

Biography and Society

BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY
RESEARCH COMMITTEE 38 OF THE ISA

NEWSLETTER / DECEMBER 2010

**LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
DECEMBER 2010**

Dear members,

I have the honour to introduce the new team of presidency of our Research Committee which was elected during the ISA World Congress in Gothenburg this summer, after Gabriele Rosenthal has shaped and coordinated the RC activities so excellently the last eight years together with Brian Roberts as vice-president and Michaela Koettig as secretary. Many thanks for the strength of programme, discussion and cooperation that has developed in this period!

In the elections during our business meeting in Gothenburg I was given the trust to take the role as president with Michaela Koettig as vice-president and Irini Siouti as secretary/treasurer for the next four years. For those who do not know me or us, just a few remarks about ourselves. After having completed my habilitation procedure in 2009, I presently hold a contract as Assistant Professor at the University of Vienna. With a long research background in biographical research, especially in East-West-European migration during the Cold War, the last ten years I focused also on visual sociology, especially on developing a method for picture analysis based in picture theories and interpretive sociology. Michaela Koettig, who luckily continues her activities in the RC, now in the role of vice-president, is Professor at the University of Applied Sciences of Frankfurt / Main. Her current research focuses on migration and female right wing extremisms. I am happy Irini Siouti agreed to join in as secretary and treasurer. She is currently concluding her PhD on transnational biographies at the University of Frankfurt.

Gladly many board members were willing to continue with activities in our RC, and we also could attract interest from young colleagues to join in – welcome! You find a complete list of board members as usual at the end of the newsletter. The variety of approaches and thematic focuses that characterises biographical research could be kept and even extended, and I am very much looking forward to lively collaboration, exchange and debates during the next years!

As guideline for our work we have chosen the motto ‘keep good traditions and open up for new research ground’. In this newsletter we start with one of our strongest tradition: the interpretation of a biographical interview by different scholars from different theoretical, methodological and disciplinary perspectives, and with different ‘stocks of knowledge’ (Alfred Schütz). Such an interpretation has taken place during a session conceptualised and organised by Tazuko Kobayashi and Michaela Koettig at the World Congress in Gothenburg this summer. Thanks to them, and to Kathy Davis, Hiromi Tanaka-Naji, Peter Alheit and Marilyn Porter who agreed to contribute with their papers to this newsletter, you find a rich content part. I hope you share the impression, that by situating different approaches to analyse a biographical text we not only create a complex understanding of the social embeddedness of every biography, but also foster a scholarly dialogue about paradigms, methodologies and methods used in biographical research in order to make sense of similar observations from distinct perspectives, their possible combinations and further development.

The next newsletter will be dedicated to sketches of results from the EU project on European Identities, coordinated by Robert Miller from Belfast. We are pleased that the group agreed to share insights

into their outcomes in this forum. All of you who are currently involved in projects are highly welcome to follow!

Finally I would like to point at the report of Henning Salling Olesen concerning his various and growing collaboration with colleagues in Latin America. To know about this kind of activities shows how widely spread biographical research in fact takes place, and encourages further engagement in this direction.

This time no announcements of new publications have reached us so far. Hope you will not miss the chance to make your work public in our next newsletter planned to appear in April 2011.

For the moment I wish you a relaxing time for the coming holidays and a good turn of the year!

I'm very much looking forward to hear and read from you in 2011!

Roswitha Breckner

www.soz.univie.ac.at/roswitha-breckner/

President of the RC Biography & Society

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 end of March 2011

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ISA WORLD CONGRESS



IMPRESSIONS OF THE XVII ISA WORLD CONGRESS I

The XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology was held in Gothenburg July 2010. Bringing together more than 5,000 social scientists from over 100 countries it seemed to us that this event which takes place every four years was one of the largest and most diverse of its kind. The topic of the congress “Sociology on the move” raised the issue of worldly and disciplinary changes, dealing with the implications they have for sociology as a whole. The particular focus of the congress was on topics such as violence and war, sustainability, worlds of difference, and religion and power. Work took place in more than 50 Research Committees (RC), various plenary sessions and additional joint-, integrative- and ad-hoc-sessions.

