

Hard Labour

The 'Biographical Work' of a Turkish Migrant Woman in Germany

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ABSTRACT Immigrant women to Western Europe, especially those originating from Islamic countries, have been turned into icons of cultural difference by the general discourse on immigration. They are not recognized as actors in a changing society, just as society's changes through immigrants tend to be denied. This obscures the work and the accomplishments of women in the course of their immigration. Focusing on a biographical interview with a Turkish woman who came to Germany as a 'guest worker' in 1972, the social history of this labour migration is outlined. Instances of 'biographical work' in the interview are discussed, pointing out the transformation potential of immigrant women's biographies.

KEY WORDS biographical work ♦ biography ♦ difference ♦ transformation ♦ Turkish migration

'GUEST WORK' IN THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF GERMANY

The recruitment of guest workers (contract workers) from Mediterranean countries to the Federal Republic of Germany was planned as a limited exercise and resulted in changing German society. The Turkish case played a significant role in this development. Migration research usually focuses on national groups of migrants and not on the social and societal dimensions of this history as an integral part of German social history. Moreover, in the majority of studies, only men are seen as the pioneers of labour immigration, not women. The effect of this is twofold; first, immigrant women are neglected in both research on workers' history and on

women's history (see Glucksmann, 1998: 209); second, most studies deal with female immigrants as mothers and spouses in the private sphere, not in the labour market.

In this article we present the case of Hülya, a Turkish woman who came to Germany as a 17-year-old guest worker from southern Anatolia in 1972; at the age of 31, she told her life story.¹ Her story reflects her self-understanding as a participant in and a witness to the history of immigration, which took place against the wishes of the state authorities and resulted less from the original immigration intentions of the contract workers than from what their stay in Germany evolved into. The contract labourers came with an 'open time horizon' (Bade, 1998: 15) in the course of what can now be perceived as a transnational project of modernization. The consequences of this eventual immigration are still not recognized. Hülya's life story depicts the hopes and the losses of the first generation of immigrant women and it reflects how they dealt with exclusionary practices, with political myths and misunderstandings. Her story is important as a document of a single female worker and a migration pioneer, as a member of a female group whose existence has remained widely unacknowledged (for exceptions to this, see Hoffmann-Riem, 1994; Kamenko, 1978; Morokvasic, 1987; Toksöz, 1991).

Realizing the social transformation potential inherent in immigration depends on the extent to which it can be socially acknowledged that a society changes through immigration and the immigrant population. Because the main paradigm in scientific and everyday discourse on migration is one of problems, suffering or deep-rooted conflicts brought about by migration, the transformation potential in immigrants' biographies is often overlooked. Migrants, however, are ordinary people who have or cause problems, like other ordinary people. We try to show in our analysis how the reflective, evaluative and ironical commentary by Hülya on her life story expresses some of the transformational qualities of biographies. We have explicitly focused on a single case analysis because these qualities tend to remain undiscovered, or get lost in more large-scale studies.

HÜLYA'S LIFE STORY

Born in a rural area of southern Turkey in 1955, Hülya was the youngest child of five, with one sister and three brothers. When she was 11 years old, her father became very ill and the family's life changed completely because of the subsequent impoverishment. It soon became Hülya's 'dream' to earn money in Germany as a guest worker. Since the minimum age for acquiring a contract was 18 years, she persuaded her father to get a doctor to alter her birth certificate, a procedure not uncommon within the Turkish administration where birth registration is not clearly

regulated. She finally succeeded in her efforts in 1972, at the age of 17. After enduring extensive and degrading health checks at the Istanbul recruitment office under German supervision, Hülya signed a contract to work in a chicken factory. Its local representative advertised the slaughtering as being a clean, quasi-medical task. An exhausting train journey finally brought Hülya to a small village in Germany. She shared a room in an old school building with four other young women who had arrived at the same time. As work started, Hülya realized that it consisted of extremely hard and dirty labour of up to 11 hours per day. She was taken to work and brought back by the factory bus, living in complete isolation from the German community around her. In addition to the slaughtering, she was made to clean the greasy and bloody iron transport racks. The work conditions were unbearable, but Hülya saw no way to break her contract and leave. She needed to pay back the money borrowed to get to Germany, and she also thought that nobody at home would believe her, since Germany was imagined to be such a modern place. During this first year on the shopfloor of the chicken factory various incidents occurred which revealed how extremely exploited the workers were. When her year's contract was finally up, she found out that her residence and work permit had run out and that her employer had not provided the necessary papers for the 'aliens' police'. It was only by chance that a helpful official did not cause any problems for her, but extended her residence and work permit. With the help of distant relatives, she found a new job as a shift worker in a metal factory near Hamburg. She had to leave her friends, who had become like 'family' to her. Hülya developed health problems; she suffered from insomnia and became depressed.

