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## Reversal of the Gender Order? Male Marriage Migration to Germany by Turkish Men: New Forms of Gendered Transnationalization of Migrant Offsprings in Germany

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### Introduction

This chapter focuses on biographies of transnational couples where the men are the subjects of marriage migration. It tries to explain why well-educated and integrated women from the third generation of Turkish immigrants in Germany marry partners from their grandparents' country of origin and asks why their husbands are willing to migrate. My hypothesis is that this type of marriage migration does not necessarily have a traditional background in the sense of the orientation of the actors at a fixed

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The related empirical research project has addressed not only Turkish, but also Moroccan men. The outcomes for both groups were very similar. For the analysis of some Moroccan case studies see Apitzsch 2014a and Al-Rebholz 2016.

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(national and/or religious) ethnicity (Apitzsch and Gündüz 2012). Instead, I want to show that ‘tradition building’ is being conceived of by the interview partners as a biographical achievement.<sup>1</sup> The transnational couples’ differentiated search for belonging in the receiving society is connected with biographical work performed in order to construct a common symbolic space of traditionality, which creates the possibility of defining one’s own position concerning both societies (Apitzsch 2003: 91).

I first will give a short insight into the discussion of transnational marriage migration with reference to the topic of ‘imported husbands’. Then, I explain the methodology of the own empirical study in Germany. I then discuss some outcomes of the project. Finally, I will give concluding remarks concerning the question whether the investigated transnationalization of marriage and family life will lead to problems and difficulties for both spouses, especially for the men who are being exposed to drastic challenges regarding their perception of manhood in the host country. Conflicts might also emerge for the children because of the different biographical experiences of their parents in the country of arrival.

## The Research Question Discussed on the Background of a Literature Review

It is a frequent and not exceptional phenomenon that ethnic minorities who are settled in immigration countries in Europe continue to prefer to marry a partner from their country of origin.<sup>2</sup> The German family sociologist Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim writes that ‘most of the non-European, non-Christian migrants in Europe marry someone from their country of origin’ (Beck-Gernsheim 2007: 271). This holds true even for migrants in the second and third generation, and it constitutes a puzzling phenomenon which is still to be explained. ‘As family networks offer the last possible gateway, they come to be the main anchoring points for migration plans and ambitions. (...) For those who live at the periphery, many hopes focus on a spouse from the metropolitan centre: marriage figures as an entry ticket and immigration strategy.’ (Beck-Gernsheim 2007: 278).

Most studies in this field focus on brides who migrate to join their husbands. In general, it can be stated that much has been written about

men's expectations in relation to a bride from their parents' country of origin, while we find less about the women's expectations when they bring a spouse from Turkey or North Africa to their country of residence. The men who 'import' partners from the country of origin are said to tend to have more traditional ideals and expectations about their female partners, and hope that 'women from the country of origin will easily adjust to a traditional marriage ideal, since they are less emancipated, more obedient, and more "pure" than women from the own ethnic minority group' (Eeckhaut et al. 2011: 275). Thus, studies of marriage migration published in recent years have focused on women as migrating subjects.<sup>3</sup> Although these studies also notice that men as well as women are migrating, there is no study focusing on migrating men in the context of marriage (as claims also Beck-Gernsheim).

Very little academic research has been done so far on the phenomenon of well-educated young women from the third generation of immigrants in Germany who, on their own initiative (and to an increasing degree via the internet), look for marriage partners from their grandparents' country of origin. There are, however, a few studies where the issue is at least mentioned. In a study published in 2007, Ayla Cankaya-Aydin estimates that approximately 50 per cent of women in this category in Germany marry partners from Turkey (Cankaya-Aydin 2007; 21). Young Turkish women of marriageable age have quite different options in relation to marriage and the choice of partners than those that were available to their parents (Straßburger 2003; 27). 'Love' is considered to be the dominant motive.

Many studies on marriage migration take for granted that, through marriage migration, the partner imported from the country of origin gains access to greater economic and social opportunities, such as getting a job, a better standard of living, and improved consumption possibilities and security (Nauck 2001). Through our project, however, we could show that this is often not the case. What we will be able to confirm through our empirical findings is the fact of the shifting power balance in gender relations in both the host and the sending country through transnational marriages (as expected by Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Kofman 2004; Lievens 1999). Similar cases have been observed in London for young British women of Bangladeshi origin (Gavron 1996). But this shift in the power balance in gender relations turns out to have different outcomes

for the different sexes. For men, marrying a woman from the country of origin might mean a strategy to secure that the accustomed traditional gender roles will not be challenged by the liberal culture of the host country, and they can maintain their traditional (patriarchal) superior position vis-à-vis their wives; for women, importing a partner from the country of origin carries the hope of acquiring more freedom and power in their marriage, and in some cases it even means a prospect of emancipation.