The small-group sessions gave everyone the chance to effectively get involved in discussions and hear feedback to one another’s work. That was indeed the case in the Research Committee 38 “Biography and Society” (RC38) where, besides sessions on biographical processes concerning the formation of a supranational identity, a spotlight was put on “Perpetuating Conflicts within/between Societies”, tackling processes which prolong and produce social conflicts.

During the RC38 sessions, as we reflected on our own research, it was especially stimulating to witness how biographical perspective(s) have become diversified and globalised. In our opinion, the organisers of the Research Committee had successfully managed to balance the demands for topical coherence and the obvious need for methodological diversity (being part of the World Congress). Presentations included papers from senior scholars as well as younger colleagues (like us), advanced research topics and projects that were still at the teething stage.

In addition to that it was interesting to see, how researchers’ personal experiences influenced the way they approached and presented their material; the inner- and interdisciplinary openness of our colleagues and their dedication to their topics impressed us deeply. Moreover, as most of the speakers stuck to the time frames and the vast majority of the sessions were not overloaded with presentations (as has happened in some other RCs), there was sufficient time for engaging in, at times critical and supportive, discussions. We also appreciated the way in which new thematic fields and orientations of the Committee were discussed frankly and openly. Roswitha Breckner, who was elected the new president of the Committee, expressed her intention to emphasise visual approaches.

Besides we were not only pleased to attend presentations from people whose research had previously inspired us, but we were also able to enjoy multiple opportunities to talk to our senior colleagues in a more casual, relaxed and unhurried atmosphere as equals – such chances are not to be taken lightly. Apart from the nice scenery, the dinner after the organisational meeting was a delight in that it af-

forded a wonderful opportunity to get in contact with each other, swap ideas and sometimes business cards. Last but not least the conference for us afforded a great opportunity for an impromptu reunion with our PhD colleagues and friends we made at the ESA summer school in Lisbon in 2009.

The ISA Congress and our participation at the RC38 became a great mixture of personal (emotional) and scientific (professional) gain. We were not only made to feel welcome when taking part in the Research Committee Biography and Society, but we came away from the experience with a new depth to both our professional and personal lives. In this regard, we are looking forward – and we really are – to the next meetings of RC38!

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IMPRESSIONS FROM XVII ISA WORLD CONGRESS II

‘Sociology on the move’ – this was the motto for the 17th World Congress of Sociology that took place in Gothenburg from July 11-17, 2010. More than 5.000 sociologists from all over the world¹ had started moving in order to come together at the West Coast of Sweden for scientific talks, for elections of presidents and boards of the International Sociological Association (ISA) as well as for a lot of informal meetings with each other.

The programme committee had chosen the congress motto because:

‘Determinism is dead in the social sciences. Despite a strong interest in social structures, social mechanisms, forms of reproduction, we are all aware that human beings are not completely dominated by them. The world changes, and this change to a large extent depends on human action and imagination. If sociology is to be useful, it has to contribute to an understanding of change – and it has to change itself. It is on the move and has to be on the move because the world, the societies, collective and individual actors are on the move.’²

The 55 Research Committees (RC) of the ISA had tried to put together different thematic sessions between 2006 and 2010 in order to discuss about these, but also many other topics. You can find out more about some of the activities of RC 38 ‘Biography and Society’ during the World Congress in the following report.

Gabriele Rosenthal (Göttingen/DE) and Michaela Köttig (Frankfurt/Main/DE) as the president and secretary of RC 38 until July 2010 were the programme coordinators of the 11 single sessions and 3 joint sessions that took place in Gothenburg³. Thanks to the great amount of members in ‘good-standing’⁴ they were able to negotiate that many sessions. The atmosphere at the RC 38 sessions was very open

¹ Most of them – more precisely 514 - came from the US, 424 from Germany and 399 from the UK. See statistics of registered members at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2010/>, 29.7.2010

² see <http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2010/priorities.htm>, 29.7.2010

³ For an overview of RC 38 sessions, see

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2010/rc/rc38.htm>, 29.7.2010

⁴ Members in good standing are individual members who have paid both ISA and the RC membership due for the current year.

to discussions and questions. Many scientists attended the RC 38 activities throughout the entire week and that helped to some fruitful exchanges of ideas.

