

# Biography and Society

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**BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY**  
RESEARCH COMMITTEE 38 OF THE ISA

NEWSLETTER / JULY 2013

**LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT  
JULY 2013**

Dear Colleagues,

This year as an interim one between the Forum in Buenos Aires and the World Congress in Yokohama, we had and still have many occasions to get in touch, meet, having inspiring discussions and encounters.

In April we completed the session program for the next **World Congress in Yokohama** in July next year. Thanks to excellent ideas and proposals of many session organizers we were able to compose a very promising program. The **call for papers** is now open **until September 30 this year**. We would like to invite you to consider participating and to submit your proposals as soon as possible, preferably before you start your hopefully long summer break. This deadline is a very strict one which means that submissions of paper proposals after September 30 will not be included in the program. Additionally, every abstract has to be submitted via an online-system. You find the whole list of sessions with short descriptions of their focus and more detailed instructions in this newsletter.

In June many of us gathered at a conference in Lodz on **“Biographical Research in the 21st Century – Epistemological Issues and Ethical Dilemmas”**, organized by Kaja Kazmierska. Apart from the warm and inspiring atmosphere I personally was impressed by the lively biographical research in Poland. Meant to celebrate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the ISA working group called ‘Biography and Society’ by Daniel Bertaux in 1978, out of which the RC 38 was established in 1984, this conference gathered some of the ‘founders’ and many young scholars showing that the generational transmission is working quite well in our RC. Thank you Kaja for this great event!

In September, an international workshop will take place at the University of Crete, organized by Irini Siouti and Giorgos Tsiolis. The focus is on **“New Challenges in Transnational Biography Research”**. Also this program looks very promising!

Last not least, I would like to hint at some proposed **revision of the organizational structure of the ISA** on which the Research Committees can vote via their presidents. I would like to invite everybody to participate in discussing these issues and to let me know if you have preference for pro or con the proposed changes. You find some more information in this newsletter and especially on the following website: [http://www.isa-sociology.org/restructuring-of-the-isa/?page\\_id=28](http://www.isa-sociology.org/restructuring-of-the-isa/?page_id=28)

So far from my side – you’ll get more information about the whole content of this newsletter in the Editorial.

Enjoy reading, and wish you a happy, relaxing and productive summertime in the northern hemisphere, and a bearable winter in the south!

Roswitha Breckner  
[www.soz.univie.ac.at/roswitha-breckner/](http://www.soz.univie.ac.at/roswitha-breckner/)  
President of the RC Biography & Society

**EDITORIAL  
JULY 2013**

Dear colleagues,

Thanks to your contributions we now proudly present this year's first newsletter of our Research Committee. We hope it encourages further discussion within and stimulates critical comments on RC 38.

In its first section Laura Odessa gives insight into her current research on mixed marriages. Among others she discusses juridical and social challenges couples with different ethnic background have to face in their wider and immediate social environment suggesting a trans-disciplinary approach when undertaking further research on this subject. Also the subject Uku Lember is focussing in his paper deals in a way with mixed marriages. He is researching about marriages between 'Estonian-speaking locals' and 'Russian-speaking newcomers' in Estonia. He discusses the potential theoretical-methodological contradiction in doing life-story based oral history research. The third paper *Noga Gilad elaborates the second questioning part during narrative interviews*.

Thereafter, Elise Pape presents this issue's country report on the development of biographical research in France. It was exactly 30 years that our Research Committee on „Biography & Society“ was founded on the initiative of Daniel Bertaux who five years before initiated a first ISA Ad-hoc Group. We like to take this opportunity to express our special thanks to him once again. It was in commemoration of this anniversary a conference on 'Biographical Research in the 21st century – Epistemological Issues and Ethical Dilemmas' was held last month at the University of Łódź, Poland. Thanks to Markieta Domecka you will find a report of the conference on the following pages.

Further on, we give you information and the Call for Papers for the next ISA World Congress, taking place in Yokohama, next year. We strongly like to encourage you to use the summer break to get registered as soon as possible.

As you know from previous issues our newsletter finishes with your news and publications related to our Research Committee, respectively the ISA.

Hoping you enjoy the newsletter and looking forward to your comments

With kind regards,  
Andreas & Michaela

Andreas Oskar Kempf ([andreas.kempf@gesis.org](mailto:andreas.kempf@gesis.org))  
Michaela Köttig ([koettig@fb4.fh-frankfurt.de](mailto:koettig@fb4.fh-frankfurt.de))

**Some further important topics:**

We ask all of you to inform us about a change in your address, and in particular in your e-mail address.

**# Membership fees**

Please remember to pay your membership fee:

Regular members	US\$ 40
Students and members from countries B and C (see ISA regulations)	US\$ 20

**Bank account:** Michaela Koettig  
Sparda-Bank-Hessen, Germany  
bank code: 500 905 00  
account number: 101 548 312

For bank transfer of members from European countries  
IBAN: 13 500 905 000 101 548 312  
BIC: GEN ODE F1 S12

**# The deadline for the next newsletter is the End of October 2013**

You can send us

- a short paper (3-7 pages) on a topic you are currently working on
- a presentation of your current project
- some reflection on your experiences of teaching biographical approaches and methods
- reports or some notes about conferences you have attended
- general reports about activities in the field of biographical research in your institution, university, country, continent
- interesting call for papers for conferences, workshops, summer schools
- new publications from you, also in your respective native language
- any other thought or information you like to share.

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## RC 38: CALL FOR PAPERS

### On-line abstracts submission

June 3, 2013 - September 30, 2013 24:00 GMT.

The direct link for submitting your abstract is <https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2014/cfp.cgi>. Only abstracts submitted on-line will be considered in the selection process. Notification letters about acceptance or rejection of abstracts will be sent on 30 November, 2013.

If you have questions about any specific session, please feel free to contact the Session Organizer for more information.

Please keep in mind that there are some Rules for Presenters, especially concerning a limited appearance in the overall conference program: "Participants may be listed no more than twice in the Program. This includes all types of participation – except being listed as Program Coordinator or Session Organizer. Program Coordinators and Session Organizers can organize a maximum of two sessions where their names will be additionally listed in the program.

A "participant" is anyone listed as an author, co-author, plenary speaker, roundtable presenter, poster presenter, panelist, critic, discussant, session (co)chair, or any similar substantive role in the program."

For more details see <http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2014/how-to-present-a-paper.htm>

### Understanding social problems through narratives by insiders

Organizer: **Tazuko Kobayashi**, Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan ([t.kobayashi@r.hit-u.ac.jp](mailto:t.kobayashi@r.hit-u.ac.jp)) and **Mamoru Tsukada**, Sugiyama Jogakuen University in Nagoya, Japan ([mamoru@sugiyama-u.ac.jp](mailto:mamoru@sugiyama-u.ac.jp))

This session seeks to explore the constructed reality of social problems through narratives told by insiders. When we consider social problems, we try to solve them from outsiders' perspectives by regarding them as problems to society. In this session we would like to understand social problems by listening to insiders' narratives about them. In doing so, we may see what the most important aspect of the problems for those facing them is and provide a different insight into the problems from that of outsiders. Topics in social problems in this session will include the relationship between doctors and patients with HIV tainted blood, that between nurses and terminal care patients, that between ethnic minorities and majorities and the other related ones. Anyone who has conducted life story interviews

with insiders of any social problem is encouraged to attend this session and discuss the problem from multiple perspectives.

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### Concepts of inclusion from a biographical perspective

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Organizers: **Lena Inowlocki**, University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany ([inowlock@fb4.fh-frankfurt.de](mailto:inowlock@fb4.fh-frankfurt.de)) and **Kathy Davis**, VU University in Amsterdam, Netherlands ([k.e.davis@vu.nl](mailto:k.e.davis@vu.nl))

Sociological theory has paid much attention to concepts of exclusion and exclusionary practice. In our session, we would like to discuss in which ways concepts of inclusion have come to address inequalities in society, and how the concepts relate to forms of exclusion. Inclusion is interesting for biographical researchers because it raises questions about individuality and differences; what is 'normal'; and the ways practices of exclusion and inclusion are mutually dependent. Given the backdrop of – rising – social inequalities and concomitant exclusions, "inclusion" has come to be written into policies, as a critical corrective to previous policies of "integration," thereby becoming a kind of 'feel-good' term for thinking about difference and diversity.

In this session, we want to critically explore "inclusion" from a biographical perspective, focusing on how individual strategies of inclusion (for example, 'passing') actually work, the social constraints that prevent inclusion of some, while enabling it for others (for example, inclusion as privilege of the powerful or as symbolic capital), as well as the policies and practices which change society and restructure institutions in the direction of less inequality and more recognition and acceptance of difference.

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### The concept of transnationality under conditions of social inequality. A look at transnationality through the magnifying glass

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Organizers: **Julia Bernstein**, University of Cologne, Germany ([jbernste@uni-koeln.de](mailto:jbernste@uni-koeln.de)) and **Agnieszka Satola**, University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany ([satola@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:satola@em.uni-frankfurt.de))

The goal of the session is to reflect on the concept of transnationality broadly used in the last two decades through close consideration of different studies about transnational biographies. The transnational biographies are aggregations of the ambivalence and complexity of the globalization. On the one hand, a transnational research perspective enables to scrutinize the micro-level of social action namely individual agency of knowledgeable actors, the people who move, as a meaningful reaction, and in contrast to the earlier macro-models of migration studies. Numerous recent studies have been dedicated to the analysis of new opportunities and changes in the social worlds and ways of life of transnational actors. On the other hand, the processes of globalization are inevitably connected with structures of inequality and social exclusion, which directly influence the individual biographies of transmigrants.

Three questions appear to be especially relevant for this session:

- How transmigrants cope with controversies of social inequality?
- How the *third transnational space* created in the context of inequality can be analyzed on the basis of transnational biographies?
- What new theoretically differentiated concepts can be suggested for analyzing significantly different ways of life which are hidden behind the general concept of transnationality?

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**Biographies in the Global South and collective histories. Individual remembering in interrelation with public and hegemonic discourses**

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Organizers: **Hee-Young Yi**, Daegu University, Korea ([biograf@hanmail.net](mailto:biograf@hanmail.net)) and **Gabriele Rosenthal**, Georg-August-University of Goettingen, Germany ([g.rosenthal@gmx.de](mailto:g.rosenthal@gmx.de))

We would like to invite colleagues who collected biographical data in countries of the Global South and who are analyzing the biographies in the context of the collective histories in these countries respectively regions, and the collectivities and groupings to which the biographers feel affiliated. The overarching question for this session would be, in which ways individual remembering is interrelated with collective memories and discourses.

The practice of remembering is, depending on the historical and cultural context, subject to various social rules of commemoration and reveals traces of rules of remembering which were effective in past or in different social and situational contexts. At the same time, it reveals the traces of the rules which are currently used.

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**Biography and politics**

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Organizers: **Rosa Maria Brandhorst**, Georg-August-University of Goettingen, Germany ([RosaMaria.Brandhorst@gmx.de](mailto:RosaMaria.Brandhorst@gmx.de)) and **Michaela Koettig**, University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany ([Michaela.koettig@gmx.de](mailto:Michaela.koettig@gmx.de))

Individuals are actors in politics. Simultaneously, political framings and developments influence biographies to a great extent. This session addresses the mutual interrelations between biography and politics. We invite contributions from different theoretical and methodological perspectives approaching this topic, may they explore the way activists contribute to a political development at regional, national or global levels, or focus on the biographical meaning of political activism in past or contemporary political systems. Also papers are welcome which focus on political events and analyze how political actors and affected individuals revalue these events in retrospect, and which meanings they attach to them in their lives.

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**Biography, violence and gender**

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Organizers: **Michaela Koettig**, University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt am Main, Germany ([Michaela.koettig@gmx.de](mailto:Michaela.koettig@gmx.de)) and **Hermílio Santos**, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), Porto Alegre, Brazil ([hermilio@pucrs.br](mailto:hermilio@pucrs.br)).

The experience and the exercise of violence are highly connected to experiences of life history and specific gender roles. This session welcomes contributions that explore relations between violence, biography and gender at the theoretical and empirical level. The perspective of male and female perpetrators and victims at the level of couple and family relations and in the social context can be addressed. It may be asked, for instance, which historical and biographical developments and interactive mechanisms are connected with the exercise and experience of violence, how gender constructions are involved in these constellations and which individual, social and societal impact violent actions and experiences unfold.

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### Different perspectives on life stories

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Organizers: **Tazuko Kobayashi**, Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan ([t.kobayashi@r.hit-u.ac.jp](mailto:t.kobayashi@r.hit-u.ac.jp)) and **Irini Siouti**, University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany ([Siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:Siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de))

The session enables the presentation and discussion of methodological approaches and methods of analysis in biographical research. Participants from different theoretical and cultural backgrounds and with different methodological approaches are asked to exemplify their way of doing a biographical case study analysis using the same biographical-narrative interview provided ahead of time by the session organizers. In the session, the invited researchers will demonstrate their analysis of the case, their methodology and "technique" as a basis for comparison and discussion with each other and the audience. The format of this session has become something of a tradition at the world congresses and enjoys great interest.

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### Reconstructing gendered biographies in transcultural research settings: methodological challenges

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Session organizers: **Bettina Dausien**, University of Vienna, Austria ([bettina.dausien@univie.ac.at](mailto:bettina.dausien@univie.ac.at)), **Irini Siouti**, University of Frankfurt, Germany ([siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de)) and **Hiromi Tanaka**, Meiji University Tokyo, Japan ([hiromi@meiji.ac.jp](mailto:hiromi@meiji.ac.jp))

In biography research gender is conceived not only as a social construction which is produced and reproduced in ongoing interaction processes but also as a biographically constructed and reconstructed social category. The thesis of the biographical construction of gender implies certain challenges for a reconstructive methodology in biography research: How can we "discover" gender constructions in biographical narratives without presupposing "typical" male/female attributes? The problem appears to be even more complex in transcultural research settings because gender constructions as well as patterns of biographical narratives and life courses are related to the respective societal and cultural context in which they are produced and communicated.

