Marriage Migration from Turkey to Germany: A Qualitative Longitudinal and Dyadic Perspective (Can Aybek)

In all Western European countries the immigration of close family members both of own nationals as well as legally resident foreigners is regulated by laws. German legislation, for instance, is more restrictive in terms of immigration for nationals of certain countries, such as Turkey, than it is for citizens of other countries. This establishes potential hurdles for transnational couples by obliging the spouse who wants to join his/her partner residing in Germany to have basic knowledge of German prior to the entry.

The German Immigration Act does not make a differentiation that goes beyond a categorization on the basis of citizenship and postulates that all individuals who have to obtain visa will be affected by legislation equally. This implies, however, a uniformity of existing pre-conditions, experiences and interests between and within the relevant immigrant groups. But to what extent is this the case? Are, for example, spouses of lower educational background prone to experience similar difficulties prior to migration compared to higher educated ones? Will they receive similar kind of support from institutions as well as family members? How do different couples cope with upcoming issues?

This research project proposes to study the dynamics of marriage migration from Turkey to Germany based on the experiences of individuals who have married partners abroad and have to cope with the legal and institutional regime designed to regulate their familial unification. The existing knowledge about on-going marriage migration from Turkey is very limited. It consists almost exclusively of a debate on the numbers of annual marriage migrants as documented in the German visa statistics (cf. section 2). Research on the subject of “marriage migration” in general has until now focused rather on questions related to the preferences of the immigrants already living in host country.

Our research project adopts a perspective that – to our knowledge – has not yet been taken into account: it will integrate both the perspectives pronounced by the emigrating and the receiving partner and will contribute to the knowledge on how – in the case of border-crossing marriages – migration is organized as a family formation process, what kind of effects immigration has on the relationship of couples, as well as how the post-migratory accommodation process is organized within the context of an intimate relationship. Therefore, this project represents a combination of demographic, sociological and policy related research and aims to deliver not only a better knowledge of marriage migration as such, but also relevant insights for debates on immigration and integration policies on family migration to Germany as well as to other European countries with similar legislative frameworks. Our two framing research questions, that will be specified in following section, are:

- What are the different factors that lead to a marriage migration decision from Turkey to Germany?
- Which factors have an impact on how the immigration and integration process evolves?

The research design and methodology proposed is adequate to the subject matter: The project will be a multi-sited research endeavour with a dyadic sample consisting of spouses, who at the beginning of the data collection are planning to emigrate to their spouses, and their partners who live in Germany. Through interviews over a time period that covers the pre- and post-migration phases we hope to get a very good understanding of what the conditions of the joining spouse were before migration, how the receiving context in which the resident spouse lives looks like, how the couple facilitates its relationship within a transnational social space, and finally how they try to cope with upcoming issues and settle potential problems.