During the Business Meeting on Tuesday, July 13, RC 38 president Gabriele Rosenthal (Göttingen/DE), vice president Brian Roberts (Glamorgan/UK) and secretary Michaela Köttig (Frankfurt/Main/DE) ended their activities in the board of the committee. The members elected the new president Roswitha Breckner (Vienna/AT), vice president is Michaela Köttig, secretary became Irini Siouti (Frankfurt/Main/DE). Roswitha Breckner aims amongst others to bring together biographical research and visual sociology during her presidency. She showed the potentials of that connection quite impressively during her presentation at the conference (see below).

Before the elections Gabriele Rosenthal and Michaela Köttig presented the development of members during the last years as well as their activities. Most of the RC 38 members belong to European countries. One result of the business meeting was that we should try to encourage members from African, Asian and South American countries to join RC 38. One colleague from Japan announced – having been asked about the situation in her country – that there are more than 5,000 sociologists in Japan and that she is optimistic that after the 18th World Congress of Sociology in Yokohama 2014 there will be more Japanese RC 38 members at least.

‘Founding father’ of RC 38, Daniel Bertaux (FR), opened the discussion about the different developments in biographical research and the formation of (almost) national (French and German) schools and paradigms. After the exchange of some viewpoints on this issue it became clear that the members as well as the board want the RC 38 to have a broad understanding of biographical research, especially with regard to the recruit of possible new members from other national and academic contexts.

But let’s first move to some of the topics and issues discussed at the sessions of RC 38 during the ISA World Congress in Gothenburg.

In the evening of Monday, July 12, the first double session took place. Since there had been that many applications after the call for papers to this session the programme coordinators negotiated with the ISA programme committee to have a double session. The main topic for Monday evening was ‘Biographical processes and supranational identity formation in a European context’. Organisers of the session were Kaja Kaźmierska (Łódź/ PL) and Robert Miller (Belfast/ UK). Both of them are part of the team of the EUROIDENTITIES⁵-project, an EU-financed project in seven countries dealing with autobiographical narrative interviews and the question of European identity formation from a bottom-up perspective. Many of the presenters in the double session came from the context of this project as well, which led to an overall fruitful discussion amongst the participants.

The first part of the session dealt with supranational identity formation in Europe and mobility. Christof Van Mol (Antwerpen/BE) presented first results of his PhD project based on quantitative data on the subject ‘From EU-identification towards a Wider European Identity. The Influence of European Student Mobility on European Identity’. He connected European identity with the decision for respectively against mobility amongst students. Howard Davis’ (Bangor/UK) presentation of ‘Language Acquisition in Biographical Narratives: Steps in Supranational Identity Formation’ posed the question which meaning language skills can have for mobility in Europe. The paper ‘Escape to Europe’ by Katarzyna Waniek (Łódź/PL) from the EUROIDENTITIES project drew conclusions about biographical work and

⁵ see the project’s homepage at <http://www.euroidentities.org/> (29.7.2010)

European mobility. The results on 'Farming as Oriented to a European Mental Space' presented by Anja Schröder (Magdeburg/DE) derived from the context of the EUROIDENTITIES project as well. Especially the newly developed concept of 'mental space' was discussed during the talk and afterwards.

The second part of the session focussed on civil society. Ina Alber (Göttingen/DE) presented first findings of her PhD research project discussing the question of 'Biographical Meanings of Europe among Polish Civil Society Activists'. She showed what many other presentations also named as empirical findings: the biographical meaning Europe can have is settled on a continuum between a pragmatic and idealistic approach. Three scientists from the EUROIDENTITIES project from Naples/IT (Antonella Spanò, Elisabetta Perone, Pasquale Musella) talked about the interconnectivity of gender and Europe in their paper 'Europe and Gender: Mobility in Space, Time and Identities'. A quite innovative aspect of supra-national identity formation from an EU financed project was presented by Lyudmila Nurse (Oxford/UK). She examined the connection of culture, music and identity among ethnic minorities in certain Eastern European countries. Her topic was 'Reconstruction of Families' Cultural Identities through Musical Memories'. Finally, we listened to more ideas deriving from the context of the EUROIDENTITIES project. Lena Inowlocki (Frankfurt/Main/DE) and Ulrike Nagel (Magdeburg/DE) talked about 'Modern and postmodern pathways to European identities? Inquiry into environmental and cultural spheres of identity formation'. The double session's discussion continued amongst the participants afterwards.