In particular, the notion of the constructed character of gender and biographies makes it necessary to rethink and question common methodological premises of interpretative research and leads to a reflection of contemporary research and fieldwork practices. In this session we invite contributions focusing on the methodological challenges that the theoretical concept of gendered biographies implies in the field of transcultural biography research.

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### Constructing biographies in different media

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Organizer: **Roswitha Breckner**, University of Vienna, Austria ([roswitha.breckner@univie.ac.at](mailto:roswitha.breckner@univie.ac.at)), **Gülsüm Depeli**, Hacettepe University Ankara, Turkey ([gdepeli@gmail.com](mailto:gdepeli@gmail.com)), and **Maria Pohn-Weidinger**, University of Vienna, Austria ([maria.pohn-weidinger@univie.ac.at](mailto:maria.pohn-weidinger@univie.ac.at))

Biographical research has focused on written or oral narrated life stories since its beginning, and has developed a variety of very fruitful and well established approaches to elicit and to analyze them. The increasing use of so-called 'new media' in transnationalizing and globalizing social settings, crossing long distances and cultural diversity, calls for reflection how biographical imagination and creativity in general are shaped by different media and communication technologies. How is the construction of the self as a 'creative work' changing in multimodal processes? In how far are biographies constructed similarly and/or differently in narratives, photographs, pictures, film, video, artifacts, bodily perform-

ances, blogs, and social networks? How do the different modes of expression relate to each other? How can we get access to and understand these processes?

This session invites speakers who deal with the characteristics of constructing biographies or biographically relevant experiences in different media, and welcomes reflection of these processes also from a methodological and methodical perspective.

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### **Embodied biographies and sexy stories**

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Organizer: **Kathy Davis**, VU University in Amsterdam, Netherlands ([k.e.davis@vu.nl](mailto:k.e.davis@vu.nl))

This session focuses on sexual experiences, sexual practices and sexual identities from a biographical perspective. On the one hand, sexuality is often left out of biographical research as though it had no appreciable influence on people's lives, sense of self, or relationship with the world around them. On the other hand, sexuality studies often look at sexual practices and cultural discourses without attending to how these practices and discourses shape individual biographies. In this session, we want to explore some of the methodological, normative, and theoretical challenges of biographical research on sexuality. For example, how do different social contexts and cultural discourses and normative formations shape people's sexual experiences? How are sexual identities constructed in life stories?

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### **Biographical perspectives on intimacy and passion**

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Organizers: **Beate Littig**, Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna, Austria ([beate.littig@ihs.ac.at](mailto:beate.littig@ihs.ac.at))

Intimacy and passion look pretty different at first glance. However, they both involve intense emotional experiences which have meaningful repercussions on people's biographies. They are also experiences which can be difficult to talk about. This can be because they are so tied up with the body (something one feels but doesn't put into words) or because they are not public or because they are invisible or even secret. They may in some cases disrupt individual's ordinary lives, evoking shame, embarrassment, or even distress. The result is that they have been under-theorized and under-researched. We invite contributions which explore how experiences of passion and intimacy shape people's biographies, the kinds of narratives which can be told about these intensely desired, but often secret and sometimes disruptive experiences, and the methodological and ethical challenges which experiences of intimacy and passion present for biographical research.

<b>JOINT SESSIONS</b>
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**RC 05 and RC 38, hosted by RC 05:**

### **Intersectionality and intellectual biographies**

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Organizers: **Kathy Davis**, VU University in Amsterdam, Netherlands ([k.e.davis@vu.nl](mailto:k.e.davis@vu.nl)) (RC38) and **Helma Lutz**, University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany ([lutz@soz.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:lutz@soz.uni-frankfurt.de)) (RC05)

This joint session explores the ways social location shapes, limits, and enables the development of critical social theory. This will be done by means of intellectual biographies of theorists, social histories of schools of thought and their travels, and transnational ethnographies of theoretical and methodological perspectives challenging racism, sexism, ethnocentrism and nationalism. We invite contributions that focus specifically on the relationships between intersections of gender, class, race/ethnicity

and national belonging and the development of critical sociological theory and practice.

**RC 38 and RC 32, hosted by RC 38:**

**Representation and Restoration of Women's Experiences: Navigating between Colonial History and Postcolonial Present in the Asian Context**

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Organizers: **Hee-Young Yi**, Daegu University, Korea ([biograf@hanmail.net](mailto:biograf@hanmail.net)), **Gabriele Rosenthal**, Georg-August-University of Goettingen, Germany ([g.rosenthal@gmx.de](mailto:g.rosenthal@gmx.de)) (RC 38) and **Bandana Purkayastha**, University of Connecticut, USA ([bandanapurkayastha@yahoo.com](mailto:bandanapurkayastha@yahoo.com)) (RC 32)

This session aims to explore and restore the multilayered aspects of women's experiences in postcolonial history in the Asian context. Based upon women's biographies and oral life histories, this session will analyze how women negotiate the boundaries between state, nation, class, and gender, and examine how researchers can historicize them. Not only feminist theoretical approaches to hidden personal life histories, but also critical methods to hear, understand, and speak to the 'historical other' will be considered throughout the whole session.

Since the 1990s when the testimonies of former comfort women drafted into the Japanese military forces during WWII garnered worldwide interests, there has been a great deal of research emerging in the field of women's oral life history, especially in the East Asian countries. Since then, biographies of women, social minorities, or ordinary people have enabled many social scientists to rethink the meaning of History, Science, Reality, and/or Truth and have led to a growing interest in the unwritten, silenced experiences of people.

Presenters in this session will pay attention to women who have experienced war, poverty, and gender violence; argue that women are not just powerless victims of history but active agents navigating the boundaries between structures and ideologies; and question our normative understanding of history, politics, and society. As such, this session will shed light on the theoretical and methodological implications of women's oral life history with regard to the representation and restoration of women's experiences in post-colonial Asia.

**RC 38 and RC 31, hosted by RC 38:**

**Crossing experiences: from biographies of migrants in and from Northeast Asia**

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Organizer: **Sara Park**, Kyoto University, Japan ([bach\\_ps@hotmail.com](mailto:bach_ps@hotmail.com)) (RC 38), **Lilach Lev-Ari**, Oranim College, Israel ([llevari@oranim.ac.il](mailto:llevari@oranim.ac.il)) (RC 31)

This session intends to contribute to the progression of migration studies through biographies and family histories in and from the northeast Asian region (Japan, two Koreas and Chinas). Historically, northeast Asian countries have sent and accepted migrants over centuries. Because of drastic transitions in labor markets and demographic compositions, societies in this region now face a new period of migration, both in sending and accepting. On the other hand, histories of migrants in and from this region (i.e. Chinese, Korean and Japanese migrants in Americas, Koreans in Japan, war-displaced Japanese in China, etc.) face difficulties in inheriting their past experiences.

Biography and/or family history provide effective means of investigation of reasons and processes of migration. Such "personal" histories enable researchers to understand each phenomenon that deeply influences migration such as state policies, economic situations, and transnational networks, through a historical perspective in keeping with the reality of each migrant.

On these academic interests, this session particularly invites contributors who promote migration studies in the northeast Asian region from historical perspectives and empirical researches of migrant's experiences, as well as locate their findings in the previous discussions in sociology that deals with international migration.

## **CALL FOR PAPER YOKOHAMA II**

### **Experiences and narratives of travel and mobility, RC 50 (Tourism)**

Organizer: **Silke Laux** ([silkelaux@gmx.de](mailto:silkelaux@gmx.de)), **Johannes Becker** ([johannes.becker@sowi.uni-goettingen.de](mailto:johannes.becker@sowi.uni-goettingen.de))

This session focuses on experiences of people being 'on the move'. How are these experiences shaped and expressed while travelling? And what role do they play afterwards, for example in the daily lives, and life histories of travelers? (Bruner 2005)

If mobility is an ideal of the 'modern global citizen', travel experiences as well as narrative and other representations of them gain high importance in the actors' lives. Travel experiences transform values (e.g. independence and creativity), as well as identities/belongings. They influence the construction of biographies and serve as a source for professional advancement. Thus, there is an increasing need to look at what happens not only while, but also before and after travelling.

However, the assumption that "we are all tourists now" (already Fussell 1980, cf. Urry 1995) does not take into account that participation in mobility highly differs and ranges from frequent and occasional travelling to non-travelling. This opens up questions including: in what ways do economic and social imbalances shape experiences of mobility? How does a highly mobile class negotiate travel experiences with less mobile contemporaries and in between generations? (Holden 2005)

Finally, taking the actors' own narratives of travelling and mobility seriously might help to disentangle well-known terminological difficulties that have developed in this specific research field: Who is (still) a tourist, who is 'hyper-mobile', already a part-time dweller, a 'modern nomad', or a migrant?

Contributions are welcome that deal with:

- how experiences are shaped while travelling;
- the role of travelling in biographies, in families, within different generations;
- narrations about travelling and other representations such as pictures, videos, social media, and blogs;
- meaning-making, changes and mediations of travel experiences through (re-)telling;
- the role of images and discourses in forming travel experiences;
- interdependencies of class, gender, social, religious, national or ethnic belongings and travel experiences/narrations;
- lacking experiences of travelling;
- actor-centered methodology in tourism research.

**WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENT****International Workshop:****“New Challenges in Transnational Biography Research”**

Department of Sociology, University of Crete, Greece 27-28. September 2013

Organized by: **Irini Siouti**, Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaften, J.W. Goethe Universität Frankfurt, Germany ([Siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:Siouti@soz.uni-frankfurt.de)) and **Giorgos Tsiolis**, University of Crete, Sociology, Greece ([tsiolisg@social.soc.uoc.gr](mailto:tsiolisg@social.soc.uoc.gr))

In cooperation with the RC 38 Biography and Society/International Sociological Association (ISA)

**Programme****Friday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013****17:00 Welcome**

Skevos Papaioannou, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences

Aliki Lavranou, Head of the Department of Sociology

Roswitha Breckner, President RC 38 Biography and Society (ISA)

**17:30 Kathy Davis (VU University Amsterdam):**

Dancing Across Borders: Tango in a Transnational Perspective

Moderation: Roswitha Breckner (University of Vienna)

**18:30-19:00 Coffee Break****19:00- 21:00 Panel discussion: Self-Reflexivity and Biography: Transcultural Perspectives**

Participants:

Minna Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Deborah Kalekin-Fishman (University of Haifa)

Lena Inowlocki (University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt)

Riki van Boeschoten (University of Thessaly)

Bettina Dausien (University of Vienna)

Chair: Phil C. Langer (Goethe University Frankfurt)

**21.30 Dinner, Rethymno****Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2013****10.30-13.00 Research Workshop I: “Doing Transnational Biographical Analysis ”**

Chair: Giorgos Tsiolis (University of Crete), Irini Siouti (Goethe University Frankfurt)

**13.00-14.30 Lunch****14.30-17.30 Research Workshop II: “Doing Transnational Biographical Analysis ”**

Chair: Michaela Köttig (University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt), Rosa Maria Brandhorst (University of Göttingen)

**18.00-19.00 Closing discussion**

Registration: Registration closing date: August 27, 2013, [newchallenges2013@gmail.com](mailto:newchallenges2013@gmail.com)

## PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

**From “biographical work” to “multi-site ethnography”:  
From couple life history to the association Les Amoureux au Ban Public – a study case.**

Laura Odessa, Italy ([la.odasso@gmail.com](mailto:la.odasso@gmail.com))

This contribution deals with the question in how far ethnography and participant observation could be used in doing biographical research. As a final conclusion it tries to show how multiple methodologies can complement each other and refine research outcomes.

First of all, I would like to offer some core definitions. Starting with Michael Burawoy who says: “by ethnography, I mean writing about the world from the standpoint of participant observation” [1998: 6]. To achieve this aim it is necessary to use the “researcher's self” as an instrument of survey. In my case this has meant a passage from participant observation (*observation participante*) to an observing participation (*participation observante*) [Pasquier, 2004; Tedlock, 1991]. In this case the participation has the priority and becomes a deeper form of observation; the subjective experience and the fact to be “inside” the field are central.

In order to better explain this proposal, I use a case taken from the fieldwork of my PhD dissertation on the influences of racism [Memmi, 1994] and of islamophobia<sup>1</sup> [(The) Runnymede Trust, 1997] in intermarriages (*mixité conjugale*). In my research, I focused on the comparison of two similar but not identical European regions – Alsace, in France, and Veneto, in Italy – and on the comparison of two different samples of couples in order to deal with different kinds of migration from Maghreb and from Mashreq (Italian-Jordanian and Italian-Moroccan couples in Veneto and French-Lebanese and French-Moroccan couples in Alsace).

I decided to study this topic because of my previous interdisciplinary formation concerning the Arab World and the Mediterranean Area and my personal experiences of working with migrants long before the beginning of my PhD. One more reason was my long-standing activity in associations and groups for the defence of the rights of migrants in Italy and in France. For instance, during my PhD fieldwork, in fact, I have never introduced myself as a sociologist, but I've preferred to present myself as a student and researcher, a linguistic and a traveller who knows the countries of origins of the couples, who

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<sup>1</sup> According to the definition used by the *Enciclopedia Universalis* proposed by the essayist Alfred Memmi « racism is a form of production or hyper-valorisation of a real or an imagined difference that could become generalised in order to make a profitable use of it” [Memmi, 1994: 14].