On the other hand, the imported husbands might encounter severe problems and difficulties because of being exposed to drastic challenges regarding their perception of manhood in the host country.

This chapter deals with male marriage migration in relation to the female descendants of Muslim migrant communities from Turkey living in Germany, and asks why these young women decide to look for a husband from abroad. What are the consequences of this decision for role patterns, sex relations, and orientations of marriage and family, and how do these orientations change over time compared to the orientations of the parents' generation? What internal familial and power dynamics are activated through marriage migration?

## **The Methodology: Analysis of Biographical Narratives**

By means of the biographical analysis of narrative interviews with male marriage migrants from Turkey and their spouses, the related research project at Frankfurt University (2011–2016) is dealing with debates about problems of language and integration into the labour market, gender relations, and dynamics within the migrant family.<sup>4</sup>

The qualitative biographical study has been conducted parallel to a quantitative study of the German Federal Office of Migration Studies (BAMF) in 2013–2014 with 2000 standardized interviews that showed the quantitative impact of the studied phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> The qualitative study financed by the Ministry of Science of the Land Hessen consists of a sample of 20 couples ( $n = 40$ ) in rural areas and 20 couples ( $n = 40$ ) in the Metropolitan Region of Frankfurt and Rhein-Main, all together 80 case studies. Additionally, two contrastive interviews with still unmarried

female students with Turkish and Moroccan background were conducted in order to find out whether the search for a husband from abroad was intentional from the start and before any concrete pre-marriage partnership had been established (one is the interview with Dilara quoted later). The interviews with the Turkish husbands have been conducted mostly in the Turkish language and then translated. The core of the methodology of the project was the comparative analysis of narrative interviews collected (in a process of theoretical sampling) in order to reveal the impact of biographical processes on migratory projects of male marriage migrants and their spouses. The interviewees (both women and men of the age between 25 and 45) were asked for a broad narrative of life-events in relation to their experiences of migration, especially experiences of legislation, family life in the country of arrival, cultural and job participation, and future prospects. Thus, the biographical interviews shed light on the complex structure of individual migration strategies as well as the role of institutions and social services. We regard social interaction in male marriage migration from countries outside the EU to female spouses in Germany who belong to the second and third generation of former guest worker families as embedded in and interrelated with biographical processes. Such an approach will enable us to reconstruct not only the intended, but also the unintended impacts of the migration project, as well as to reconstruct the consequences of absences of specific policies (cf. Apitzsch and Siouti 2007).

## Discussion of Findings

Most of the studies published to date on the subject of marriage among Turkish immigrants assume that parental acceptance of the chosen partner still remains an important criterion. On the basis of the biographical material collected in the course of our project, however, we have been able to develop an alternative or additional way of interpreting the phenomenon of the transnational marriages of well-integrated women from the third generation. Women of the second or third generation of well-integrated migrant families within Western EU countries are hoping for a realistic chance of starting a family and bringing up children by marrying

a partner from the country of origin of their parents or grandparents, while they continue to work and remain the breadwinners in the country of immigration and thus strengthen their autonomy (while their husbands wait for work permits and/or job opportunities and meanwhile have to take over care obligations within the family).

These women, who are between 25 and 35 years old, objectively have a major problem that they share with young German women of the same age<sup>6</sup>: the problem of how to find partners from the same age cohort who take a responsible attitude to starting a family. This claim is supported by many interviews. As an example, I am quoting from the interview with Dilara (the name has been changed), a 24-year-old unmarried student at a German university. She is about to complete her degree in social affairs. With regard to relationships to young men she confesses:

...I think I would rather have something more serious, not the common sort of children's play or just something to pass the time but something real that makes me feel satisfied, someone for my whole life rather than just something that's fun or to pass the time or just for enjoyment. Something that isn't... In the last two years I have been able to imagine meeting someone. I have known a couple of boys, but they weren't right for me...<sup>7</sup>