As mentioned before there is the decision and need to integrate more researchers from other continents than Europe into the 'Biography and Society' committee and the ISA. The session named 'Biographical Research in Countries of the Global South' hosted by Gabriele Rosenthal (Göttingen/DE) and Steve Tonah (Legon/GH) tried to make an effort into this direction.

Robert Miller (Belfast/UK) discussed the practical and methodological challenges of field and biographical research in Kenya during a (by now finished) project on families and poverty. The topic of his presentation was 'Collecting Life and Family Histories in Order to Investigate the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty in Kenya'. Julia Vorhölder (Göttingen/DE) reported from her current PhD field research about post-war youth in Northern Uganda discussing 'Gender Discourses in Northern Uganda – Perceptions, (Re)-Productions and Transformations of Gender Roles and Norms among Youth'. The question of 'Competing Profiles of Knowledge - Biographies between Marginalisation and Modernisation' was raised and discussed by Angela Pilch Ortega (Graz/AT), who presented results from her research in Mexico. Kammila Naidoo (Pretoria/ZA) impressively presented family biographies in a region in South Africa where mainly young people suffer from HIV/AIDS under the topic 'Family Biography and Memory-Making in an AIDS-Affected South African Community'.

On Wednesday afternoon, the next double session took place dealing with the issue of 'Perpetuating Conflicts within/between Societies', chaired by Noga Gilad (Haifa/IL) and Lena Inowlocki (Frankfurt/Main/DE). Steve Tonah (Legon/GH) presented the case of Northern Uganda and the topic 'Chieftaincy, Party Politics and Recurrent Conflicts in Ghana's North'. The next talk dealt with a conflict in Africa as well. Artur Bogner (Bayreuth/DE) discussed 'Established Discourses and the Life Histories and Life Stories of Outsiders: the Post-Conflict Process(es) in North Uganda'. Quite impressive insights into visual sociology were given by Roswitha Breckner (Vienna/AT) with her presentation of 'Pictures of Violence – Dealing with Photographs from the Armenian Genocide'. A slightly other level of conflict was discussed by Martina Schiebel (and Yvonne Robel, Bremen/DE) in their talk 'Enemy Images in the Cold War and Their Biographical Meanings in East and West Germany', based on a research project

about biographies of political activists who faced repressions in both East and West Germany during 1945-68.

The second part of the double session was introduced by Uku Lember's (Budapest/HU) rather historical presentation of an issue taken from his PhD research project. He discussed the 'Entanglement of Two Life-Worlds': Estonian-Russian Inter-marriages in the Soviet and Contemporary Estonia'. Chris Schwarz (Frankfurt/Main/DE) was the first one in the session to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict focussing on 'Adolescence and Intergenerational Transmission in a Palestinian Refugee Camp'. His presentation was based on his PhD research. Maja Ferber (Frankfurt/Main/DE) discussed findings from her PhD project as well examining the topic 'centre – periphery' in her talk 'Social world perspectives in the Jewish-Israeli periphery: the case of Sderot'. Another geographical context was touched by PhD researcher Niklas Radenbach (Göttingen/DE). He talked about the continuity of anti-Semitism among ethnic Germans in post-Soviet Ukraine in his talk 'Perpetuating Hostility: Anti-Semitism in the Grouping of Ethnic Germans in Southern Ukraine'. Finally, Michaela Köttig returned to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict presenting the challenges and findings from a student research project on that issue. The title of her presentation was 'Researching Conflicts: Self-Location and Viewing the Others in Investigating the Coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians'.