Instead, to define islamophobia I have chosen the following indicators suggested by *The Runnymede Trust* organisation based in London and used by the *European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance* (ECRI):

The eight points retained about closed views of Islam are:

“1) Islam is seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities.

2) Islam is seen as separate and other – a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures; b) not affected by them; c) not influencing them.

3) Islam is seen as inferior - barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist.

4) Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, and engaged in a ‘clash of civilizations’.

5) Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.

6) Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.

7) Hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.

8) Anti-Muslim discourse is seen as natural or as ‘normal’.” [(The) Runnymede Trust, 1997: 12]

know Arabic languages and who is familiar with their dialects and with the history of the area [Burawoy, 1998: 11]<sup>2</sup>. These specificities of my personal identity change my identity as a researcher and, surely, they influenced the data collected and the questions raised during the research process. Thereby, I don't mean invalidate my conclusions.

My own profile as researcher, my personal biography and the subject chosen led me to widen my methodology of research, primarily based on biographical research and on life stories.

First of all, the study of intermarriage (*mixité conjugale*) is based on the assumption that individual orientations cannot be understood without a deeper analysis of the couples' relational environment (*entourage*)<sup>3</sup>. In accordance with the geographical context and with the present situation and the past history – in other words with time and space – the members of a couple are affected and are confronted with some forms of discredit [Goffman, 1963; Delcroix, 2011]<sup>4</sup>. They have to fight against representations, prejudices and stereotypes, sometimes also against various forms of legal discrimination and institutional racism<sup>5</sup> derived from the social process of categorization (i.e.: the creation of categories of "national", "migrant/regular and irregular migrant", the categorization concerning their "origin" - real or imagined - and "race"<sup>6</sup>, etc.) and from widespread and silent forms of everyday racism [Essed, 1991].

That means that we need to observe the *mixité* as a "total social *phenomenon*". From an internal perspective, it demands the analysis of the knowledge carried by the social actors themselves; while, from a wider perspective, it requires to consider the couples' relational environment, because intermarriages are affected by a process of constructing and of collective representations.

In this perspective, Norbert Elias' "figurational sociology" and his conception of history could be valid epistemological tools [Elias, 1997: 55-56] to study the issue of my PhD.

In fact, it is not possible to limit the analysis of intermarriages to the simple micro-sociological level. Between the internal space of the couple and the external space there are transactions, interconnections and positive or negative influences that have to be observed in order to better understand the idea of "challenges" coming along with mixed marriages. The men and the women interviewed react

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<sup>2</sup> To cite Michael Burawoy: « The data I gathered was very much contingent on who I was – a white male recently graduated from a British university with a degree in mathematics, a newcomer to colonialism, and an idealist to boot. Every one of these characteristics shaped my entry and performance in social situations and how people spoke to me of racial issues. » [Burawoy, 1998: 11].

<sup>3</sup> See Beate Collet [15 – 19], Catherine Delcroix [pp. 26 – 29] and Gabrielle Varro [pp. 20 – 25] in "*Mariages mixtes, Hommes et Migrations, no 1167, 1993* and Tognetti Bordogna M., *Legami famigliari e immigrazione: i matrimoni misti*, L'Harmattan, Torino, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> For this concept I refer to Catherine Delcroix's approach who, elaborating Erving Goffman's terminology, defines discredit as a stigmatization process that affects all the persons belonging to an acknowledged category for the reason that *they are a member of this category*. These categories are symbolic, stated by the collective perception that isolates arbitrarily a particular characteristic. A person in a situation of discredit is affected by a deficit of credibility in front of the *entourage* [Delcroix, 2011: 83].

<sup>5</sup> Using in present French context the definition proposed by Carmichael Stokely and Hamilton Charles in *Black Power: the politics of liberation in America*: « racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism. The first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury or the violent destruction of property. This type can be recorded by television cameras; it can frequently be observed in the process of commission. The second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of *specific* individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type » [1967: 4].

<sup>6</sup> I agree with Colette Guillaumin [1972/2002] when she affirms that it is not the race that creates racism, rather the racism that creates the race.

to the mirror images reflected by the society; they do a reflexive work on their own history and life, they act strategically to overcome these challenges with the purpose to succeed in their project of leading a life as a couple.

Apart from the juridical dimension of the intermarriages (herewith, I mean the bi-national marriage defined on the basis of the difference between national and foreign), there are other kinds of boundaries the partners need to cross. These dimensions are more symbolic and connected to identity marks and to belonging and non-belonging, and they are fed by historical events, media and political pressure. In what comes next I will mainly focus on the juridical challenge that has brought me to widen my field of research.

The “biographical work” [Inowlocki and Lutz, 2000: 301] on the history of a young couple from Mulhouse, Alice and Mourad, is useful to explain the core idea that I would like to develop here.

Alice started to tell me her life history as follows:

« I am Alice, I’m French, [*ironic laugh and deep sigh*] I’ve never been particularly proud of it but since a while I feel ashamed of it [...] You know my dad is a fan of the French Revolution, the Age of Enlightenment when the bourgeoisie has had social ideas, of justice and so on, *liberté égalité fraternité*. I grew up with this idea of France, the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme* and so on ... I toppled, you know, because I have already seen racism before against my friends when I was young and then I discovered that France is also pro-slavery and Nazi and so maybe France is not so perfect, then the colonialism, but then at that moment I was really.... it was against me.»

And then, later in another part of her story:

« [*my parents*] are jurists, my father is notary and my mum is judge, but I didn’t want to study law, because I didn’t want to do the same as they have done, you know, but when I am thinking about it, if I had studied law, I probably would have been better able to aid the foreigners now, you know, ... but at that time, I’ve chosen a School of Management and Foreign Trade... » [Alice]

While I was listening to her history, I discovered that she had many problems to get married with her actual husband, a young Moroccan. She got married in Morocco and the two remained completely blocked in the administrative bureaucratic system that suspected them of marriage of convenience (*mariage blanc*). This happens since the year 2003, when the French migration law started openly to fight against these marriages and has created a real crime of marriage of complaisance or participation to the marriage of complaisance<sup>7</sup> as it is often the case of many couples married in France or with a French partner in the country of origin. Once married, a new problem rose: how to transcribe the marriage on the French civil register in order to validate it in France, the only way for the husband to receive a visa and a permit of stay in France? Again they were blocked in doing so: usually it takes a preventive delay of five months, but it can also last for years. After being interviewed several times in Morocco by the Consular authorities, at home the young woman – coming back to France – received the visit of the police and was interviewed for a long period as a criminal, asked intimate questions that represent a form of abuse of power by the agents. As it turned out, the suspicion and the practices of legislative abuse varied.

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<sup>7</sup> Even if the Constitutional Court has sanctioned the unconstitutionality of this norm; the practices suggest that it is integrated in the legal administrative frame of restriction and control of family migration – that, according to the political discourse, would be a form of “suffered immigration” (*immigration subie*). In 2009, a new category of marriage was created, the “marriage of hidden convenience”, called grey marriage (*mariage gris*), where one partner is “got ripped” by his/her foreign partner that wanted to marry him/her just to obtain the possibility to stay or to arrive in France.

Just when finally her husband arrived in France, Alice discovered the French movement called *Amoureux au Ban Public*<sup>8</sup>. It is a movement initiated in Montpellier in late 2007, which spread quickly given the spontaneous groups that emerged everywhere in France. After some years of activity, in 2010 it got transformed into a formal association, the aim of which is fighting for the rights of mixed couples (French/foreign). Some French mixed couples, who were victims of the restrictive and discriminative politics decided to join this movement. Their decision was motivated by their wish to assure their right of defense, threatened by the reinforcement of migration laws and of the administrative practices<sup>9</sup>. After having experienced such an embarrassing and heavy situation in her couple, Alice became an active member of the movement, working voluntarily for the group in her region.

She said:

« I was online and I've read an urgent message of *Les Amoureux*, this way I've discovered them and I thought it's cool that people group together, you see, and it has made me feel less alone. I've seen that what happens to us, to my husband and me, was not just only one case, but also that others have experienced that as well. It has lightened my pain, my sense of desperation and suddenly I've decided to contact the responsible of the association and there wasn't a group in Mulhouse and so I have created one, that's it! » [Alice]

Analyzing her history, the difficulties and the success in her family reunification procedure – she is now living with her husband in France and they plan to move to Morocco – she acquired a strong awareness of her role as a woman and wife belonging to the middle high class. But especially the consciousness of her biographical resources and of her way of being a young French active citizen increased as well. It was important for her to take part in the mobilization to defend the right of mixed couples and of foreigners in general.

The life history of Alice was also the history of an active member of *Les Amoureux au Ban Public*. Following her reasoning and her doing of biographical work on her life – as others person interviewed during my fieldwork – I could see the freedom of action of individuals, and the forms of resistance to the administrative and juridical challenges they could develop.

At the same time I realized that for a complete understanding of my field of research, it was fundamental to extend my research perspective: I did a form of urban ethnography looking for couples fitting to my target sample, focusing on life stories and biographies, analyzing them. However, this was not enough. I needed to “participate more”, following more some people’s lives.

I therefore multiplied the sites of research.

According to George E. Marcus “a multi-sited researcher is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal,

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<sup>8</sup> In France and abroad the movement collects and diffuses information about the juridical, economic and social situation of bi-national couples; it informs by any means people in the situation of intermarriage about their rights and supports their actions in order to ensure the respect and the recognition of their rights. It supports all informative actions, the mobilization in order to defend, promote and reinforce the rights of bi-national couples and the recognition of their place in the society. It fights against all forms of racism and discrimination, direct and indirect, and assists the victims. See the Internet website of the association: <http://amoureuxauban.net/>

<sup>9</sup> Multiplication of procedures of opposition against marriages, difficulties to obtain the acknowledgement of marriages celebrated outside France, refusal of visa and of the deliverance of residence permits deliverance, expulsion of French partners, enquiry about the cohabitation without respect of privacy, absence of respect and of objectivity for the person inquired in the police office or public offices, absence of recognition of the right to stay for mixed couples who are not institutionally married.

physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact define the argument of ethnography" [Marcus, 1995: 105]. One of the modes or techniques of construction of the object of study is to "follow the life or the biography" [Marcus, 1995: 109], the plot of this life story - as in my sample. These procedures gave me the possibility to delineate the potentials which lead to a wider ethnographic space.

I employed Marcus' modes or techniques of construction to open my field for different settings: 1) "following the metaphor" (moving on the Net, starting to become member of the association *Les Amoureux au Ban Public* and actively participating in the forum which the members of the association use as a democratic space of taking decision and for exchange of different pieces of information (juridical, organisational or practical etc.) or, following all media interventions on this subject), 2) "following people" (going to the National meeting of the association and acting with them, asking people in my sample questions about the association, counselling other couples that had to face the same difficulties like Alice and Mourad, asking employees in social associations, who work in the field of family and migration in Alsace what they know about the administrative marriage procedures), 3) "following the conflict" (looking for documents, laws for a long period, asking questions about meetings in municipalities and the prefecture or the concerned consular representation, meeting mixed couples of different European nationalities, participating in the European Transnational Seminar "Intercultural families challenges and chances. The impact of social policies and behaviors on bi-national and multicultural families (France Spain Italy Germany and Holland)", in order to understand the situation in France and to better understand the situation in Italy in comparison to other European countries, I started to follow other forums on-line. In September 2011, I invited Alice to hold a conference in Strasbourg on the difficulties of bi-national couples in France and in April 2012, I showed the documentary about different stories of couples realized by the Association. This participation helped me to observe the reception and the reaction of the discourse around my PhD subject from inside and among people who do not know much about this issue or who are only slightly interested in it.

In summary, it was necessary for me to engage completely in my field of study on a real "road of knowledge" [Burawoy 1998: 5], by, again quoting Michael Burawoy, the elaboration of a model of *reflexive science*<sup>10</sup>. This sum of methodologies seems to present at best how a biography is interconnected with the meso and the macro social level, so that a work on biographies demands that the researcher moves from a "micro-sociological" level to a "meso" and a "macro" one, passing through interactions and transitions.

Due to my formation, my approach was founded on interdisciplinarity. In addition, I have learnt, quoting Barbara Morovich [2011], that it is possible to go beyond "transdisciplinarity" [Nicolescu, 1996] an approach that is "at the same time, *across* disciplines, *between* disciplines and *beyond* disciplines, in order to overcome the critic of parceled knowledge and of the limits of specialists".

This was a good way to achieve a complete comprehension of the interviewees' stories and to deepen the issue of my research. Additionally, it was necessary to better describe and to experience interviewees' lives, which in accordance with Michael Burawoy means to "leap across space and time, from

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<sup>10</sup> "We thematize our participation in the world we study. We keep ourselves steady by rooting ourselves in theory that guides our dialogue with participants. Polanyi (1958) elaborates this deal in detail, rejecting a positivist objectivity based on "sense data" in favour of a commitment to the "rationality" of theory - cognitive maps through which we apprehend the word. This "dwelling in" theory is at the basis of what I call the *reflexive* model of science – a model of science that embraces not detachment but engagement as the road of knowledge" (Burawoy, 1998: 5)

the singular to the general, from the mundane to the grand historical themes" [Burawoy, 1998: 5]. For this, the interviewer as a researcher, cannot be satisfied with the life story (*récit de vie*) he/she has to "be part of the stories collected" in order to give a three dimensional form to the biographical work.