Her first visit home was in March 1974, two years after she had left. With her consent, a marriage was arranged with her mother's nephew, a post office clerk, whom she married in the summer of 1976. She stayed with him for one week. He and his family had agreed that she could go back to Germany and work for one more year in order to save money. Upon her return to Germany, she became very ill. During the next three months, she underwent three serious operations. She was afraid she had a tumour, but any information about the cause or nature of her illness was withheld from her. When she was released from the hospital she was in poor health, with no one to take care of her.

Hülya then returned to Turkey for the second time and went directly to her mother's, without seeing her husband first. His family complained that she was not behaving like a 'good' daughter-in-law. Her husband summoned her to come to him immediately, but Hülya refused. After the summer, she went back to work in Germany. When she returned to Turkey a year later, the family unsuccessfully tried to reconcile the couple. Hülya was convinced by then that she could not live with her husband. She wanted a divorce but did not pursue this until after her mother's death.

After her extended illness, Hülya was sacked in 1978. She found a lawyer and sued her employer. After four years of working in Germany, she had started to learn German via the television. Now she was learning to deal with German administration and institutions. She found out about state support for her court case against her former employer. Without any help from a trade union, she achieved partial success in the Labour Court and received compensation.

Between 1979 and the time of the interview in 1986, Hülya was employed in a metal packing factory as an unskilled worker. She lived by herself and realized that Germany had become her second home. Even though she had bought a flat in Turkey, she knew she would not be able to earn a living there and be socially accepted as an independent, divorced woman.

In the final section of the interview, Hülya spoke about her hope that she might still be able to find a nice man at some point and live a comfortable life – a life situated in Turkey rather than in Germany. It was a dream of settling down after retirement.

LABOUR MIGRATION FROM TURKEY

The state-controlled recruitment of workers from Turkey to Germany started in 1961, the year when the Berlin Wall was built and the flow of skilled workers from East Germany ceased. It was part of an agreement based on the bilateral principle of 'import of labour' on the German side and export of surplus labour on the Turkish side. Migration thus became an integral part of the dominant economic system; the personal decision to migrate became embedded in national policies, becoming in character a supra-national phenomenon.

Before the agreement with Turkey was set up, there had been other contracts for labour supply, with Italy (1955), Greece and Spain (1960) and then with Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965) and Yugoslavia (1968). Between 1961 and 1973, 865,000 workers from Turkey entered the Federal Republic of Germany (see Jamin, 1998: 149), many of whom later returned to Turkey. Of these workers, 21.4 percent were women (Eryilmaz, 1998: 134). As a result of the oil crisis, the Federal Republic of 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.

The majority of the guest workers had been recruited through the German employment office in Istanbul, which processed 50,000 people a year – an average of 160 a day. At peak times, the medical office (at which

Hülya was examined) checked 700 people per day (Jamin, 1998: 153). As there were four times as many applicants, the recruiters had a wide choice. Priority was given to skilled workers, of whom 200,000 went to work in Germany. This was the highest number of skilled workers recruited from any of the recruitment states, and it made up 42 percent of all qualified recruited workers (see Jamin, 1998: 151–3).

At first, workers from the urban centres (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir) were recruited by means of glossy brochures (featuring nice, clean, technically advanced and automated work), with the promise that they would be very welcome and treated in a friendly way by the Germans, if they would just work hard and well.² Only at the end of the 1960s did the Turkish government realize that this recruitment process was detrimental to Turkey's cultural capital, that it was a brain-drain; and the process was changed by dividing Turkey into three main regions and by demanding the extension of the recruitment area to eastern and middle Anatolia. Thereafter, the majority of 'guest workers' came from rural areas. The system of recruiting guest workers was intended to be rotational. 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, for instance to avoid the fee of DM3000 per recruited worker the companies had to pay to the German employment office. While the employers thus made use of the migration pioneers' networks, the workers also learned to make use of this recruitment system.