In present-day Germany starting a relationship no longer needs to take place within the legal framework of marriage, and it is not the case that every relationship—including relationships between immigrants of the same third generation—is associated with the prospect of starting a family. Female members of immigrant families in the third generation are therefore making use of transnational options in their search for partners in cases where they are hoping to start a family because, as a rule, young men from their grandparents' society of origin still share this goal. These young women describe, in very similar ways, how they have certainly had both friendships and intimate relationships with young German men and with members of Turkish immigrant families born in Germany. But none of these relationships 'led to anything' (see quotation above). What the interviews reveal is that for emancipated immigrant women who are successful in Germany the generational transmission will not necessarily be characterized by an irreversible separation from the society of their grandparents. On the one hand, they hold on their own claim to autonomy; on

the other hand, they are converting changing gender norms into a transnational orientation.

In the following, I will give insights into three case studies. The case of the still unmarried student Dilara (section ‘[The Dream of a Reliable Life Partner: The Case of Dilara](#)’) shows the dream of a reliable partner for the founding of a family by means of shared religious convictions that serve as a pledge of love. The case studies of the two couples Erol and Aylin (section ‘[The Career Advancement of Both Partners: The Case of Erol and Aylin](#)’), on the one hand, and Idris and Zeynep (section ‘[Career Advancement Only on the Woman’s Side: The Case of Idris and Zeynep](#)’), on the other hand, are confronting difficult but successful, and difficult but tragic biographical trajectories.

## The Dream of a Reliable Life Partner (Dilara)

It was very interesting for us to see whether this transnational orientation was something that just happened occasionally or whether it was imagined before, when these young women were still unmarried.

Dilara was by no means forced by her family to make up her mind. Her parents are supportive and liberal. She has developed her normative view on relationships out of her own volition.

I have friends who are atheists, and we get along very well, but when I think about the level of relationships for myself, I think... if I... I’m someone who would like to have children some time, you know what I mean? And then I don’t want to have that sort of disagreement where he says ‘I don’t share your faith’. Or if he says ‘I want to live according to this culture and these moral ideas’, and I say no, I want my child to live according to this culture, these customs, and these moral ideas... And I think that when you bring up a child together, these conflicts are bound to arise from time to time. I think that perhaps as long as you don’t have any children it will be ok, but as soon as you have a child, someone who is part of both of you, and where both of you together have just as much right to decide... No, I think... perhaps I’ll meet someone in Turkey who is waiting for me there [she laughs]... You never know.

This, then, is a case of a successful female student who was born in Germany and who has good professional prospects there, but who—despite

all this—would like to marry a Turkish man in Turkey. How can this be explained? Her desire for a transnational marriage with a man from Turkey is structurally associated with her desire to start a family. Another central issue is the problem of combining work and family. She explained during the interview that her profession is very important to her, but that she would also like to have children and start a relationship that, as she says, will be ‘more serious’, not ‘the sort of thing children get up to’ or just something to pass the time.

This possibility is a realistic perspective for many Turkish women who live in Germany and are married to men from their grandparents’ country of origin. They are not forced into marriage, but look for their partners themselves. They marry for love, but at the same time they achieve what one might call an exchange of resources: they offer the resource of secure residential status and possible career advancement for the husband, and what they receive in return is the pledge that they will be able to continue their own career while starting a family. In this marriage, the partners’ origins and shared religious convictions serve as a pledge of love.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Career Advancement of Both Partners: The Case of Erol and Aylin**

If one compares the narrative of the yet unmarried Dilara with interviews of men and women who have decided to enter into transnational marriages and describe how they got to know each other, it is noticeable that this is a completely new, hybrid form in which romantic love is mingled with the reciprocal securing of resources brought into the marriage by the partner and in which the woman has achieved a more powerful position in the family. It is not the woman who leaves her own family to become, as a daughter-in-law, an inferior member of her husband’s family, but it is the husband who follows his wife into the new family and the new culture. In a way that runs counter to tradition, the wife can maintain her ties with her original family, especially with her mother and sisters, and in this way she can to some degree alleviate the difficulties involved in combining work and family. Usually, both partners are very well aware of this.