The strong alliance between participation, ethnography and biography helps me to recognize *mixité* as a complex phenomenon, by looking through the subjectivity lived by the migrant. I tried to develop some "extended cases". The one presented is just an example. I agree with Bernard Lahire when he says that sociology has to take advantage of all methods and all manners of building scientifically the social reality. Thanks to it, it is thus possible to observe the incidence of the migrants' presence in the family life and in the social change [Varro, 2003: 23] sometimes thanks to the collective action. This helped me to go over the interpersonal dimension of assimilation and integration - phases that in accordance with the European and National politics of integration could help the migrant to belong to the National community - to investigate the national and international dimension, on which individual or groups of individuals can act. Thus, I reached a deeper potentiality life stories can offer, in order to reach a counter-intuitive or paradoxical point as Daniel Bertaux named it as the core aim of a social research. Social actors can act in their life, using different kinds of resources; they can also do more: they can organize themselves together in collective actions, and change opinions and politics.

I started my research under the impact of my experiences in collective action and, by passing through "doing biography", the circle is closing and I come back again to collective action when I close my research.

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## Methodological reflections on the oral history approach to the inter-ethnic “Estonian-Russian” families in the contemporary and Soviet Estonia

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Herewith, I touch upon my research of marriages between the “Estonian-speaking locals” and “Russian-speaking newcomers” in Estonia which has sprung from my general interest in looking at ethnic relations in the Soviet Estonia. These two mentioned intermarried groups are, essentially, defined by me in line with the macro-demographical situation in the contemporary Estonia. This short article raises the potential theoretical-methodological contradiction in doing life-story based oral history – moreover, intergenerational family history – among the group conceptualised as “inter-ethnic.” After offering a short introduction to the topic, I will contemplate on the potential reasons which have led to the relative absence of inter-ethnic themes within the oral histories that I have been hearing and how this could be related back to the original research design.

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Throughout the Soviet rule in Estonia, the enforced industrialization created a “Russifying” type of Sovietization in the Baltic states which established different conditions from the nominally independent “satellite states” in Eastern Europe. Namely, during the period of 1945-1990, the number of Russian-speaking inhabitants in Estonia grew from ~3% (in 1945) to ~35% (in 1989).<sup>11</sup> In terms of the nominal passport category of “ethnicity” (*natsional'nost'*, in Russian) 2-3% of the marriages in the Soviet Estonia took place between the people of “Russian” and “Estonian” ethnicity in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup>

As for the historical background, Estonia had been independent from 1918 to 1940. In 1940, it was non-voluntarily annexed to the USSR, the following Stalinist repressions among the local population seeded rather strong feelings of resentment against the newcomer Russian-speakers. These feelings found their strong expression at the time of nationalising restoration of the Estonian republic in the 1990s. As of now, most of the Russian-speakers who were in Estonia in 1991 have remained despite these transition years which were often difficult; proportionally more Russian-speakers were hit by the economic collapse of the all-Union industry and Estonian language and citizenship politics which deprived many from the automatic citizenship.

I started my inquiry in the aftermath of the Bronze soldier crisis in Estonia in April 2007; this crisis marks the unprecedented rioting by the mainly Russian speaking crowd in a climax following the decision of the Estonian government to relocate the Bronze or the Unknown WWII Soldier statue and to rebury the bodies below according to a political mandate received from the parliamentary elections in March 2007. The conflict was rooted in questions of history and identity, in the legacy of the Soviet

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11 Such (im)migration was generally voluntary; higher living standards and structurally conditions for resettlement (jobs, flats) were a principal attraction for newcomers. However, a larger part of “people on the move” actually did not stay in Estonia, but moved further on. See: Olaf Mertelsmann, ed., *The Sovietisation of the Baltic States, 1940-1956* (Tartu: Kleio, 2003).

12 In the USSR and also today, there were and are many people from other nationalities, whose mother tongue was Russian; marriages between such Russian-speakers from nominally different ethnicities were also counted as “inter-marriages” in the Soviet statistics. In the current public discourse, there are two terms being used simultaneously – “Russian-speaker” (language) and “Russians” (ethnicity). The former involves, for example, also Ukrainians and Belarusians, the popular use of term “Russians” could designate all the Soviet era immigrants, Russian speakers, Soviet officials or Russians by ethnicity.

era, and fundamentally, in the “historical rights” for being on that land which the Red Army soldier statue stood and stands on.<sup>13</sup>

My primary interest was to shift attention from the public conflict to the more private realms which is constituted by the family, but I was still alert to finding conflicts and differences that derive from the mentioned ethno-cultural heritage (“Estonian”-“Russian”) and the socio-political contemporary experience (“local”-“newcomer”) which thereby create something that could be seen as “doubled mixity.” I was interested in how the differences between these two life-worlds were negotiated in the private sphere from the Soviet Estonian authoritarian social environment up to the today’s conditions. As a historian, I reasoned the turn to interview sources by the fact that ethnic relations are very poorly reflected in the historical archives (e.g. KGB documents for Estonia are missing from 1958 onwards) and, in historiography, they are overwritten by the nationalist point of view on history which clearly entitles Russian-newcomers with little opportunities “to speak.”

More specifically, I conducted semi-structured life-story interviews with the representatives from the families which had brought together an “Estonian-speaking local” and a “Russian-speaking newcomer” spouses in the Soviet period in Estonia (marriages from 1953 to late 1970s). I made 90 interviews with the people from different age cohorts. When possible I interviewed various members of the same family, both the children and spouses. I covered several locations in Estonia – both ethnically more Estonian and Russian dominated areas. I attempted to meet with different social groups, but there is some overrepresentation of people with higher education due to easier access I had to their milieu. The majority of the interviews were in Estonian language, some were in Russian and some were using both in a mixed manner.<sup>14</sup>

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I position my research and aspirations conditionally in the field of oral history. My ultimate aim is to recover and reconstruct the past. Then again, with oral history I wish to put stress on the *individuals* within it. Alessandro Portelli described the ambition of oral history as connecting individuals with “history” and as emphasising the human relations in this process: “without violating that space [of encounter], [without] cracking the uniqueness of each spore with an arrogant need to scrutinize, to know, and to classify.”<sup>15</sup> With this emphasis, oral history remains consciously on the borderlands of the scholarly endeavours that are so often brought together around the business of “arrogant classification.” However, oral history does have the ambition not to remain in vacuum but to somehow “connect life to times, uniqueness to representativeness, as well as orality to writing.”<sup>16</sup>

My point here is that there is an inherent tension between the theoretical design of my informant pool and the methodological approach to my interviewees and their stories. I had not noticed it clearly in the beginning and I have learned to really embrace it rather recently, after having carried out all the

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., the Special Issue of *Journal of Baltic Studies*. ed. by Jörg Hackmann and Marko Lehti. “Contested and Shared Places of Memory. History and Politics in North Eastern Europe.” 39, Nr. 4 (2008).

<sup>14</sup> It should be mentioned that I am an Estonian myself, I have been socialized into an Estonian milieu, I bear an Estonian name, my Russian skills are not too good. Among most of my social circles the Russian-speakers are rarely present and, with some negative attitudes or with a genuine attempt at the rhetorical inclusion, they are perceived as something external. After studying the topic for several years I am aware that I remain in this, uneven position.

<sup>15</sup> Alessandro Portelli, “Introduction,” in *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), viii.

<sup>16</sup> Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” in *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 6.

interviews. I refer to the tension between the focus on the sociologically determined “familial mixity” of categories and appreciating human lives as wholes; between looking at lives through the categories (here: Russian-Estonian ethnicity and local-newcomer origins) and looking at categories through the lives (analytically much more infinite process, emphasizing individual life-worlds in the making).

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In what follows, I will touch upon the contradiction of family-unit and individual life and then I will continue with the discussion of some silences in the interviews as indicative of the potential over-ethnicization by me of the research matter.

During the interviews, I asked people to tell me their life-story and I followed up in a semi-structured manner by the questions which were more specific to the inter-marriage condition. With my interest on the familial links, inter-generational connections, I sometimes suggested that people start from their ancestors, perhaps grandparents. Marina, one of my interviewees, would reply to this suggestion in the following way: “So, my life-story should start from my grandparents? I’d rather start with myself.”<sup>17</sup>

This led me to realize one contradiction in the research design. The scholarly perspective on the family, more precisely on the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and on the homely environment of growing up privileges potentially the dominant assumptions of familial normality. How to situate individual life-stories in the family context so that they would remain holistic; or should family in itself be seen holistically? A historically minded look at the “roots and origins” of biography somewhat downplays individual agency in favour of structure as researcher’s gaze would be alerted towards the familial continuities. Even with attention to the “breaks” with ancestral past that are rather normal in the post-Stalinist biographies, these breaks would be observed at the background of the assumed familial transmission as a norm. I became increasingly aware of the danger of taking inter-cultural families as granted holistic units; that I would actually let families shadow the nuances in people’s individual lives. (With this point I do not wish to argue for a radical break of familial bonds.)

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Let’s now turn from the family unit to the silences in the life-stories that acted as an eye-opener about the potential over-ethnicization within my approach. Namely, it appeared that in the life-stories of people, the familial practices related to the multi-ethnic condition were rather rarely mentioned, they were under-stressed from the Soviet period through the post-Soviet transformation until today. In reference to the Soviet era, I learned that the ideological background differences were not discussed almost at all in the families. But also, more curiously, I often had to specifically ask about the language at the initial meeting of spouses, or about the communicative difficulties that could have arisen in such encounters. Even if it appears from the stories that one of the two languages – either Russian or Estonian – dominated their later homestead, it seems to have just “happened” to the couple without much reflection or, at least, without carrying a biographical importance. Similarly, when asked about the decisions about children schooling language (this could be rather freely chosen by the parents in the Soviet Estonia), it seems not to have been a matter of much debate in the family. Even if parents *now* know well that such decisions had a strong impact on children later life-courses, children were then often put to the school nearest to the home...

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<sup>17</sup> Marina, born 1955, interview Nr. 8, page 1.

As for the present moment of storytelling, it is obvious that the inter-ethnic experiences are not particularly cherished socially in Estonia today, the nationalist “memory landscape” reinforces some silences. In terms of family life, this silence or “avoidance” could also be seen as a way to keep the family intuitively closer; not meddling with the sources of potential endless misunderstanding, distrust, and conflict – as the process appears in the social realm, especially through the media. Whereas silence about inter-ethnicity could be appreciated as a functioning practical strategy in family life, it presents a rather un-reflected situation and as such, it holds some explosive potential; the potential to be triggered by the same social forces that it should guard the family against. In addition to these discursive and intuitive elements, it also seems that, at large, social class matters in how people articulate ethnicity in their life. The people with higher education came across as better equipped to tell more nuanced stories about the links between “ethnicity” and their life. In general, as much as vocalising life-experiences in relation to abstract notions is facilitated by the skills acquired through socialising and education, oral history as a method might contribute to the silence it has called to break in the first place. These are some of the reasons for the silence about inter-ethnicity in the biographies. These reasons share an assumption of there having been an object for the silence – of there having been an “inter-ethnicity” as an aspect of family life to be hidden, avoided or reconfigured in the story told to me.

\* \* \*

It should be worthwhile to look again at the tension – also constructed by me – between the inter-ethnicity as a sociological criterion and oral history attempt to embrace lives holistically.

Roger Brubaker calls for looking at ethnicity “as a modality of experience, rather than as a thing, a substance, an attribute that one “possesses.” [---] It happens at particular contexts. [---] Although we speak routinely of persons as having an ethnicity, we might more aptly speak of them doing an ethnicity at such moments.”<sup>18</sup> In the end, two phenomena could be observed in parallel: ethnicity serves the human world both in the context-specific and experiential ways of perceiving and conceiving; and also, ethnicity is socially used as a generic and nominal way of titling and naming.<sup>19</sup> By the same line of thinking, I ask: when does “inter-marriage” really happen to the interviewees? To biographies, to narratives, to interviews.

This approach is not so unique, of course. Perhaps it is just another way of bringing together etic concepts and emic research findings. How and when are the markers of inter-marriage emically employed by the informants? Taking this path, however, would softened the violence, the ease with which I as a researcher had put my informants in that categorical box of inter-marriage in the first place; this move would create some space for meta-reflection about the researcher’s role.

The construction of the inter-ethnic object of study draws attention to an important phenomena in social reality but it is also a way to “make inter-ethnicity.”<sup>20</sup> I became increasingly cautious about the interview setup and the ways in which to analyse them. Interview situations could sometimes have worked as potential authoritative calls for informants to insert ethnicity into life-story. Thereby, silence

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18 Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 209-210.

19 Ibid.

20 There is an analogy to sociologists “making classes on paper” articulated by Pierre Bourdieu in various occasions. E.g.: Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological Theory* 7 (Spring, 1989): 14-25.

is not only lack of expected research findings; lack of articulations of ethnic difference in “inter-marriages” – but it is also about subtle resistance to academic authority and, as such, should be cherished.

On the other hand, by taking this situational view it becomes clearer that the importance of silence should not be overstretched. The situations in which “inter-ethnic” marital condition is relevant for individual biographies and life-stories are easier to outline. Some occasions when it happened were the following. It happened in relation to certain life-course events: for example, when children chose their “passport ethnicity” at the age of 16 in the Soviet Estonia between their parents’ nominal ethnicities it is often memorised as an event; sometimes the calendar holidays are designated as ethnic by informants – the familial celebration of Christmas during the Soviet years and the appreciation of the Red Army day are referred to as “Estonian” and “Russian,” respectively. There are also some historical periods during which one’s sense of ethnicity seems to have mattered more: for example it would happen in relation to the restoration of Estonian independence (Singing revolution, 1988-91), the Bronze soldier crisis (April 2007), and in many references to family remembrance of the WWII.