The German state had put special controls on workers from Turkey (and Morocco) on 'epidemic-hygienic grounds' (*seuchen-hygienische Gründe*), a term which had been coined in the context of forced labour during the Nazi regime. Once the hurdle of the health checks had been successfully surmounted by the recruited workers, next came a strenuous train journey of 50–55 hours, in unhygienic conditions, with little food; 'transport', as the German administration called it. After their arrival in Munich (at which point they were put into former air-raid shelters), the workers were distributed immediately – as one German official put it: 'The people have to disappear from the platform in order to avoid the impression of a slave trade' (Jamin, 1998: 164) – and reached their final destination within two days. They were usually set to work within one day.

FEMALE SINGLE MIGRANTS – AN EXCEPTION?

In general, there is very little literature about the female migrants of this recruited generation (for a critique, see Huth-Hildebrandt, 1999: 47, 53; Toksöz, 1991: 11). While labour recruitment is seen as being dominated by

male workers, who were joined by their spouses and children only after the recruitment came to an official end in 1973 and access to Germany was restricted to 'family reunion',³ single female migration is conceived as an exception. The number of studies on this group is next to none. However, considering the little bits of information to be gleaned from secondary sources, Hülya's story as a member of a group of single female labourers is not at all as exceptional as it first seems.

In 1967, 1 million male applicants signed up at Turkish employment offices for a German work permit,⁴ but in families where men did not pass the health checks, had a criminal record or other deficiencies, the wives or daughters were urged to migrate on the husband's, father's or fiancé's behalf (Abadan-Unat, 1985: 208). In 1968, the percentage of married women among the Turkish migrant workers was 29 percent and in 1972, the year of Hülya's emigration, it was 22 percent (Eryilmaz, 1998: 135). Of all guest worker nationalities, the number of married women migrating by themselves was highest among the Turkish, presumably because their family reunion was undesired by the state and permits for husbands could not be easily organized. One out of every five (21.4 percent) workers sent to Germany via the employment office in Istanbul was a woman (Eryilmaz, 1998: 134). Although the sex ratio was uneven, in some regions, for instance in Berlin, the number of female workers comprised 40 percent of the Turkish workforce in 1973 (Brandt and Blaschke, 1997: 2). The majority of women worked in the electronics and textile industries in the German regions of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg.

The unmarried female migrants showed a very heterogeneous social profile: more than half of them came from urban areas, from Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana and Samsun. In part, they were young women from a middle-class background wanting to save enough money to pursue their education back in Turkey.⁵ The percentage of well-educated female Turkish workers was higher than that of their male counterparts (38 vs 21 percent; see Abadan-Unat, 1985: 210).

Another group consisted of female family members who left rural Turkey as part of a family migration strategy. Hülya, it seems, was one of these. It is this group's history to which she testifies: women who were not prepared in any way for what they had to endure.

'ON A PERSON'S HEAD ALL THINGS CAN FALL IN THIS WORLD':⁶ CATEGORIES OF EXCLUSION

The German scientific discourse on immigrant women can be reread as a history of constructing 'images of the other', by emphasizing *differences* while, at the same time, de-emphasizing or ignoring *sameness* (for a detailed analysis, see Lutz, 1991; Lutz and Huth-Hildebrandt, 1998). The

number of studies on these women over the last three decades is enormous (see Huth-Hildebrandt, 1999) but their focus is biased. With very few exceptions, there are no studies of *women as workers*. From the 1970s onwards, a clear tendency towards the orientalization of migrant women can be identified: the debate on 'foreign women' (*Ausländerinnen*) became a debate on Turkish women (Lutz, 1991). The Turkish peasant woman, oppressed by her tradition and (Islamic) culture and transformed through migration into a humble follower of her husband's orders, a helpless and isolated housewife, became the icon of migrant women, the female migrant par excellence.⁷ During the 1980s, the culture-difference paradigm and, with regard to the second generation, the culture-conflict paradigm became the dominant scientific narrative. A particular representation of the female migrant lies at the heart of each narrative: as wife and as mother, she is subjected to archaic patriarchal habits (the importance of honour, the denial of women's sexual activities before or outside marriage) and unable to act on her own. Therefore, she is not prepared to raise her children according to the standards of a modern society. As a daughter, she is subjugated to her father's despotism and unable to bridge the gap between private (tyrannical) and public (tolerant and emancipated) norms and values.