Erol came to Germany a number of years ago. His wife Aylin told us:

And then of course, the question was bound to come up of... where are we going to live after we get married, here or in Turkey? It was clear from the outset that if he came here he would have to start again from scratch, because of the question of education... And I must say that it was very, very difficult for him.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that conflicts are going to arise in situations like this. In particular, it is very hard for many male marriage migrants to take care for the family and to look after the children while their wife is out at work, at a time when they are in a phase of enforced unemployment and living through disillusioning experiences in German environments, for example the new language courses. Very often, trajectories of suffering (Riemann and Schütze 1991) are threatening the young family. However, in the case of Erol and Aylin the marriage project went well. In Turkey, Erol had worked as a professional, a very successful tax advisor. Erol describes the encounter with Aylin (when she was holidaying in Turkey) as occasional, but at the same time as a 'coup de foudre', the famous 'flash' that makes people fall in love when seeing each other for the first time. Erol quit his job and came as a tourist to Germany in order to marry Aylin because she did not want to come to Turkey for this purpose. After the wedding in Germany, Erol had—after a phase of unemployment—the chance to take up a job at a construction site, under 'terrible' working conditions.

After the wedding... when Aylin went out of the house I was alone. It was very annoying. We did not have a car... Yes, I did the cooking. Much better than Aylin did. The only thing she was able to cook were fried eggs. Don't tell her that I told you this [laughing]... At first, I had a working permission only for 3 months. Afterwards it was extended by one year. Fortunately, I did not remain unemployed for a long time. Oh, but this work was slaves' work. It was terrible. Twelve hours every day. There were not windows, and it was cold. But you were dependent on that work. I thought what sort of a person had I become? But you were responsible. For your wife and later on also for the children. I worked like that as a shift worker for two years, but after that I became shift leader, and working conditions improved.

He supports Aylin to continue with her career and to make her master craftswoman's diploma in order to set up her own hairdressing saloon.

Aylin continues to work with her own clientele, and Erol is able to set up his own construction site. He successfully builds houses in the rural environment of his wife's little town, one also for his own family. After ten years of marriage, they have three well educated children and make plans for their further education. Every year, they return to Turkey during the holidays and show to their children different parts of the country. They hope that their children one day will study in Turkey and eventually settle down there, so that the whole family will be able to live in both countries.

### **Career Advancement Only on the Woman's Side: The Case of Idris and Zeynep**

In Turkey, Idris has been a physicist with a university diploma. He had wanted to become a teacher at a grammar school when he met Zeynep. Idris encountered Zeynep during her holiday in Turkey. They came to an engagement, but after that were separated for more than three years, while Zeynep continued her education in Germany in order to become a dental technician. When Zeynep found him a job as a temporary worker and a flat for both of them in Frankfurt, he decided to join her. They married, and he tried to find a job in his original profession as a teacher in physics and mathematics. In order to achieve this, he participated in costly language courses, but to pay them he also had to continue to work in badly paid temporary jobs.

The costs for the good language courses were about 10,000–15,000 Euros a year. We could not afford that. I asked the officer at the job centre whether he could send me to good language courses instead of the integration courses that I had to visit and that brought me nothing. However, he said: 'Go and work, then you can afford language courses.' And I could not learn at home. I had not German colleagues or friends in order to communicate and train the language with them.

After Zeynep gave birth to a daughter, she continued to work, and Idris took care of the child and of all other care work for the family. Zeynep has been the family breadwinner since then. Idris is content with

that, but he is depressive about his loneliness and own future. He does not see a way out to get a job in his original profession.

I regret so much that I cannot work in my profession for which I have studied. In Turkey, I would be able to work as a teacher in physics.

In general, one can learn from our case studies that the success enjoyed by the women is bound up with major challenges in relation to the traditional gender roles of their husbands. Very well educated fathers (we interviewed physicists and former tax consultants, teachers and opera singers) feel humiliated if they remain unemployed for a long time or have to take menial jobs. They feel especially humiliated if they have the repeated experience of being unable to help their children with their homework because their language skills are inadequate, even though one of the reasons why they came to Germany was that they thought their, at that time unborn, children would have better educational prospects in Germany. The worst problem for these men is the loneliness they experience if their wives are out at work and they themselves are unable to find a circle of friends that will satisfy their needs of communication where they now live. There are many cases in which this kind of disillusionment leads to depression, and even for non-believers a connection with the local mosque, where they can speak their own language with other men, seems to offer a way out. In the 1960s, the guest workers always had the possibility of an equal, organized relationship with others in the trade unions, but today's male marriage migrants who have come to Germany for the purpose of family unification mostly do not have this option—and the difficult initial period is when they would need it.