## **“Two Faces of the same Coin”:**

### **Exploring *the Second Questioning Part* of a Biographical Narrative Interview**

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#### **Introduction**

The phenomenological approach seeks for ways of positioning the person in the center of discussion; the person as an active agent of his or her own life. The initial phenomenological premise is that experience is the preliminary source of human knowledge (Schutz, 1964): one finds it easier telling “how I became to be who I am today” instead of supposedly explaining “who I am” (Fischer-Rosenthal, 1995). Against this backdrop another assumption comes up: knowledge about experiences and indeed such notion of “identity” is not ready as a shirt folded in the closet to be taken out and dressed over (Rosenthal, 1993). It is not available (to one) in advance. Rather, we have to enable persons to construct their experiences phenomenologically and linguistically; to conceptualize it first to themselves in order to tell it to us.

It is accepted in the biographic research that narrative rather than argumentative questions enable articulating and conceptualizing experiences (Schuetze, 1983 in Rosenthal 1993). Thus, if we enable persons to tell us about their experiences we can trace back the ways such knowledge has been constituted. In other words, instead of the positivistic orientation based upon the research topic - or rather the interviewer’s expectations - we orientate ourselves to focus on the interviewee’s own world and experiences. Clearly these external questions provoke internal ones and facilitate a dialogue, in which responses lead both to new questions and new insights unthought-of earlier by the interlocutors. Such an interviewing process thus facilitates dialogues taking place simultaneously both between the interviewer and interviewee (defined here as the ‘external’ dialogue) and between the interviewee and itself (the ‘internal’ dialogue).

In this respect, this paper is a tribute to a methodology celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (first presented in the constitutive article: “Reconstruction of Life-Stories: Principles of Selection in Generating Stories” (Rosenthal, 1993). Indeed, it has carefully structured the temporality of an interview from a quite open unstructured approach at the beginning (with the initial question) towards a more (narratively) structured questioning part leading to its end. Moreover, in the tradition of the grounded theory, it has offered us a comprehensive toolkit connecting methods for data collection (narrative interview) with elaborate methods for phenomenological and linguistic modes of reconstruction (biographical case reconstruction). In this sense this method has perfectly addressed the dialectics between deep and surface structures (or linguistic and phenomenological text levels). However, it is my contention that since it is such a rich methodology its advantages have not yet been fully realized. I would like to discuss here three interconnected aspects: the second questioning part; reconstruction of a new sub-section (“article”) and a method for micro-analysis. However, the ideas offered below are only preliminary insights calling for more elaborate discussion in the future.

The so-called “second questioning part” seems to be a central issue. It seems that we have better insight of its interviewing method than of the actual dialogical processes it has helped enabling (or hindered). While the questioning-answering process addresses the ‘informational’ level of the interview, it seeks to facilitate deeper insights about the self; others and the life-world in general.

In the first part, the interviewer is instructed to let the interviewee determine his or her way through with a very open narrative question until she has reached the point to stop. The data emerging in that resultant sequence provides new possibilities to delve into in the second questioning part. Since past events are told from the present perspective it opens room for reflecting and elaborating upon the past and present perspectives; since events address how one is related to others it suggests delving into interactions with others and self perceptions; making the temporal and self positioning axes constitutive (Rosenthal, 1993; Davies & Harré, 1990). Since it is accepted that both perspectives are not available to the interviewee in advance and their evolvment depends greatly upon these external and internal dialogues, we need to explore how these options materialize.

However, considering the second part secondary to the first; so far no specific adaptation was suggested for the reconstruction method. Still the fact that interviewees oftentimes produce a short and mainly argumentative initial part; leaves the second part to be the more fertile interview/dialogue part. In this sense, in many of my cases, when the transcripts were approached they provoked questionable and surprising readings that required clarifications<sup>21</sup>. In this sense the two other topics (the linguistic 'article' segment and new ideas for micro-analysis method) join the discussion. Below I will illuminate how such difficulties provoked my suggested methods for reconstruction.

### 1. "They have Established Much from Nothing!"

The sequences introduced below demonstrate external and internal dialogue processes. They were retrieved from an interview conducted in June 2000, a short period before the collapse of the Oslo Peace process and the break of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Following the model suggested by Rosenthal 1993 (based upon (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) and other discourse analysis literature), the transcript is broken down into clauses (equivalent to sentences in standard language); the clauses are joined into themes (equivalent to paragraphs in standard language) and the themes are joined together to a sequence (equivalent to small articles in standard language).

When I contacted Dovi Frenkel (pseudonym, born 1957) on the phone, he suggested that in order to save my travel time we meet at his office in Jerusalem. As can be expected, the interview was often interrupted by phone calls and people coming and going.

My opening question reflects my tension and implicit wish for control:

"Well as I told you, my central topic is biographies of eh Mitnachlim (Jewish colonialists) or Mityshavim (settlers) in Yesha<sup>22</sup>, and,  
In the beginning I actually present you with an open question, Tell me the story of your life, and then I write down some notes for myself, and perhaps later I ask you ((literally: request)) for some clarifications, eh ask you ((literally: query))."

By "tension and implicit wish for control" I mean that it sounds more like a command and an interrogation rather than an expression of deep empathic ethnographic interest in someone else's life story. I also create an invisible division between me and my notes, and the interviewee. And indeed, the main narration was a quite short optimistic report, seemingly showing a coherent development from a

<sup>21</sup> My interviews were conducted between 1998 2004 with Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (N=40). It explores symbolic appropriation of controversial territories to the hegemonic state map through means of settlement; during the context of fragmentation of control over space.

<sup>22</sup> Hebrew acronym for Judea Samaria and Gaza, literally "Salvation".

tragic loss (of his parents' generation in the Holocaust) until contemporary progressive times in the settlement. His idealizing statement concerning his parents: "and indeed they established much from nothing," that explicitly framed his parents' establishment of their Zionist-Religious cooperative settlement (within the Israeli hegemonic 1949 borders) and own family; could be indirectly perceived as characterizing his own life story: the youngest of the three siblings he seemed to have reached the most distant frontiers having the largest family.

Emerging problems too supported the self presentation as "ideologically involved" by constituting them as biographic turning points. Such was the failing political struggle against evacuation of Sinai Peninsula in 1981. Ostensibly it led to his family's joining a Samaritan (north West Bank) settlement. An unmentioned reason behind leaving Samaria and joining the Judean (south West Bank) settlement was ideologically justified as well<sup>23</sup>. And finally, the settlement's privatization possibly forcing him to look for a job to provide for the family, is accounted to its economic prosperity (rather than de-ideologization as suggested in his wife's 2001 interview) and highlighted as 'the beginning of employment in the office' supposedly 'involved with all types of educational projects for the sake of the people'. The main narration ends with framing the narrator's family as involved with education. His detailing of that educational track (divided across hierarchies of gender, age and territorial positioning) constructs the ultra-national-orthodox schooling as hegemonic.

## 2. "There is nothing lacking for us as is said"

My first question in the second questioning part related to the two opening words regarding childhood:

"You mentioned you were born in "Alonim"<sup>24</sup> ("Oaks", pseudonym). Can you tell a bit more?"

The response was short, composed of three paragraphs. At first sight it seemed to include mainly *idealizing* arguments about "wonderful childhood":

1. "We were inside a "greenhouse" very=very eh, good."
2. "The parents- it was very very much important to them [...] that no shortage will be felt [...]"
3. There is nothing lacking for us as [is] said [*Hebrew: plural general*]"

However, it turns out that while the two opening and concluding themes idealize material prosperity the middle one argued of 'ideological deprivation'. Frenkel supposedly demonstrates that by comparing his parents with their neighboring contemporaries "Kibbutz parents" and between the Kibbutz children and himself<sup>25</sup>. Oriented upon the opening and concluding marker themes, the listener feels the self identification with the idealization. Meanwhile the middle theme helps Frenkel shifting smoothly the ideological position from his parents to himself. Let us see how that is performed.

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23 "An agricultural Moshav like the one we had grown up in"; merging the two "We" competing types Moshav children and contemporary settler's family i.e. two socio-political milieus: the Zionist-Religious mainstream and Emuni Redemptionist settlers (Aran, 1987). Perhaps it implied lack of ideological cohesion

24 According to the interviewee "*Hapoel-Hamizrachi*" Zionist-Socialist-Religious *Moshav* (cooperative community).

25 We should note that while he pluralizes his parents behind the Moshav founders ("them") he constitutes that founding generation, adults in their own right, along their role as "parents".

4. "And eh:m we could see that,
5. Also that struggle [...]
6. "It was manifested **also**! in the family names of the children of Kibbutz "X"<sup>26</sup>
7. As compared with the names of our families
8. That came with the families from, from exile, from abroad,
9. That the family names were not yet (my emphasis NG) Hebraized for Hebrew names"

Instead of looking at the text from a supposedly 'historic' perspective, asking ourselves 'what happened and what meaning it had for the narrator' in a straightforward way, we ask ourselves questions about positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990): what is the narrator 'doing' with his words (Bamberg, 1996)? How he positions himself and others in the narrated life and the interview situation, and how he is being positioned in the interview return? Bamberg suggests exploring performative discursive methods: who the narrator agentivizes in the story and who is being de-individuated (ibid, p. 33)? Who is assigned with praise and who with blame (Bamberg, 1997; Labov, 1997)?

Clearly using the plural "we" and "they" Dovi de-individuates parents, Kibbutz children and especially himself. Next he agentivizes his peer group in clause 4 (as active "we could see"). In clause 5 he refers to the struggling parents. Instead of a verb describing their activity ("they struggled", *hitmodedu*) he employs a verbal noun (*hitmodedut*). While a verbal noun sounds more impressing, it extends the parents, stands as an action in its own right, being appropriated by the children. Thus the children who observe the parents' activity are imposed with more agency than the parents themselves! We see how much Dovi is oriented upon interpretative discursive rather than physical practices. How much he is trained in dealing with ideological constraints and with situations of controversy, in and out of the interview.

In clauses 6-7 the parents' image is reduced and greatly passivized (using the static "was" form; reduced to their family names and implicitly parenting roles). In clause 8 Dovi refers to an ideological Zionist practice. In the hegemonic discourse, space outside the Zionist hegemonic place is marked negatively as 'exile', and Jews are requested to immigrate to Israel. However, as the growing de-ideologization of the Israeli public sphere along the years produced wide criticism of that stigma it has practically disappeared from the speech. Indeed Dovi revises "exile" into "place". Ostensibly he tries "updating" his appearance in order not to appear as conservative in front of the interviewer. However consequently, he downgrades the ideological meaning of the parents' immigration at the time. That becomes apparent from the following, final clause. In clause no. 9 the outcome of the observation becomes manifested: 'the family names have not yet being Hebraized'. As part of their Zionist 'cultural conversion', new comers are requested to Hebraize their 'exilic' family names which apparently didn't happen 'yet'. It sounds convincing: Frenkel is indeed a European Western name<sup>27</sup>. Thus Dovi illustrates his parents as lacking conformity with Zionist cultural demands while the Kibbutz children are thus constituted as having ideally accomplished ideology<sup>28</sup>. Using the hegemonic Zionist discourse's

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<sup>26</sup> The Kibbutz' name was Hebrew too. It refers to a central settlement in which attempts were made after destruction of the temple by the Romans to renew Jewish life.

<sup>27</sup> What actually is the complaint about? Dovi Frenkel too haven't Hebraize his family name "yet"!

<sup>28</sup> Being a Kibbutz offspring myself and having 'the deserved' first and family Hebrew names I am thus indirectly assigned too with that *Accomplished* character. In this way Dovi attempts to engage me to stand along with him against his parents (Bamberg, 1997, p. 337). From footnote 7 we can learn that this is a strategy rather than a historic narration. It is used to constitute the external dialogue between us in a certain way.

own methods and without a committed active “I” the narrator is constituted as hegemonic, assigning him with praise.

How did that surprising transformation from the first to the second themes take place? We can realize it if we read it again, relocating the semantic accentuation in clause 2 from the conventional reading: “they cared that no shortage exists” into the alternative implicit “not feeling the shortage” reading. In this sense that assumes such “shortage” the parents are stigmatized and pitiful.

Labov claimed that the storied text brings up only what is absolutely necessary, only data that extends the taken for granted reality. Gramsci argued that hegemony is what extends beyond controversy; so when there is a need to constitute hegemony, one should construct the controversial as taken for granted (Gramsci, 2004). The narrator constructs himself as hegemonic, both explicitly by the interweaving of all these relations between the different types of others and implicitly by the implicit implications of that to himself while excluding him concretely from the text. In my view, these hegemonization attempts constitute the primary external dialogue between the interlocutors.

I have introduced the second element of the methodology: micro-analysis methods. They help us reconstruct the text pragmatically and yet as close as possible to the original language. I hope that demonstration showed that it is a fertile method in cases one can’t proceed otherwise as the original suggestion of the thematic field analysis (Rosenthal, 1993, 2004). The third linguistic component refers to the “little article”. There is no time or space to demonstrate my claim. The results suggest that this textual segment helps us to reconstruct both the external and internal dialogues.

### **3. “We were concerned all eh, to do alone!”**

#### **“All we built as is said in, our four fingers!”**

Attempts to break down the second questioning part into clauses, paragraphs and thematic fields detected the importance of sequences larger than a single theme and smaller than a thematic field evolved. Perceiving the thematic field as equivalent to a chapter in a book, each such “chapter” was found to be constituted by several such smaller sequences that can be perceived as equivalent to an *article* in a document. It is my contention that they have a constituting function in the dialogue. While the reconstruction process below showed an external dialogue extending between the initial question (challenging the interviewee) and the narrator’s conclusion (resuming narrative hegemony; opening the door to the next question), the reconstruction further on exposed also the narrator’s internal dialogue. In the current case it challenges the reading that hegemony has indeed been constituted “out there”.

The next (second) question:

Q: “Can you give me perhaps any example, some kind of recollection now alive in your head?”

A: 1. “About what?”