A new field of social work and pedagogical interventions in migrant family life was established. While the first, the 'lost generation', was 'caught between tradition and modernity', their children were seen as the 'agents of change' and in need of institutional support to overcome the restrictive rules of their home culture. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, these stereotypes were identified and criticized as representing a group as a problem, thereby creating a new clientele for educational and social work (see Lutz, 1991). Despite this criticism, the perception of oppressed immigrant women in need of institutional support is still dominant and influential in policy-making, as well as in social scientific and everyday accounts. In German migration research, the pitiful female has become the key figure of the 'creation of ethnicisms'⁸ (Bukow and Llaryora, 1988), legitimating the exclusionary character of sociopolitical and educational interventions and measures. While the themes have slightly changed over the years, the meaning has stayed the same. In the process of the 'making of ethnicity', a (scientific) canon has emerged which channels and categorizes the perception of migrant women, especially from Turkey. It has created a self-referential truth represented by numerous phantom constructs in all kinds of communication, often absorbed and traceable in the accounts of the group in question.

This is also the case in Hülya's interview. This article discusses three themes commonly referred to in the literature on (Turkish) migrant women: the (uncivilized) stranger, the victim of patriarchal honour and being 'twice rootless'. However, by presenting them in the context of

Hülya's biographical narrative, their meaning can be shown to be different to how they are usually perceived.

BECOMING STRANGE

Hülya's narrative illustrates how 'the making of ethnicity' works, as she deals with her self-images in relation to the images imposed on her ('me-images', in the sense of G.H. Mead). She describes the process of becoming a stranger by speaking about the humiliating health checks (such as the investigation of breasts and genitals) which were carried out on candidates in Istanbul, the *Mecidiyeköy*, under the supervision of German doctors:

In Istanbul we were just a number, not a person any more. No name, we were given numbers over the PA, a huge hall, they always called us by numbers. Men and women were separated of course, but you had to go with several people into a room to be X-rayed. And somehow that was quite terrible that people always – the women from the countryside felt ashamed to stand there totally naked. Large numbers of people were all put together, and then, well, there was also the staff, male staff. And they grumbled when the women covered their breasts with their hands: 'Why are you ashamed, are you a beauty, or what? Move your hands!' We were being treated somehow or another in an inhumane way already in Istanbul, you know. Your urine was analysed, your blood examined; when someone's blood pressure was too high, the person had lost already, you know. . . . Teeth were also looked at, you had to bend over, bones were counted, too, your spine had to be straight, and you couldn't have a gap between your teeth, also no rotten teeth, your blood sedimentation had to be all right, everything. Also if you happened to be a bit small. . . you couldn't have a scar from an operation and you had to stretch hands straight ahead, you had to be quite calm, no nervous illness. . . . Of course we were all totally healthy, the people who passed.

The unbearable conditions of what was to come are foreshadowed in this quote. Hülya's exposure to sexist prejudice (the disrespectful treatment by male doctors) and to racist health checks are just an introduction to the horrendous work that would ensue in Germany; it is her first encounter with the demands of the German administration. Thus, she has to deal with all sorts of unfamiliar and unexpected situations before she even sets foot on German soil and becomes a foreigner (*Ausländer*) in the juridical sense of the word.

Becoming a number starts the dehumanizing process, which not only denies her a name, but also a voice, a possibility to speak up, and a subjective position.

In discussing the terrible working conditions of the year at the chicken factory, Hülya talks about the consequences of the company not arranging

the work permits, and how, after the factory contract was over, she and the other young Turkish women, her co-workers and living companions, had to quickly apply for a permit to avoid being expelled from Germany. She describes a funny scene where the five young women got into the small car of the brother of one of the women, who rushed with them from the factory accommodation to the nearest small town where work and residence permits were issued. Hülya then describes how the town clerk looked at them,

... with such big round eyes ... when he saw all of us there, six seven persons, I don't know, we couldn't speak any German even though it had been one year, because we had always been just among ourselves, and we had no contact at all with German colleagues. They didn't treat us as human beings either.

Her explanation why she and the other young women were ignorant of the necessary administrative procedures and could not express themselves in German follows the description of the scene of how strange they must have looked to the official. She explains that they spoke no German even after one year and knew nothing about residence and work permits since their German colleagues had not talked to them, had not even come near them. They were excluded from the community of speakers, there was not even any interaction by gestures which could have signified a basic recognition of reciprocity. They had not been treated as human beings.