The question of 'Ethnicity' was the content of the session 'Performing Ethnicities' on Thursday, led by Eva Judit Kovacs (Pecs/HU) and Hee Young Yi (Gyeongbuk/KR). Anna-Christin Ransiek (Göttingen/DE) started by presenting first findings from her dissertation project, the meaning of 'race' in a biographical narration of an Afro-German woman from the German Democratic Republic. Her presentation was called 'Performing Ethnicity in the Narration of an Afro-German Woman'. The issues masculinity and criminality were examined by Tina Spies (Kassel/DE) during her presentation 'Performing Ethnicities in the Context of Migration, Masculinity and Criminality', deriving from her PhD project as well. Noga Gilad (Haifa/IL) discussed the difficulty of dealing with a great variety of cases due to different forms of 'labelling' among Israel Settlers in 'Performing Collectivity - The Case of the Israeli Settlers'. 'China-town of Bucharest' – Transnational Migrant Communities in Eastern Europe Post-1989' was the title of Rixta Wundrak's (Göttingen/DE) presentation based on the results of her finished dissertation project dealing with more methodological questions in connection with ethnicity and migration.

There were even more sessions organised by RC 38 and many other events. Sessions I have been to that were organised by other Research Committees left the impression that international sociology is mainly dominated by quantitative research designs and descriptive statistics. Thus, the increasing number of members of RC 38 dealing with biographical research seems positive to a junior researcher like me. All of the contributions in the sessions of the RC 38 have shown that a biographical approach can be fruitful to analyse and understand social change and human actions, something sociology should do according to the above cited statement of the organisers of 17th World Congress of Sociology.

Ina Alber, Georg-August-University of Goettingen (ialber@uni-goettingen.de)

NEWS FROM ISA ACTIVITIES**GLOBAL DIALOGUE #1 and #2**

The president of the ISA presented the first and second issue of the ISA Newsletter, Global Dialogue. Global Dialogue initiatives to increase communication in the midst of ISA as well as with communities beyond sociology. You can access

Global Dialogue #1 in four languages at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/>

And *Global Dialogue* #2 in five languages at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/>

The second issue features a dialogue between Ulrich Beck and Raewyn Connell on global sociology as well as reports from around the world — research stories from China and Bangladesh, election assessments from Brazil and Belarus, and conference reports from Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia, and Poland.

Beyond that on the main page of the ISA website you will also find the “Universities in Crisis” blog <http://www.isa-sociology.org/universities-in-crisis/>. So far we have over 60 articles from 36 countries, showing indeed that there is a crisis in universities across the globe.

The success of Global Dialogue will depend on your cooperation, your willingness to submit short articles to Burawoy@berkeley.edu. You can also enter your own comments on the blog at <http://www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/>

The location for the next ISA interim conference is to be decided in January 2011

DISCUSSION

PAPERS PRESENTED DURING ISA WORLD CONGRESS IN SESSION 7: DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON BIOGRAPHIES

The session 'Different Perspectives on Biographies' was set up during the ISA World Congress this summer in Gothenburg. This kind of sessions has a long tradition in RC 38, as far as I can see since Montreal in 1998. The session enables the discussion of methodological approaches and methods of analysis of biographical data and has become an established forum during the World congresses. Participants from different theoretical and cultural backgrounds and methodological approaches were asked to exemplify their way of biographical case study analysis using the same biographical-narrative interview provided by the session organizers. This year Kathy Davis (Netherlands), Hiromi Tanaka-Naji (Japan), Peter Alheit (Germany) and Marilyn Porter (Canada) were invited to demonstrate their methodology and "techniques" for analyzing the interview with Ms K. The interview with Ms K. was conducted by Tazuko Kobayashi (Japan). The different approaches and focuses of the analysis led to a very intensive comparative discussion during the session. We decided to share these perspectives with all of the members of RC38 in order to give you an insight into the differences in working with biographies in social sciences.

Michaela Koettig, Germany (michaela.koettig@gmx.de)

Preface for the papers on Different perspectives on biographies

by Tazuko KOBAYASHI (Hitotsubashi University, Tokyo) (t.kobayashi@srv.cc.hit-u.ac.jp)

In the ISA World Congress, held once every four years, it has been almost traditional for RC38 to organize a session where one life story text is analyzed and discussed by several sociologists.

For the RC38 session in Gothenburg, Sweden in July, 2010, I provided an interview text of a Japanese female life story. This text was analyzed from the different perspectives of four sociologists, who then presented excellent papers on the text. It was a very exciting and inspiring opportunity for us to understand the diversity and profundity of life story analysis. I am planning to compile the four papers on the interview text into a report, but before I do this I think it will be convenient and useful for the members of RC38, especially those who were not able to participate in this session, to understand how very interesting and fruitful the session was.