2. For example about the children’s farm we have established.

3. This I remember (1) until today:

4. Also because incidentally, you interview me on this week, that,

5. A classmate of mine was killed on the Peace for Galilee (Campaign),

6. And we were very very good friends.

7. And: it is the week of their commemorations this week

8. And eh:m, all our buddies, we built,

9. I remember the, children's farm, the sheep the pigeons the dogs,
10. It was really,
11. **Every** ((stressed)) afternoon to go mess around with those things,
12. And: I remember the construction,
13. And the, the going out for the pasture with the sheep,
14. And=and everything!
15. That we were concerned all eh alone to do ((literally "by ourselves")),
16. There were not yet eh:m grownups who would hand out a hand
17. And it was not in very very sophisticated technologies as today.
18. All we built as is said in,- our four fingers.

If we break that sequence into clauses, and we combine the clauses into paragraph, we note three paragraphs (2-7; 8-15; 15-18, with 15 playing both parts of ending and beginning). The discursive progress from one paragraph to the next is illustrated in right indenting. Next, we begin reconstructing the linguistic structures. At the clause's level we reconstruct the modes of continuity and change between each consecutive pair of sentences. For instance in clauses 15-16: what is the connecting theme (creating thematic continuity)? And what is changed from one clause to the next? We see the surprising switch of positioning between 'children' and 'adults'.

At the paragraph level, based upon the typical structure (for example: while the second paragraph pretends to be as a story, the third paragraph is an argumentation) we search for its 'main message'. In this sense we employ two alternative readings: the 'historic' one ('what has happened and what is the meaning for the narrator') plays as the narrator's theory about himself (the so-called Life Story) and the so-called performative reading ('what does the narrator do with his words'). How does the narrator position himself and others in the text?

### Concluding remarks

This paper suggested continuing looking into epistemological and methodological issues raised in biographic and narrative research methods, inspired mainly by the Biographic Case Reconstruction. It suggested exploring both the linguistic level (with the help of discourse analysis methods) the discursive and performative levels. I hope my short analysis helped illuminating some of these questions' potential and stimulate more discussion in these fields.

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## REPORT ON BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

### Life stories in France – Emergence and current developments<sup>29</sup>

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This text was written in the framework of a dissertation project at the Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main and at the University of Strasbourg under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Helma Lutz and Prof. Dr. Catherine Delcroix. A special thanks goes to Daniel Bertaux and Catherine Delcroix for their advice and comments on this article.

#### The reintroduction of the biographical approach in France

The biographical approach<sup>30</sup> in social science was mainly reintroduced in France at the end of the 1970's by two sociologists: Daniel Bertaux and Maurizio Catani. In the midst of a sociological context which was strongly affected by positivism and structuralism, this approach was, after the events of May-June 1968, motivated by the wish to trigger to a new way of thinking in social science, a "different way to carry out sociology" (Heinritz and Rammstedt 1991, 332). In the course of the summer 1968, Bertaux, who at the time had just started his occupation at the CNRS<sup>31</sup>, conducted first life stories with older master bakers. In his proceeding, he was inspired mainly by Karl Marx and the materialist conception of social history as being fully structured by social relations in the sense of relations between social (class) positions. He was also influenced by Oscar Lewis' work *The Children of Sánchez* (Lewis 1961). The daring combination of these two very different approaches, the one on the macro-, the other on the micro level, seemed very contradictory, if not incoherent to many social scientists at that time. After this first research on the potential of life stories for sociology, Bertaux wrote a report for the CORDES<sup>32</sup> entitled "Life Stories or stories of practices? " ("Histoires de vie ou récits de pratiques? ") (Bertaux 1976), which was never published, but largely acknowledged. In 1974, Bertaux and his wife Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame submitted a research proposal to the CORDES with the goal to explore the reasons for the surprising survival of artisanal bakeries in France by the means of life stories. Their results appeared four years later in the form of a report for the CORDES (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1980).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> This report is published in the newsletter of the German section of Biographical research No 58, July 2010 and in the newsletter Bios, 22Jg. (2009)

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Bertaux suggested to use the term "approach" in order to "suggest that not only a method, but also a new research approach is at stake here, in which life stories are used in order to develop sociological theory" (Heinritz/Rammstedt 1991, 332). All the citations in this article have been translated by the author into English.

<sup>31</sup> The "Centre national de la recherche scientifique" is France's national public centre for scientific research.

<sup>32</sup> The CORDES (Comité d'organisation des recherches appliquées sur le développement économique et social), was a Center of applied research on the economic and social development for the Commissariat au Plan.

<sup>33</sup> The results of this study were also published in the article "Artisanal Bakery in France: Why it Lives and How it Survives" (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981). In this article, the authors evoked the recurrence of similar processes in different life stories and showed how these recurrences lead to a saturation and therewith to a possibility of generalization on the basis of qualitative data. At that time, this represented a solution to the acute problem of generalization without a representative sample. The idea of saturation had already appeared in the work of Glaser and Strauss *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser et Strauss 1967) that at that time had not yet been translated into French. It presented the idea of "theoretical saturation", but in the perspective of interactionism. The Bertaux's discovered this idea departing from a comparison of individual life stories using a totally different approach, inspired by Marx and structuralism.

In parallel to this, Maurizio Catani also conducted one of the first studies based on biographical narratives. Catani, who was of Italian origin and who also worked at the CNRS, conducted five biographical interviews with the aunt of his French wife, Aunt Suzanne, a former worker in artisanery who had married a clockmaker. Inspired by the anthropologist Louis Dumont, Catani reconstructed the coherence of Aunt Suzanne's value system, which he perceived as representative for the French working class of the "deep" traditional France in general: the value system of small farmers, urban or rural craftsmen, or laborers. Catani argued that the very roots of the cultural model of traditional France could be worked out through a precise analysis of the semantic contents of the conducted interviews, but also through the observation of the arrangement of the Aunt Suzanne's house and backyard (Catani 1982). In France, the years following these first works were marked by numerous discussions on the use of life stories in sociology. At the end of the 1970's and in the 1980's, several studies based on this empirical approach emerged in different fields (see Heinritz and Rammstedt 1989).

In July 1978, Bertaux organized several panels on "Life Histories" at the 9<sup>th</sup> World congress of Sociology of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in Uppsala, Sweden. The unexpected success of these panels led to a diffusion of the method on the international level. A collective volume entitled *Biography and Society* (Bertaux 1981) was published three years later. It assembled articles by Kohli, Denzin, Ferrarotti, Paul Thompson or Catani, all present in Uppsala. It also contained articles by Polish sociologists, which had the particularity that they departed from autobiographies written following public calls for autobiographical accounts. After this Congress, Bertaux founded a research group of sociologists which was accepted as the Research Committee 38 "Biography and Society" of the ISA in 1984. This Research Committee was directed by Bertaux until 1990 and from then on by the German sociologists Wolfram Fischer and Gabriele Rosenthal. Since 2010, the president of the RC 38 has been Roswitha Breckner. In addition to this, Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson created a French-British journal entitled *Life Stories/Récits de vie*, which was first edited in 1985.

A certain enthusiasm in France for empirical studies based on life stories arose in the field clinical sociology (De Gaulejac) and in adult education (Pineau). The Establishment of the French sociology (Bourdieu, Boudon, Tourraine) however strictly rejected this method. This refusal was finally clearly expressed in Bourdieu's article "The biographical illusion" which appeared in 1986 (Bourdieu 1986). Without mentioning prior publications on biographical research in France, he described a biography as a mere artifact which produced the illusion of a biographical entity.<sup>34</sup> The sharpness of Bourdieu's critique appears to be symptomatic of the way in which the at the time French leading institutes of sociology reacted to the biographical approach.

Soon after, Bourdieu changed his standpoint, without coming back on his critique. When the financial organization which administered the public and social housing in France offered him to finance an empirical study on the inhabitants of deprived neighborhoods, he accepted the task under one condition: not to pursue the study by using standardized questionnaires, but with the help of open interviews. The collective volume *La Misère du Monde* which appeared in 1993 contains about fifty interviews with biographical characteristics, testimonies of witnesses, so Bourdieu, of people who told social scientists about their living conditions (Bourdieu 1993, 9).

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<sup>34</sup> As Heinritz and Rammstedt show, Bertaux had already formulated this critique ten years earlier in his report for the CORDES in 1976, in which he evoked the risk of a "biographical ideology". In this ideology, every individual would, in retrospect, try to give a unity to his/her life course which however wouldn't exist, as life courses according to the author are more or less shaped by social rapports and hazards (Heinritz/Rammstedt 1991, 350).

### Debates on the biographical approach and methods of analysis

The use of life stories, the status of the material and methods of analysis were discussed in the following years in diverse contexts. In 1986, Gaston Pineau and Guy Jobert organized a Congress on the topic "Life stories in adult education" ("Histoires de vie en formation") at the University of Tours. This Congress gathered sociologists from different fields of specialization who worked with the biographical method. Questions on the individualization of subjects, possibilities of theorizations departing from life stories in contrast to written autobiographies and methods of analysis concerning the content analysis or the hermeneutic approach were discussed there (Pineau and Jobert 1989).

Aspects concerning the impact of the interaction in an interview and suggestions on the analysis were furthermore treated by scientists such as Alain Blanchet (Blanchet et al. 1990) (who however worked on qualitative interviews in general and not precisely on biographical interviews) and Jean Peneff (1990) (who however predominantly works with the method of participant observation).

Networks on the biographical approach, especially in adult education, formed around Gaston Pineau and Bruno Jobert, while Vincent de Gaulejac introduced seminars on Freud's family romance combined with biographical interviews.

None of these approaches however was adopted on a broad basis. The ones developed by Bertaux and Catani didn't develop on an extended basis either, which is mostly linked to the fact that both were employed at the CNRS and therefore didn't have students whom they could teach. In 1997, Didier Demazière and Claude Dubar's work *Analyser les entretiens biographiques – l'exemple de récits d'insertion* [Analyzing biographical interviews – the example of narratives of rehabilitation] was published (Demazière and Dubar 1997). In this work, the authors presented their method of "structural analysis" which they – contrarily to what this term could imply – perceived as a descriptive method and not as a theoretical structural project. Demazière and Dubar leaned on Barthes' levels of analysis of narratives and developed a code system in which each text unit was assigned to three levels: the sequence of the story, the actors of the narrative and the arguments which are formulated towards the listener. In this method, units of meaning are first formed along the described coding and are then in a next step crossed with one another with the aim to work out the structuring categories of the interview (Demazière and Dubar 2007, 114). Demazière and Dubar's work constitutes one of the central attempts to introduce a detailed analytical method of biographical interviews in France. It however also did not find a broad diffusion, probably because of its complexity.

Up until today, analytical methods concerning biographical narratives are not presented in a detailed way in France. In his introductory work on open narrative interviews (which he calls "comprehensive interviews"), Kaufmann for example advises not to use the content analysis for narrative interviews because of its standardized character. He describes the way he himself analyses narrative interviews, departing from recurrences or contradictions in the text. He however doesn't describe his analytical proceeding in an explicit and detailed way (Kaufmann 2008).

The proceeding which has probably most influenced the use of life stories in France is the one developed by Bertaux. In his first empirical study on artisanal bakeries in France, he wasn't interested in the subjectivity of individuals. He was interested much more in what they had *done* (for example where the bakery apprentices or the master bakers had worked, how many hours per week and for how many years, how they had managed to open their own bakery with missing capital, how they had met their wives, etc.). These narratives contained rich significations and numerous subjective accounts of

meaning. Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame however didn't aim at grasping the subjectivities at work, but the logics which are produced by the relations of production, in this case in the field of artisanry. The idea was that these logics structured, and up to a certain point had a coercive effect on the practices of bakers, their wives, their employees and their apprentices. About 200 000 persons work in this professional field in France. For the researchers, capturing these logics meant understanding the reasons for the preservation of the bakery craft as well as its chances of survival in France. According to them, life stories make it possible to grasp practices which on their turn point to logics of situations, in other words to the social positions of the interviewees and to their logics of action. Departing from life stories, practices and logics of situations, they aimed at working out the socio-structural relations which marked the practices and therewith the life stories in a decisive way.

Bertaux describes this approach as "objectivist" as it doesn't aim at "analyzing schemes of representation from the inside nor value systems of individuals or groups, but a specific fragment of the socio historical reality, a social *object*" (Bertaux 2010, 12). Because this approach aims at grasping the structural processes of actions, the use of other sources such as statistical data, ethnographic observations or expert interviews is not excluded.

The analysis of lived practices according to Bertaux offers a solution to the problem of the development of objective sociological results based on subjective testimonies, because these descriptions contain, so the author, numerous, often factually correct information (Bertaux 2010, 12-14). Practices of actions also seem to play an important role in the use of biographical interviews in France on a wider scale.

### **Life stories and family histories**

A further central development regarding biographical research in France consists of the close link of the method with family histories. Family histories were amongst others developed by Daniel Bertaux since the 1980's as an empirical method for researching the development of siblings within a same family as well as the passage from employment to self-employment. Bertaux and Delcroix perceive family histories as a natural extension of life stories (Bertaux and Delcroix 2000) which allows a much larger temporal depth than life stories of just individuals. Family histories also make it possible to grasp dynamics within generations as well as relations between generations. Bertaux used this method in Russia, where he reconstructed how members of different generations had undergone the 70 years of the communist era departing from 30 family histories.

On the basis of this analysis, he tried to investigate the Sowjet working class, which was largely composed of families of peasant descent. He also explored the question whether this working class was, because of its specific history, able to merge into the free market economy and democracy. He further addressed the question of the functioning of the Soviet system, in which neither capital nor private landholding played a role (Bertaux 1994).

Family histories also stand at the center of Bernard Lahire's work on school success in families from lower social classes, in which he studied the family configurations of students departing from life stories (Lahire 1995).