This encounter with social exclusion is inserted after Hülya has concluded her narrative about working in the factory, as an aside after describing how she got the necessary papers for her continued residence in Germany. Had she started out with a focus on exclusion instead, her account might have gravitated towards a narrative of victimization and suffering. However, she attempts to present an account which depicts how she overcame the difficulties and the hardship imposed on her. She avoids telling a sad tale by modifying what she experienced, creating an anecdotal, joking atmosphere to sustain the interview situation and to continue her narrative. While Hülya does not leave out the negative experiences of exclusion, and even wants her listeners to be aware of them, she, nevertheless, puts her listeners at ease, so they do not feel embarrassed or appalled by the narrative.⁹ This 'interaction work' produces the reciprocity which was described as denied to her by others. Creating a situation of dignity (Margalit, 1996) in the interview presents a scenic contrast to, and commentary on, what she was deprived of in the situations she relates. It is a common and also gendered feature of immigration accounts that encounters with social exclusion are not stated directly and explicitly, but rather as remarks on the side, as 'a second thought', only when the interviewer has already shown clear signs of reciprocity, active listening, or has expressed interest and readiness to

listen to accounts about experienced prejudice and exclusion (Inowlocki, 1993; Lutz, 1991, 1998).

For example, in their field notes, the interviewers remarked that, in arranging for the interview, Hülya was

very open and warm-hearted and invited us to her house. She said that when German people visit a Turkish woman, she would in any case want to prepare a meal. The meeting went very beautifully and harmoniously. The friendliness we were received with shamed us. Hülya had prepared a voluminous meal. We ate together in her living room and talked about things in general. After the meal we explained again what we planned. Hülya agreed and found it important to tell us about her problems.

This demonstrates the active attempts of the narrator to deal with experienced reality. Discourse on migration is not simply reproduced, it is worked on in an attempted, sometimes successful, transformation.

THE CASE OF 'HONOUR'

The concept of 'honour', and the powerful 'explanation' it seems to present in social science research, the news media and policy communications, is another key issue in the discourse of 'ethnicization'. As an explanatory concept, 'honour' is taken mainly to explain difference: the difference between 'modern' and 'traditional' societies, between west Europeans and Europeans from the south or the east (civilized vs uncivilized), between those who have been residents of the industrialized countries for a number of generations and those who have immigrated to these countries not so long ago. It is also seen as a key concept of the Christian-Islamic binary. In addition, 'honour' is highly gendered; its focus is on the difference between the sexes and on the social processes and mechanisms this difference generates. 'Honour' not only signifies different gender attributes for the sexes, but creates interdependencies through what women's 'honour' signifies for men, and what men expect from women's honour. How male immigrants (southern, south eastern European and especially Islamic) act is understood in these terms as something they must do because of their place of origin and its fierce traditions. Since the 'honour' of men is further understood in these terms as something that they 'have', whereas the 'honour' of women is seen as adding to or subtracting from their 'honour' as men, it becomes a dynamic formula for explaining all sorts of activities.¹⁰

Hülya mentions honour only once and at a particular moment. She talks about her marriage briefly, almost casually, and then proceeds to her divorce:

And afterwards I did not go back to my husband. I said, 'We are too different'. I read life in small letters, he reads *capital* letters. For him everything was so superficial and different and . . . we were as different as day and night. Of course older people don't understand it. Our mothers, my mother and my mother-in-law, have experienced life quite differently. They only accept one reason for divorce, my mother or Turkish women: only if she is unfaithful or very bad things happen, or if the parents-in-law don't want her. If a *man* is unfaithful it is even an honour for him because he can still attract . . . women and so forth. But if a woman does it, it's a *disaster*. She either gets killed or, if he still has some common sense left, the man gets a divorce, but a woman. . . . Even when the man is guilty they don't ask. It's always women who are guilty when they get divorced.

This quote could easily be mistaken as an example of the culture-difference perspective. A closer look, however, brings a different reading. Hülya invokes the term 'honour' when she speaks about generational differences in the perception of marriage: 'Our mothers, my mother and my mother-in-law', referring to elderly women as the significant persons in charge of the moral rules. By breaking the rules she rejects the life patterns of her mother and her mother's generation. Refusing her mother's advice to be reconciled with her husband, however, must have been a difficult decision for her. As she was 'alone all the time' and her husband never came to Germany, the social consequences of her divorce were more relevant for her family back in Turkey; for them, in particular for her mother, it was a disaster. Her mother was the only person in her life account who continued to be emotionally close to her. Out of loyalty and love she arranged for her legal divorce only after her mother's death. Hülya concludes by saying that she was very sad about her divorce, that in fact she had married in vain. Fulfilling her mother's wish to arrange a marriage for her, on the basis of the normative expectations to be a married woman, turned out to be impossible to reconcile with her own pursuit of happiness and fulfilment in partnership.