First of all, I would like to explain about the life story interview text used for the analysis and how it was produced.

The narrator of the life story, Ms. K, is a Japanese woman in her late 40s who lives in Tokyo. She is a working mother with two boys who has been working at a department store since graduating college, where she studied social welfare, in 1981.

In 1996, Ms. K was one of the subjects sampled for a questionnaire survey in the research project on University alumni and responded to the sampling with the comment that she would be happy to be interviewed.

The research project was entitled “A study of Life/Consciousness and University Evaluation after Graduation” and targeted former students who graduated in 1978 and 1981. The reasons why the project focused on these graduates were that more than 15 years had passed since graduation, the subjects were thus over age 35, and had experienced the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, enforced in 1986, when they were around age 30.

For Japanese women, the age of around 35 years was significant for their job career in the 1990s, as it is even now. In the Japanese employment situation, the female labor force participation rate reaches a minimum at around age 35 and rises again thereafter. This situation appears as an M-shaped curve for the labor force participation rate for women during their child-rearing years.

Furthermore, we emphasized very much that the subjects had experienced the situation both before and after the enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, which was said to have had given a great influence on working women.

Thus, in spring 1997, we accepted 17 graduates who lived and worked in the Tokyo area for interviews from among the sampled graduates. After about 10 years, in the summer of 2006, we conducted a second round of interviews for these subjects, who were then around 50 years of age, in order to talk with them about their current situation. We were able to interview 15 of the 17 graduates at that time. The interviewees’ jobs were, for example, a high school teacher, an editor, a teacher of Japanese in Germany, a freelance editor, a director of a nursery school, an artist, an architect at a housing company, an office worker at a chemical company, a manager of a private tutoring school, and so on.

Of these interviews, I chose the interview with Ms. K because she spoke openly and clearly about her work and the family situations faced by modern Japanese working women.

The first interview with Ms. K was held in April 1997, and the second meeting took place in August 2006. Both interviews were held at the same location. The interview text used in this session is from the second interview. Before the second interview, we informed Ms. K that the interview would be about what had happened in the last ten years, what kind of daily life she was living, her job, her family, and whatever else she would like to talk about.

The English version of the transcript was edited by myself to maintain confidentiality, remove redundancies, and make the content more easily understood for non-Japanese speakers. It was then sent to the four analysts in November 2009.

As is shown in the following papers, although only the small amount of information was offered to them about Ms. K, the analysts were able to perform a truly wonderful analysis of this interview text from each of their original perspectives. With this background in mind, I hope that you will enjoy reading the papers presented in the session.

PAPERS

Accounting for disappointment: biographical choices re-visited

Kathy Davis, Netherlands (Kathy.Davis@let.uu.nl)

It is a great privilege to be invited to participate in a session where you actually get to work together on the same interview and compare notes about how each of us would go about analyzing it. At the same time, it's a rather scary business to try to analyze a transcript without the safety net of an already existing research project. You don't have the usual props like a research problem or a familiar social context or even a familiarity with the informants' background.

So, let me start out by very briefly situating myself as a sociologist and as a biographical researcher in terms of my theoretical, epistemological, and methodological orientations.

First, I would call myself – as many of you would – a critical biographical researcher. This means that I see biographical research as a means to an end – namely, engaging in some form of social critique. I use biographical research as a resource for understanding how social inequalities, cultural discourses on difference, and hierarchies of power shape and are shaped by individuals in the course of their everyday lives. To this end, I draw much of my inspiration from feminist theory, but also from critical race theory and cultural studies on transnationality and the effects of globalization.

Second, epistemologically, I would call myself a social constructionist with postmodernist leanings. For those of you who remember the heated debate we had in the RC38⁶ about realism versus constructionism with Daniel Bertaux and Wolfram Fischer as respective proponents, I'm definitely on the far end of the constructionist pole. This is perhaps not surprising as I started out my academic career as an ethnomethodologist.⁷ I have always preferred the single case over large collections of stories. I do not gather stories in the hope of revealing systematic patterns. Instead I like to focus on one interview and show how an individual constructs and interprets her or his life world. But – as a postmodern sociologist - I am also interested in the ways people's stories are embedded in the broader cultural and institutional narratives available within the specific historical and geographical context in which they are told.