## **Concluding Remarks: Transnationalization, Not Re-traditionalization of the Third Generation**

In our project, we were able to analyse daily interactions, practices, and biographical policy evaluations of the spouses. Both partners were constantly negotiating their expectations concerning ideals of marriage, issues of child-raising, notions of manhood and womanhood, and their different

paths of socialization. All this is taking place in the context of a society where they belong to a minority group. The main finding with respect to policies is the almost total lack of adequate language training for the immigrating partners and of places where they can communicate with other men and share their experiences. Furthermore, we have had the opportunity to see what is happening in transnational marriages with respect to cultural traditions. The transnational family emerges as a social site where several re-negotiation processes about what is modern and what is traditional take place on a daily basis of familial interaction. What is taken for granted, accustomed ways of behaviour and thinking, beliefs, and convictions regarding gender roles and the gender order have been permanently questioned and challenged in the context of marriage migration.

We found out that these marriages did not represent cases of more or less successful assimilation over a period of several generations, and not phenomena of re-traditionalization either. Rather, these can be understood as experiments where Karl Mannheim's fundamental problem of social 'transmission' in societies can be studied. Women and men involved in migration processes are trying out alternative possibilities of emancipation in which inter-generational relations, too, are being completely restructured in hybrid ways. To say it in the words of Karl Mannheim:

This means, in the first place, that our culture is developed by individuals who come into contact anew with the accumulated heritage... The phenomenon of 'fresh contact' is, incidentally, of great significance in many social contexts; the problem of generations is only one among those upon which it has a bearing. Fresh contacts play an important part in the life of the individual when he is forced by events to leave his own social group and enter a new one—when, for example, an adolescent leaves home, or a peasant the countryside for the town, or when an emigrant changes his home. (Mannheim 1952: 293)

We have established that among the young women from the third generation we have interviewed there is agreement with important norms of the receiving society, especially in relation to the expectation that career advancement should be compatible with starting a family. But this expectation is frequently put into practice transnationally and not exclusively within the receiving society. These women increase their autonomy in the receiving society by means of professional advancement, but they

try at the same time to realise the compatibility of work and family by bringing an element of re-formulated traditions into their own family through their transnational marriage.

The problem of understanding these processes in the society of arrival lies in the fact that up until now, marriage migration to Germany has been discussed almost exclusively as something that leads to the formation of ‘parallel societies’ and not as a possible source of modernization. However, there is the need to identify institutions and policies that recognize the biographical efforts made by women and men who bring transnational ways of living into nationally organized societies, and who do this in order to promote non-traditional aims such as the re-definition of the relationship between family work and the pursuit of a profession. As has been said earlier, the language and communication problem of the husbands from abroad are neither recognized nor resolved with adequate policies. New conflicts, but also new transformations are taking place in a Europe that finds itself in the process of becoming transnationalized.

## Notes

1. See Apitzsch “Migration und Traditionsbildung” (1999); “Religious Traditionality in Multicultural Europe” (2003).
2. Eeckhaut et al. (2011: 273–274), Gonzalez-Ferrer (2006: 173), Lievens (1999).
3. Woman as migrating subjects moving from Turkey to Germany are the subject of analysis in the studies by Toprak (2007), Straßburger (2003) and Wolbert (1984). All the cases presented in these works follow the pattern of men with a Turkish cultural background settled in Germany, who marry migrating wives from Turkey.
4. Reversal of the Gender Order? Male Marriage Migration to Germany by North African and Turkish Men: Consequences for Family Life, Work and the Socialization of the Next Generation. Project funded by the Ministry of Science and Arts of the Land Hessen, directed by the author together with Anil Al-Rebholz. The interviews were realized by Anil Al-Rebholz, Nergis Demirtas, and Ariane Schleicher. The latter two researchers conducted them in the framework of their PhD studies.
5. The quantitative study has been conducted by Anja Sticks, Christian Babka von Gostomski, and Tobias Büttner (2014).

6. Surveys inquiring into the reasons for the long time declining birth rate in Germany, (<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/familie/kinderwunschstudie-der-bevoelkerungsforschung-13493239.html>) especially among well-educated women, have found that one of the main reasons is the absence of a suitable partner. This might be even more important than the availability of nursery schools.
7. This interview was conducted and transcribed by Anil Al-Rebholz.
8. For the analysis of similar cases see Apitzsch (2014b: 204–214).
9. This interview was conducted and transcribed by Nergis Demirtas.

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