The normative and emotional conflicts of having married in vain are certainly not characteristic of a traditionalist society; instead, they are typical of a state of social transition. When Hülya talks about 'honour', she is critical of how 'honour' is used to justify and reproduce gendered inequality. Her critical observations would be obscured by explanations under the culture-difference paradigm, which take a mention of 'honour' to denote the powerfulness of archaic customs under patriarchal rule.

'TWICE ROOTLESS?'

Similar to the discourse on 'honour', 'twice rootless' is regularly employed to explain why migration presents a problem, both to the migrants

and their families and to the receiving society who has to bear the brunt and consequence of ensuing 'identity conflicts'. Especially for the younger generation in immigrant families, a dangerous concoction of not belonging here or there and of being denied social recognition has been predicted to result in their vengeful turn to Islamic fundamentalist beliefs (Heitmeyer et al., 1997). This threatening scenario rests on the firm assumption that identities have to be fixed in systems of norms and values which, incidentally, are divided between 'western Europe' and 'Islamic countries' (Inowlocki, 1998).

A different picture, however, results from observing how changing identities are actually worked out in everyday practice. As a divorced woman, Hülya prefers to live in Germany because it gives her more social freedom and enables her to keep supporting her family back home. Towards the end of her account on balancing her hopes and wishes with her experiences, Hülya says:

And here I'm not at home, you . . . notice it again and again. You feel it that we don't belong here. And I'm neither at home in Turkey. That's easy to say: 14 years. I am not a *hundred percent* – not Turkish, I would say, you know, with regard to how I was before. You still become someone else. I fully, I've had contact with the outer world, I've had contact with people, I *know* more about the world. I am not this . . . good little mother of the family or the little daughter of the family who has been influenced from infancy: 'When you are big, you will get married and will have children and will take care of your husband and your children.' *That's gone, that's not everything. That's what I know now.* That won't be like it was before. I know that a woman can do more things than just cook and stand at the kitchen stove.

Neither German, nor Turkish, Hülya has become an inbetween, a transnational person, though there is no word for and no legal acceptance of this state of being. In this context, she presents her life as a story of learning, which allowed her to escape the fate of the housewife. She reflects on her life as an emancipation project: a change of perspective she owes to her migration experience.

BIOGRAPHICAL WORK AND TRANSFORMATION POTENTIAL

At the time of the interview, Hülya was 31 years old and therefore probably not much older than the two women students who interviewed her. While an autobiographical narrative unfolds in some ways independently from the actual interview interaction, the social components of the interview situation also influence what is being told. Hülya's social position in relation to the German women students probably lead her to emphasize her life experience in terms of being a person who looks back

on her life instead of forward, speaking to students who are actively improving their life and career opportunities. Hülya, however, also translates what these German interviewers need to know or understand about her family background. Her language ability is impressive.¹¹ She not only has the vocabulary at her disposal to express this outlook, but, more importantly, the ability to change perspectives in communicating with speakers of German. In a strange environment, without mastery of the local language, it can be hard to make oneself understood because one might feel like a prisoner under the gaze of strangeness and non-belonging. Hülya is not only eloquent, she makes it easy for others to communicate with her, talking about events and developments in her life in such a way that her listeners are able to understand, to imagine situations for themselves: for example, the Turkish birth certification regulations, living conditions in rural Turkey, the recruitment procedure, working conditions in the factories, health problems and what life is like for a divorced woman.

While these might be regular activities in any interaction, they are more marked here, where specific knowledge of the background and context is needed. If we see the interviewers as representative of a (desirable) social milieu, we can also interpret Hülya's presentational skills as habitually evolved through many years of encounters, confrontations and self-reflection. A lot of her activities include explanations ('in Turkey, we don't have pensions, or health care', 'for us, marriage and divorce mean. . .'). About her marriage and divorce, she has to explain why these turned out to be shameful and a disgrace. She cannot presuppose a common ground, given the differences in social position, background knowledge and experience. The communicative features of her account, we would argue, indicate the transformation potentials achieved through her 'biographical work'.

The notion of 'biographical work' (Riemann and Schütze, 1991) refers to sense-making of everyday life in situations when interactions, especially with significant others, are recalled and are played through again, this time, however, with a consideration of alternative reactions and outcomes. This notion is especially helpful for understanding the reflexive qualities of a narrative. When Hülya, for example, recalls persuading her parents that they should let her leave for Germany, and also the reasons she had at the time for wanting to leave, it becomes clear that such thoughts and reflections have always been an integral part of her migration experience in Germany. Through such often painful remembering and working through, life changes can become acceptable, as a step towards regaining initiative and the ability to plan.