Third, I tend to be eclectic – or, more positively – creative in my methods. In my empirical work, I have drawn much of my inspiration from conversation analysis, discourse analysis and the analysis of rhetoric. I am generally less interested in what people say about their lives (i.e. the content of their stories) than in how they tell their stories. In other words, why do they choose to tell their stories in a particular way, what forms do their narratives take, and what is at stake for them in telling their stories in the first place.

This is – in a nutshell – who I am and where I am coming from. I hope that it will give you an idea of what you can expect today in terms of how I approach the biographical analysis of this particular interview. The procedure I use for analyzing an interview is basically quite simple. It consists of three steps:

⁶ This discussion took place at the World Congress of Sociology which was held in Montreal in 1998.

⁷ See, Heritage (1984).

First, I begin looking for a puzzle, something which intrigues, disturbs, or angers me. I am searching for what I call the 'I-smell-a-rat' feeling. This is the 'uh oh' which tells me that I'm on to something and I need to look further. This sensation of 'smelling a rat' is the starting point of nearly all of my own research projects. It is also something that I have taught my students to do in their research project. It is the way to get 'into' to any interview and to find something worth analyzing.

Once I have found my 'rat', I go back over the interview. In this second step, I tend to skip over those parts of the interview where the informant is not having any trouble telling her or his story. I am less interested in the smooth sailing parts. On the contrary, I go through the interview for places where informants seem to be having a hard time, where they are struggling. I look for hesitations, for backtracking, for repairs and revisions. I am especially alert to when informants defend or justify themselves, to when they seem to be grappling with contradictions and inconsistencies. These are the moments where I expect to find out what is at stake for them in telling their story.

Third, I am perhaps just as interested in what my informants say as in what they do not say. It seems to me that for every interview, there is a sub-text of things that shape the person's story, but which – for all kinds of reasons – he or she cannot or will not say in so many words. Michael Billig (1999), one of my favorite discourse analysts, calls this the 'dialogic unconsciousness (p. 97).' He advocates doing discourse analysis as a kind of psychoanalysis, whereby the analyst uncovers what has been repressed in the interview. This unspoken subtext can provide important clues to how a person's life story is embedded in the specific social, historical and cultural context in which it is being told.

Those are the three basic steps which I use to analyze – or, at least, get started analyzing - any interview. After going through these steps, the most difficult part remains, of course. I then begin the long and arduous process of thinking about the sociological significance of what I have discovered, interpreting it with the help of the critical lens of feminist theory or critical race theory or critical transnational studies. Obviously, I can't take you through the whole process, but I will apply some of this very briefly to the interview we are discussing today and end with a few questions which could be pursued.

Interview

We have already heard a lot about Ms. K from the previous speakers, so I won't go into the details about her life. Instead I'll get right down to business with my three steps.

My first question after reading the interview is: where do I smell a rat?

The first faint whiff appeared early in the interview, when Ms. K explained that she had been 'very lucky' in her life. I might not have noticed anything the first time, but just a few pages later, she once again insisted that she was 'very fortunate' and, indeed, throughout the interview, she insists at regular intervals that she has been 'really very lucky.' Wow, I thought. One of the privileged few! I wondered what it was about Ms. K's life that allowed her to come to such an optimistic and happy conclusion about her life. After all, how many of us could say with such certainty that we are lucky and 'very, very fortunate'?

Going back through the interview, however, I began to suspect that Ms. K has perhaps not been so lucky after all. In fact, I began to suspect that her 'luck' had seen something of a mixed bag. As the mother of two children with a working husband, she calls herself 'lucky' because she was able to work the 'special shift'. This shift allowed her just enough time to come home after a hard day's work in the

department store and cook meals for her family, do the housework, and spend time with her children. I must admit that, at first glance, Ms. K's special shift didn't exactly sound like 'luck' to me. It sounded more like the least of what a woman in her position should be able to expect. Any woman who has to juggle a high level management position with more than half of the responsibility for children and housework is going to need help. In contemporary post-industrial societies like Japan, shouldn't this simply be considered normal? So why, I wondered, does Ms. K. continue to insist that she has been lucky?

