of general claims made about the phenomena we are studying; second, reconstruct and analyze how individuals integrate, deny, adapt to, or are sometimes overwhelmed by general ideas concerning their own biographical experience and their family as well as group history; and third, discover how biographical knowledge is generated from these ways of dealing with set opinions, and in which ways such knowledge

constitutes a part of transformational biographical processes within the individual life story.

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