Hülya clearly sees her life unfolding in its hardship, suffering and disappointments, yet her perception is neither coloured by bitterness nor illusionary notions of escape. As 'social narrative', Hülya's life story

presents a strong moral commentary on the exploitation and injustice which she and her contemporaries have endured. Her life story bears witness to social processes which are usually ignored or categorized as marginal in every sense of the term; they do not exist in (history) books or museums. As observer and commentator, she selects socially relevant aspects of her life and only hints at unbearable hardships and disappointments. For example, her mother's death is left out altogether from the narrative. This theme might have produced too much gravity to keep the story she wants to tell unfolding. She makes it easy for her listeners to follow her narrative by presenting life events in a scenic way, as if she and the interviewers were watching a funny play: for example, when she recalls the description of the work in the chicken factory given by the factory representative in Istanbul:

'There's only an assembly line here, and you won't see the chicken, you will only press the button and the whole work gets done by itself.' You know, I didn't have much idea about what slaughtering chickens would involve, but I thought, if I don't have to see it and if it is *clean* it will be all right, you know. . . . There was also another person and he spoke a different language from ours, we had to stand up, turn around, he looked at us from top to bottom and back again, too, well, [she laughs] he had to take a look, a close look at what he is paying for.

Hülya invites her interviewers to 'watch a scene' in which a naive girl, dreaming of a job as a medical worker, parades on a stage like a fashion model. In a very humorous way she alludes to symbolic violence, the story of a slave trade: 'what he is paying for'. However, it is not her style to use this terminology. She prefers to focus on the absurdity of the situation and, finishing this sequence by saying that she was welcomed in the factory with a meal of leg of chicken, she performs as a comic: the interviewers reward her by breaking into laughter.

This ability, present throughout her story, to make listening a bearable task by revealing facts of her life from a spectator's perspective can be referred to as the transformation potential. By speaking about her life in this particular way she not only makes it bearable for her listeners, but also for herself. By transforming a story of exploitation into a tale of horror and joy, of losses and gains, she creates what Jerome Bruner (1987: 31) calls a 'recipe to structure self experience'. Through telling life stories in specific ways, these 'recipes' are engraved in our memory and become anchored so that a life is not how it was led, but how it is narrated. Hülya's transformation capacity gives her the possibility to refute the notion of personal shortcomings; instead, she shows how the personal interacts with the social. This becomes obvious in the three themes which were analysed.

The experience of 'becoming strange', for example, is not told as a story

of bewilderment, frustration or defeat, where her self is finally drowned or torn between external and internal images. It is not a story of assimilation or heroic protest. Instead, she skilfully changes observer perspectives by alternately talking about herself as participant in the events and looking at herself from an observer's perspective, or doing both simultaneously.

When Hülya invokes cultural discourses in the case of 'honour', she attempts to figure out what this has to do with what has happened to her. Against the 'iron cage' of fixed sociocultural norms and expectations on both sides, she struggles to find her own way; locks are rattled and eventually begin to yield. In using the term 'honour', she also distances herself from what has hurt and disappointed her. Thus, again, the discourse is not simply reproduced, but it is worked through and transformed.

And, finally, in 'twice rootless', Hülya tries to argue against the dominant discourse that a person like her is a 'rootless' person. As there is no accepted terminology in which she can present herself as a 'transnational' citizen, she invokes the picture of culture *mélange* ('not a *hundred percent* Turkish') and of personal change through migration ('That's what I know now').

In all three themes, it is *change* which Hülya emphasizes, not just confinement and social constraints. By using this transformative potential, she engages not only in keeping her life from falling apart, but she also gives it a meaning.

THE HARD LABOUR OF MIGRATION

Concerning labour migration, the most influential (mainstream) theories in Germany have emphasized the problematic aspects of migration, the impossibility of integration, because of what has been identified as a 'conflict of cultures' (e.g. the strangeness of cultural norms like honour) or 'split identity' ('twice rootless'). Against such a normative-culturalist position, we have focused on the transformation potential of the migration experience. We would argue that the perception of transformation potential through migration depends on being able to acknowledge that a society changes through immigration and its immigrants. Hülya's interview provides a strong case for understanding the biographical qualities of this transformation potential, because it becomes possible to recognize how migrants draw upon different resources. Resources can be understood in terms of access to social networks and in terms of knowledge.¹² Our analysis of Hülya's narrative is also informed by feminist post-colonial theorists and their critical analysis of power relations and domination under the perspective of agency (see Brah, 1996; Ifekwunigwe,

1999). Such theories emphasize agency above victimization, even under conditions of constraint which impede the range of action, initiative and planning. This single case analysis has demonstrated how exclusion and exploitation are experienced and countered. It has focused on how conditions of social constraint are being dealt with in everyday life and it has tried to make visible that this is hard labour.