In their study on mixed couples, Guyaux, Delcroix and Rodriguez used the method of "crossed narratives" which Delcroix developed in further works (Guyaux, Delcroix, et Rodriguez 1992). This method consists of crossing the narratives of close persons such as members of one same family with one an-

other (Delcroix 1995). This method is also used by other sociologists such as Blandine Veith in her study on individualization processes of women (Veith 2009).

### Action Research

Works in the field of action research also count among the current development of the biographical approach in France. In their anthology which appeared in 2008, Gaulejac and Legrand for example, in a perspective of clinical sociology, study the impact which the use of life stories has on the research fields in which they are conducted (Gaulejac and Legrand 2008).

This approach is also used in other sociological fields, for example in a study by Catherine Delcroix on "Fathers of Nantes". In this work, the sociologist trained social workers in the use of life stories. The social workers then conducted biographical interviews with fathers of adolescents in a suburb of Nantes. This study, which revealed the mechanisms of discretization, strengthened a mutual perception of the actors – in this case of the interviewed fathers and the social workers. During the study, a gradual change of the professional practices of the social workers occurred. A change of the social relationship between the inhabitants, the social workers and the local politicians were also observed, which in this case led to the creation of an association of Muslim fathers (Delcroix and Inowlocki 2009).

Further French works within action research consist of the autobiography of Yazid Kherfi who – accompanied by Véronique Le Goaziou – aimed at grasping the mechanisms of the banlieues departing from his own life story in order to improve professional practices in social work (Kherfi 2003). The works of Lamia Missaoui on drug abuse, HIV and individualization processes of women within the group of Sinti and Roma (Missaoui 2004) as well as the works of Alexandra Poli on public claims against racism (Poli 2004) can be named in this field.

### Current research works

Different studies which base on life stories have been conducted in the last years. One of them consists in Catherine Delcroix's work *Ombres et lumières de la famille Nour. Comment certains résistent à la précarité ?* [Shadows and light in the Nour family. How some resist to precarity] (Delcroix 2013). Through a longitudinal work using life stories, the author follows individual life courses and interfamilial relations within a family of Moroccan origin. Bruno Laffort's study *L'immigration des intellectuels marocains en France – Regards sur une génération d'étudiants étrangers* [The immigration of Moroccan intellectuals in France – Perspectives on a generation of foreign students] (Laffort 2009) is also based on the use of life stories. In this study, the author explores the process of arrival of students in France as well as their perspectives in different contexts. The work of Marie-Thérèse Têtu-Delage *Clandestins au pays des papiers* [Illegals in the country of papers] (Têtu-Delage 2009) can also be attributed to the field of migration studies. Departing from an ethnographic study and biographical interviews, she studies the situation of illegal migrants and reconstructs their possibilities of action, which they show in this study despite the constraints of their situation.

In other fields, Gilles Chantraine in his work *Par-delà les murs* [Accross the walls] (Chantraine, Lascoumes, and Martuccelli 2004) studies the social processes which link the life of individuals to the criminal law system departing from life stories with inmates. Other works finally consist of Catherine Negroni's study on professional reorientation (Negroni and Singly 2007), of Corinne Rostaing's study on the relationship between inmates and employees in prisons (Rostaing 1997), Emmanuelle Lada's work on dominant representations in the accompaniment of young people in job-creation measures

(Lada 2004) or Isabelle Fréchon's study on the development of children in foster families after they have reached majority (Fréchon 2003).

### Current trends

In 2006, the sociological research section RT<sup>35</sup> 22 "Life courses and social dynamics" ("Parcours de vie et dynamiques sociales") was accepted as a recognized section of the French Sociological Association (AFS, Association française de sociologie) which was founded in March 2002. This section treats questions which are linked with the biographical approach and with themes which concern the mechanisms of social mobility, logics of actors, gender-related questions, biographical turning points or questions concerning social rapports.

Other research sections of the AFS such as the research section 7 "Old age, aging and life courses" ("Vieillesse, vieillissement et parcours de vie") or the RT 2 "Sociology of migration and production of Othering" ("Sociologie des migrations et production de l'altérité") recur to this method which allows to contrast essentialized representations with nuanced and complex life courses of individual actors. Works in this sections for example consist of Myriam Hachimi Alaoui's study on Algerians in France and Canada (Hachimi Alaoui 2007) or Santelli and Collet's work on forced marriage (Santelli and Collet 2008).

A conference at the University of Maine (Le Mans) took place in November 2010 on the theme "Social paths between new constraints and assertion of the subject" ("Les parcours sociaux entre nouvelles contraintes et affirmation du sujet"). 120 presentations were done there, amongst them a large part by PhD-students. About 30 of the presentations were based on empirical studies conducted departing from life stories.

### Conclusion

How can the biographical approach in France be presented in a condensed way? Several points seem characteristic of its development. These can largely be explained through the French context of sociology at the time of the reintroduction of the biographical approach in France.

The slow development of the biographical approach can on the one hand be explained by the importance of structuralism, which dominated the French sociological scene for about 30 years. A mindset developed, which aimed at orienting the methodology of social sciences towards the methods of natural sciences. Bourdieu's provocative sentence "It is perhaps the curse of the human sciences that they deal with a *speaking object*" (Bourdieu et al. 1991, 37) attests of this spirit. In this context, it becomes comprehensible why Bourdieu reacted so vehemently towards the biographical approach and why life stories – if at all – were only used in a very limited way by the sociologists who dominated the establishment of French sociology between 1960 and 1990.

Furthermore, a long unawareness of the comprehensive German sociology may be observed which explains why the founders of the biographical approach in France based on the ethnographic tradition instead of on the German comprehensive access which seems much more obvious. Up until today, Patrick Watier's work, which was published in 2002, constitutes one of the only introductory works on this approach in France (Watier 2002).

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<sup>35</sup> "Réseau thématique", research section.

This context explains why the biographical approach in France was reintroduced mainly through international cooperation, for example through the creation of the research group "Biography and Society" of the ISA in 1978 or through the French-British Journal *Life Stories/Récits de vie*.

The biographical approach however has found a wide acceptance in different sociological research fields in France since about 15 years. Currently, a strong increase of studies may be observed which base on life stories. Specific developments may be observed which seem of particular interest. Among them one may count crossed interviews or the interaction with the field through action research. Furthermore, numerous works use biographical interviews in combination with other empirical methods such as ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews or statistical data. The strength of the French approach probably lies in the way in which these methods are used in a complementary way and in the large variety in which they are brought together.

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## CONFERENCE INFORMATION BRAZIL/AGENTINE

### International Congress of (Auto)biography Research (CIPA) 16.-19.10.2012, Porto Alegre (Brazil)

The V International Congress of (Auto)biography Research (CIPA), was held from 16/10 to 19/10, 2012, in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, with promotion and organization of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul - PUCRS and the Brazilian Association of (Auto)biography Research - Biograph.

The CIPAs already have a substantial history with a trajectory marked by a process of constant search for improvement and consolidation. The first edition was held in 2004 at PUCRS in Porto Alegre, continued with the CIPA II, held in 2006, UNEB in Salvador, followed by CIPA III, in 2008, UFRN in Natal and the CIPA IV with realization in 2010, at USP, São Paulo. V CIPA celebrates this journey back to the origin to start a new cycle, thinking about new challenges.

This event is co-organized by various graduate programs in the country.

The meeting of peers for a collective production is always profitable. In the case of researchers who have dedicated themselves to (auto) biographical research tradition, they developed, since the I CIPA, a scientific collaboration network, nationwide and internationally. The written production from CIPAs, so far, involves 24 books and two collections.

The central theme of V CIPA is: **(Auto)biography Research: places, paths and challenges**, which objective was to resume historical issues and its links to the various posts that mark the beginning, the development and consolidation of research in the educational field, to highlight paths and thinking about the challenges in contemporary research on the (auto) biographical dialogue through networks of researchers.

VI CIPA will be held in Rio de Janeiro, in 2014, more information about V CIPA you will have in: <http://www.pucrs.br/eventos/cipa/>

## CONFERENCE REPORT

### **Interim Conference to the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Biography and Society Research Committee Biographical Research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - Epistemological issues and ethical dilemmas**

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The conference 'Biographical Research in the 21st century – Epistemological Issues and Ethical Dilemmas' was organised by Kaja Kaźmierska and Katarzyna Waniek at the University of Łódź, Poland and was held on the 17th and 18th of June 2013. It was commemorating the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ISA Ad-hoc Group initiated by Daniel Bertaux, which then led to the foundation of the RC38 'Biography and Society'. Thanks to the keynote speakers, including Fritz Schütze, Daniel Bertaux and Catherine Delacroix, stimulating presentations and discussions as well as excellent organisation, the conference was a successful event.

**Fritz Schütze**, Professor Emeritus from the Otto-von-Guericke University, Magdeburg gave a presentation on the thematic and non-thematic phenomena in autobiographical storytelling, focusing on the span between faded-out (or even repressed) phenomena and conscious biographical reflection. On the basis of his previous and current analytical work Fritz Schütze explained and gave examples of the phenomena detectable in the autobiographical narratives such as second and third level background constructions, repeated losses of memory, fading out, confounding of different events, carriers of highly symbolic meaning and biographical significance, repeated production of arguments (where argumentation suppresses narration) and the occurrence of split coda, where first part refers to the past and the second part refers to the present day. Making a link to his current research project on life in real socialism (in East Germany and Poland) Fritz Schütze distinguished between the textual phenomena of dealing with difficult aspects of biographical development in socialism, such as leaving out / not mentioning, indirect implying, alluding to, vagueness of reporting, circumventing argumentation in the coda commentary, contrast sets of description, episodic, ironic or dramatic storytelling, as well as argumentative positioning and counter positioning. Subsequently Professor Schütze focused on the phenomena of non-explicitness and explicitness giving examples of trans-generational trajectory inheritance, discouragement of biographical work, undergoing or being involved in societal constellations of guilt, superimposed classifications and their biographical impact and many more. In the next part Fritz Schütze described the phenomena accompanying the processes of biographical trajectories and metamorphoses. He concluded with a reflection on the mutual impact of biographical processes and collective forces. In the discussion following his presentation a question appeared about the relations between biographical analysis (with its attention to the processes of fading out) and psychoanalysis. Fritz Schütze admitted that his approach attracted some interest from his colleagues doing psychoanalysis but the method itself was developed on the grounds of sociology.

**Daniel Bertaux** from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, the second keynote speaker, gave a talk about the possibilities of generalisation from a small number of individual case histories. He linked generalisation to the concepts of saturation and discovery of generative mechanisms. In order to illustrate it he gave numerous examples from his studies conducted in France (on the artisanal bakers) and in Russia. Daniel Bertaux distinguished seven properties of life stories, such as historicity, singularity, subjectivity, acting, connectivity, contextuality and expressivity.

The third keynote speaker, **Catherine Delacroix** from the University of Strasbourg, reflected on her study combining ethnography and sociology and following migrants' families through time in order to find out how they cope with and struggle against precariousness. Reconstructing family histories and observing how they make subjective choices it was possible to understand what kind of multiple strategies they develop in order to deal with public images (portraying Muslim girls as 'victims' and Muslim boys as 'danger'), discrimination on the labour market and low level of economic capital. Catherine Delcroix demonstrated how families develop reflexive resources choosing [my own fault] different ways of communicating with children in order to pass family stories and to touch their imagination. Thanks to reflexive resources the success of children at school can no longer be described as an 'improbable success' in the sense of Bourdieu, as it comes from the great effort made by the whole family. An important point was to stress that building ideal types of coping strategies is not enough as nothing is prescribed once and forever (gender relations and family dynamics may change at any time) and it should be taken into account how people construct their symbolic worlds. Following families over time allowed discovering processes that are counter-intuitive. A good example is the perception of the fact of choosing spouses in the country of origin as 'going back to tradition' whereas it is the choice dictated by the wish of starting a family with a person who did not experience discrimination, which could possibly help their children to gain more self-confidence crucial for becoming equal citizens.

In the first plenary session **Minna Ruokonen-Engler** and **Irini Siouti** from Goethe University in Frankfurt posed the question of subjectivity in biographical studies and proposed the concept of biographical reflexivity understood as a methodological means for doing biographical research. In the same session **Michaela Koettig** from the University of Applied Sciences in Frankfurt, discussed the concept of triangulation (of methods, data and theories) allowing to expand perspectives on the cases, to go more in depth in the analysis and to maximise the research validity. Three other presentations in the session were made by scholars from the University of Łódź: **Marek Czyżewski**, discussing the relations between biography analysis and discourse analysis with special attention paid to the differences between theoretical perspectives of Foucault and Symbolic Interactionism; **Kamila Biały** reflecting on Gestalt psychotherapy in biographical research and **Tomasz Ferenc** proposing a biographically oriented sociology of art.

In the second plenary session we could hear the presentations of **Victoria Semenova**, from the Institute of Sociology in Moscow, analysing the relationship between interviewees and interviewers, especially with regard to their different positions and interests; **Noga Gilad**, from the University of Haifa, reflecting on the interviews as sights of dialogue and reconstructing external and internal dialogues in narratives; **Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas**, from the University of Łódź, reporting on biographical research with traumatised groups and sharing some of her ethical dilemmas involved, as well as **Rozalia Ligus**, from the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław, discussing the concept of biographical learning, as described by Peter Alheit, in the context of parallel ways the researcher gathers practical and scientific knowledge (as well as self-knowledge) in the process of doing biographical research.