We would argue that looking for agency does not represent an idealization of female migrants' freedom of action, but rather an acknowledgement of how they deal with difficult, sometimes impossible, conditions. It recognizes initiatives and actions of female subjects struggling with social conditions of constraint, instead of reproducing in social theory the structures which tie them down in social reality. Identity processes comprise much more than the identity of being a 'victim'. On the level of text analysis, discerning 'biographical work' is a central task of understanding narratives. Single case biographical analysis can detect processes of resistance and attempts at gaining control (Apitzsch and Inowlocki, 2000). On the theoretical level of migration processes, focusing on 'biographical work as integration work' (Lutz, forthcoming) emphasizes the potential of relying on resources. Neglecting the transformation potential of biographies, and of 'biographical work' in particular, not only contributes to the continuation of distorted images and the degradation of immigrant women, it denies them a place, a voice, a vision and their history in the receiving society.

NOTES

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1. The interview with Hülya was recorded and transcribed by Heike Kahlert and Christa Noack, students of the late interpretive social researcher Christa Hoffman-Riem, at the University of Hamburg in 1986. The transcript was made available to the authors of this article by Gerhard Riemann, who organized a session on 'Doing Biographical Research' at the International Sociological Congress in Montreal, July 1998. The analysis of the interview transcript was worked out in collaboration with Neval Gültekin and Serin Erengezin. We based our article on the analysis of this interview because the expressiveness and reflexivity of the narrator highlights the historical importance of the first generation of immigrant women contract labourers.
2. See the quotes from 'Advice for Turkish Workers in the Federal Republic of Germany - Recommendations and Hints' in Eryilmaz and Jamin (1998: 148).
3. The concrete definition of this rule, which the German state was forced to accept as part of international human rights conventions, has been constantly changed by numerous governments and by regional parliaments. While spouses and children have to be admitted, this is not the case for grandparents or foster children. The current rule has adapted the western nuclear family model as a standard pattern (see Lutz, 1997).

4. Unfortunately, the number of females is missing in these data.
5. See, for example, the partly autobiographical novel by the famous German-Turkish writer, Emine Sevgi Özdamar (1998).
6. See Özdamar (1998, 180).
7. Between 1976 and 1980, there were 52 publications on Turkish, eight on Spanish, seven on Yugoslavian, six on Asian, four on Italian, three on Greek and one on Portuguese women migrants. Since then, studies on Turkish women migrants have increased tremendously and still outnumber those on any other immigrant group (Lutz and Huth-Hildebrandt, 1998).
8. 'Ethnicization' is the German equivalent to the British term 'racialization', based, however, on a different history and debate.
9. For an elaborate analysis of the 'hidden fear of the researcher' in interview situations with immigrant women, which is often cushioned by the interviewees, see Lutz (1991: Ch. 3).
10. The anthropologist Schiffauer introduced 'honour' as an explanatory concept for the strangeness of the Turkish culture in his famous book *Die Gewalt der Ehre* ('The Violence of Honour') in 1983. Since then, the idea that the 'strange' habits of and the miscommunication with migrants are rooted in this paradigm has dominated (German) social science discourse. For a more recent example see Strobl, 1996; for an overview of literature until the early 1990s see Lutz (1991: 16–27).
11. It reminds us of a biographically based novel by the writer and psychoanalyst Eva Hoffman (1989), who emigrated with her family from Poland to Canada at the age of 13. Hoffman named her autobiographical account of her often difficult and painful language transition *Lost in Translation*, thus ironically commenting on her loss and melancholy through skilful competency in the new language. Similarly, Hülya uses the language of the place which exploited and humiliated her, which made her feel sick, isolated and alone, to accurately point out what happened, in what way and what this meant. Without the opportunities to be taken care of, to go to school and actively partake in literature and music that Eva Hoffman relied on for her transition, Hülya's resources are as impressive as they remain mysterious.
12. In interpretive sociology, knowledge includes 'ways of life, methods of coming to terms with the environment, efficient recipes' (Schütz, 1962: 14). Knowledge, furthermore, can be understood as 'socially situated' (Mannheim, 1929). Feminist theorists have specified and worked with concepts of 'situated knowledge' (see Haraway, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Hirsch and Fox-Keller, 1990; Spivak, 1988 and many others).

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