The third plenary session was devoted to ethical and methodological reflections, which were shared by **Laura Odasso** (University of Strasbourg) talking about her experiences while completing her doctoral research; **Katarzyna Winiecka** (University of Białystok) recollecting difficult situations and ethical dilemmas she had encountered during her fieldwork; **Anna Wylegała** (Polish Academy of Sciences) talking about dilemmas in the context of anonymisation of biographical data; and **Marcin Gońda** (University

of Łódź) discussing the opportunities and limitations of using biographical analysis in migration studies. In the last plenary session **Roswitha Breckner** (V University of Vienna) reflected on biographies and pictures and the challenges encountered when one approaches the images of self. The distinctive features of visual dimensions in processes of constructing biographies were discussed and it was concluded that pictures and narratives could be understood as complementary but not equal types of data. **Tom Wengraf** (University of East London) made an attempt to quickly summarise the method of autobiographical narrative interviewing (as developed by Fritz Schütze) and presented the analytical procedure as taught in the courses of BNIM (biographical narrative interpretive method). Making a distinction between lived life and told life story Tom Wengraf called the left part (lived life) more objective and the right part (told story) more subjective, which was opposed, among others, by Marek Czyżewski arguing that the semantic structure of the narrative is in fact quite objective. **Lena Inowlocki** (University of Applied Sciences, Frankfurt) rose in her presentation the question what is biographical about expert interviews. Giving the example of the interviews conducted with psychotherapists and psychiatrists on changes in their institutions towards more diversity she argued it would make sense to provide space for biographical narratives to all interview partners as the meaning of 'expert knowledge' and 'expert status' have changed and professionals themselves can be seen as active participants. **Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska** (University of Warsaw) proposed to incorporate the concept of social anchoring into biographical research as it potentially overcomes limitations of a subjectively defined identity and allows to include its objective aspects. Closing the session **Olga Zeveleva** (National Research Institute, Moscow) presented the analysis of biographical interviews done with the Atlas.ti software.

Among the parallel sessions I chose Gender & Biography, where **Agata Szwech**, **Kinga Majchrzak** and **Anna Matusiak** presented some analysis of personal diaries and portfolio learning as an educational process that allows for a reflection on one's own biography; **Agnieszka Król** and **Helena Szczodry** gave a very interesting presentation on an international biographical feminist project on post-war history in Western Ukraine; and **Anna Odrowąż-Coates** shared her fresh observations of everyday life in Saudi Arabia and talked about her autobiographical experience as a tool of ethnographic study into the hidden world of Saudi women. In the next parallel session I attended the session on Social Exclusion in Biographical Research **Carsten Mildner** reflected on the challenges of untold stories in narratives of mentally disabled people; **Paulina Bunio-Mroczek** talked about her experiences from the research field dealing with clients of social services as narrators in biographical interviewing; **Andrzej Kacprzak** presented some epistemological issues and ethical dilemmas he had encountered in his study on the biographies of ex-convicts; and **Sylke Bartmann** together with **Antje Handelsmann** reflecting on risk biographies reconstructed biographical processes of young dropouts. The last parallel session I chose was on the different experiences of war, where **Júlia Vajda** gave a presentation on the narratives of Hungarian women who used to work as forced labourers sixty years before and developed some mechanisms to protect themselves from complete devaluation. Also **Gergely Kunt** talked about forced labour and the mechanism for survival but this time in the context of the analysis of the diaries of a Jewish teenage girl, Lilla Ecséri, who dreaming about becoming an actress tried to distance herself from the traumatic conditions. The session was concluded by **Monika Stec** reflecting on ethical dilemmas which appeared while interviewing elderly people on their memories about Jews.

To sum up it should be stressed that it is very important to continue the dialogue between the various biographical approaches and to explore more in depth the similarities and differences between them.

It was suggested that next biographical conference should be organised in the form of a workshop where the same interview could be analysed using slightly different analytical procedures and perspectives.

## PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENT

**Project:** **Belonging to the Outsider and Established Groupings: Palestinians and Israelis in Various Figurations**

**Principal investigators:** Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal (University of Göttingen, Germany), Prof. Shifra Sagy (Ben-Gurion-University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, Israel), Prof. Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi (Al-Quds University, Al-Bireh, Palestine)

**Funded by:** German Research Foundation (DFG)

**Duration of the Project:** 1 February 2010 – 30 April 2015

### Summary:

After the German Research Foundation has approved our extension, we are able to continue our successful German-Israeli-Palestinian research cooperation for two more years. Dealing with established-outsider figurations in Palestine and Israel, the first project phase began in February 2010. The qualitative part of the research is conducted by Gabriele Rosenthal in collaboration with Ahmed Albaba, Murad Amro, Johannes Becker, Hendrik Hinrichsen, Nicole Witte, Arne Worm and Rixta Wundrak.

Looking at Israel and the areas of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the research group's basic questions consider social constellations and the dynamics of interaction between members of different social groupings who are in a state of mutual dependence. We pursue the question if and in which way numerical majorities correspond with the constitution of a (local) established-outsider figuration; in other words, if and in which way numerical minorities also form an outsider-grouping in the sense of Norbert Elias. The study emphasizes perspectives and experiences of Palestinians as members of different – and indeed multiple – groupings and (local) group constellations (Muslim or Christian Palestinians in current local contexts of a Muslim, Christian or Jewish majority in Israel; Muslim and Christian Palestinians and Jews in the Palestinian Authority).

During the *first research period*, we have comparatively traced local group constellations in the urban regions of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Haifa, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Beer Sheva. A central finding is that the unequal power chances and we-they relations between different groupings (urban and rural population; refugees of 1948 and 'long-time residents'; groupings of Jewish Israelis which have immigrated during different historical periods and from differing contexts of origin), differ considerably according to administrative region and geopolitical location.

During the *extension period*, we will continue to conduct family and life historical interviews, focused ethnography and questionnaires. Our analysis is historical-processual, socio-geographical and based on the Sociology of Knowledge. It is intended to deepen the understanding of webs of relations and everyday interactions between members of sociologically distinguishable groupings in Israel and the West Bank. We will also keep up the careful and sensitive analysis of changing we-they relations and changing images of the self and the others.

To strengthen the empirical foundation of our results up to now, we will enter into further in-depth analyses of data already collected as well as extend our theoretical sample. Our empirical results have until now been mainly focused on national and religious belongings. However, to broaden the perspectives on established-outsider figurations resp. (local) majorities and minorities, we will increasingly

take into account further collective belongings or characteristics of inequality. For example, we will include into our analysis of local group constellations the relations between immigrants from the former USSR and other groupings, such as Palestinians. Furthermore, we plan to consider more intensively the Christian-Palestinian denominations in their entanglement in different established-outsider figurations.

In the second project phase, we will limit the qualitative part of our research to five urban spaces: Haifa, Jaffa, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Additionally, we will put an emphasis on tracing social, especially familial networks between those local spaces. Thus, we will be able to pursue differences and similarities of group constellations in these administrative regions and in geopolitical locations in a more focused manner. New questionnaire surveys are intended to continue the research on self-images and images of the other of various Jewish-Israeli groupings.

## ISA-NEWS



ISA is about to propose some changes in its organisational structure, especially concerning the composition of the Programme Committee of the World Congresses and changes in the statutes by law. For more details see [http://www.isa-sociology.org/restructuring-of-the-isa/?page\\_id=28](http://www.isa-sociology.org/restructuring-of-the-isa/?page_id=28).

In case of a positive response, these changes will be implemented in the voting procedures in Yokohama.

Each Research Committee has one vote via its president. If you have arguments for pro or con these changes, I would be happy to follow with my vote the preferences of members, and especially the board of the RC. The vote has to be registered until September 14 the latest.

See the open letter on this affaires from the ISA-president below:

#### **Restructuring the ISA - Open Letter to the ISA Membership (Michael Burawoy, ISA President)**

In a few days the representatives of the Research Committees and National Associations (in good standing) will be asked to vote on organizational changes in the ISA that have been proposed by the ISA Executive Committee.

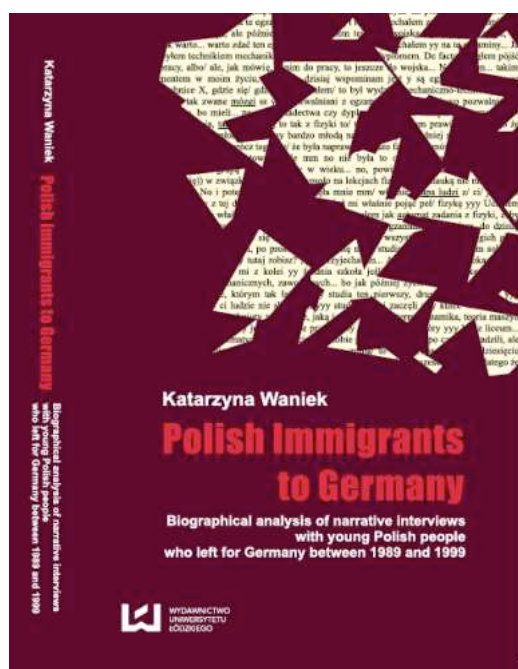
The proposed changes involve the re-composition of the program committee for World Congresses that will give wider representation to Research Committees and National Associations and enable future ISA Presidents to play a more direct role in shaping World Congress programs. If the proposals pass then they will take effect at the 2014 World Congress in Yokohama.

The details of the changes can be found at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/restructuring-of-the-isa/>. There you will also find the rationales for and against the changes as well as the modification in the ISA Statutes and By-laws that the changes will require. All 4 documents can be found in the three official languages of the ISA, but the English version will govern in case of ambiguity.

We encourage you to read the materials and post your comments and suggestions on the blog and if you have questions I and others will try to answer them. Don't hesitate to get in touch with your representatives to express your views! All changes in ISA Statutes and By-laws have to be approved by the Assembly of Councils, which is composed of the representatives of the Research Committees and National Associations (in good standing). They will have 90 days to register their vote. Best wishes for an engaging and open discussion.

## NEW PUBLICATION

- Breckner, Roswitha (2012) Bildwahrnehmung - Bildinterpretation. Segmentanalyse als methodischer Zugang zur Erschließung bildlichen Sinns. In: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie (ÖZS) 2/12: 143-164.
- Kovács, Éva/Vajda, Júlia (2013): Príbehy o židovskej identite (Jewish Identity Stories), Dokumentačné Stredisko Holokaustu, Bratislava
- Svašek, Maruška/Domecka, Markieta (2013): The autobiographical narrative interview: a potential arena of emotional remembering, performance and reflection". In: Skinner, Jonathan (ed.): The Interview: An ethnographic approach. Oxford: Berg
- Szász, Anna/Vajda, Júlia (2012): „Mindig van éhség” – Pillanatképek Mauthausen felszabadulásáról, („Hunger is always there – Snapshots of Mauthausen's liberation), Budapest: Eötvös Publishing House



**KATARZYNA WANIEK (2012): Polish Immigrants to Germany. Biographical analysis of narrative interviews with young Polish people who left for Germany between 1989 and 1999. Łódź (Poland): WYDAWNICTWO UNIWERSYTETU ŁÓDŹKIERGO**

The importance and the strength of physical borders within Europe is systematically declining in recent years and the freedom of movement presents one of the main goals of the European Union, still the question remains whether the same process refers to mental boundaries? This book offers an insight into the subjective understanding of migration and the significance of belonging to certain “we”-communities in everyday life experience of an individual. This matter is approached at a micro-sociological level and analysed from the viewpoint of “ordinary people” who - through their immigration -

cross cultural and social borders. Autobiographical renderings of young Poles living in Germany seem to be one of the most interesting examples of this phenomena (especially while taking into account dramatic events in the Polish-German relationships). Through the application of autobiographical narrative interview method designed and developed by Fritz Schütze and attempt is made to explore the manner in which the experience of living abroad and approaching a group of different culture modifies one's collective/ national identifications. The focus is especially on the way in which immigrants struggle with their ‘otherness’, ‘strangeness’ and marginality as well as on their biographical work concerning national identities, conceptions of ‘we-ness’ and embedded collective memories. Furthermore, their different ways to the desired, although idealised, attitude to both cultures i.e., the Polish and the German is the subject of intense scrutiny.

This study is concerned with the Poles who left their homeland voluntarily and trouble-free in the period between the fall of communism in Poland in 1989 and the eastern enlargement of the EU in May

2004. It concentrates on people who were young at the time of their arrival in Germany (i.e., not older than 30 years) and therefore constitute a group of a 'new' or 'young' generation of the Polish immigrants in Germany.

The book discusses certain socio-biographical conditions that deepen cracks in the immigrants' life situation and enhance the trajectory dynamics. These are: (1) anomic interactional encounters that concern divergent definitions of the common past of Poland and Germany and the predominance of the negative picture of a Pole; (2) biographical losses, e.g. decline of one's arduously gained relatively high social position and consequent recognition and/or respect by others and breaking off biographically relevant relationships; (3) the deceptive mechanism inherent to immigration which results in disillusionment and great disappointment; (4) the homecoming experience implying being a stranger at home; and finally (5) the process of becoming a marginal man.

Furthermore, some possibilities of overcoming the immigrant trajectory and unanticipated negative consequences of the immigration process are outlined and discussed, e.g.: (1) participation in social worlds in Strauss' terms; (2) emotional support of the biographical caretaker - usually the narrator's spouse or friend who is an indigenous member of the approached community; (3) living within the scope of one's national 'ghetto'; (4) one's believe concerning his or her role to be fulfilled that involves presenting one's culture of origin in a favourable light, disproving false beliefs pertaining to their nation and mediating between the two cultures to establish some degree of mutual understanding and trust.

The book is based on down-to-earth and bottom up approach. It draws on the Chicago School tradition, interpretative sociology and consequently utilizes the biographical method.

**Please let us know about changes of**

- **your e-mail address**
- **your full mail address**

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The **deadline** for the next newsletter is end of **October 2013**

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