I began to examine the interview for some clues. I found many examples where Ms. K. seemed to be contradicting her own assessment that she had been lucky. She talks about the pressure she is currently under to take an exam in order to be promoted to director. It is clear that she is expected to take the exam, it would look bad to the company that had invested in her if she did not move up the career ladder. But she doesn't have time to study for the exam. She is worried that she will fail, and, in fact, she doesn't really even want the promotion. She doesn't want to disappoint her company, but she doesn't want to disappoint her sons and husband who need her at home either. She is also very worried about her health, but she just doesn't have enough time left over after work to take care of her own needs (go to the gym, have a hobby of her own). So, after deliberating the pro's and con's of taking the exam, Ms. K. has decided she probably won't take it, after all. As she puts it, it makes her 'sad' to be giving up on her career (after all, it's always been what she wanted), but she has 'hit the wall of reality': 'I wanted children and I wanted to have a career. But the reality is that ...I must be satisfied with this, with trying to have both. I must continue in that manner.'

Ms. K.'s story now seems to me less about how lucky she has been than about how she has to explain her failure to make the most of her career opportunities. Ms. K. is struggling to justify her life choices. It as though she has to defend herself before an audience of silent critics – critics who are sitting in judgement over her – for example, the company who has been so 'helpful' by letting her work special shifts; the 'active, gung ho career men' who have had no trouble at all moving up the ladder; the women who, unlike Ms. K, gave up having children in order to pursue their careers; and even the women who, like Ms. K., have children and husbands at home, but still go ahead and take the exam even though they know they will fail. It is as if they are all shaking their heads and saying: 'Ms. K, you have had so many chances and yet still you have failed.'

So, having looked at how Ms. K. defends herself, it is now time to wonder what is *not* being said here? Is this the whole story or is there something missing? Is there a sub-text to the interview with Ms. K., which we should be exploring here? Obviously, uncovering sub-texts involves interpretation – or, to return to Billig, becoming discursive psychoanalysts and analyzing the text for that which is repressed. My interpretation would begin with two omissions that I would want to pursue.

The first is Ms. K's denial of her own disappointment. She expected much more from life. She wanted a different kind of job (in social work). She wanted to make a career. She even had higher hopes for her family. Her sons have disappointed her, too. She has failed to achieve what she set out to do. However, Ms. K's disappointment seems to have disappeared behind her insistence that she has had good fortune and many opportunities. I would suspect, however, that Ms. K. feels shame for having failed to make more of her life. As we all know only too well, shame is a painful emotion. It is an emotion that we all try to repress if we possibly can. Ms. K. does this by insisting that she made her bed and now she just has to lie in it ('I wanted children and I wanted a career' so 'I must be satisfied with what I have').

But, of course, there is another omission in Ms. K's story. One of the most glaring silences is the unspoken norm that demands the impossible. Ms. K. is expected to unproblematically combine a high level career with responsibility for family and household. Ms. K. is not only expected to work long hours every day without complaint. She is also supposed to do the housework and to cook a full meal everyday so that her family can eat together. She wants to be a 'good' modern mother, of course, which means worrying about how her sons are doing in their private schools, attending their baseball practices, mediating family conflicts. Combining all of this successfully, however, would require very different conditions than the ones under which Ms. K. lives and works. At the very least, she would need to share some of the family responsibilities with her husband. Or she would need to hire some domestic help. Or her husband would need to earn more money so that she could work part-time. As things stand now, however, Ms. K's life is a mission impossible. Something has to give and that something is her career.

The question is: why doesn't Ms. K. criticize this impossible norm? Why doesn't she express righteous anger instead of conceal secret shame for her failure to meet these impossible expectations? Why doesn't she protest that she has been set up?

To understand this a sociological analysis is in order.

Sociological analysis

I do not know enough about the situation for working women in Japan to do such an analysis. For that, I would need to know more about the reality and rhetorics around gender, work, and parenting in contemporary Japanese society.

However, Ms. K's story resonates with the situation for professional women in the Netherlands. This is the way the Dutch story goes: after many years of hitting the glass ceiling, women are now gaining entrance into the higher echelons of the corporate structure. The media delights in providing examples of these New Super Women. They are shown, calm and smiling in their tailored business suits. The typical example is CEO of her company AND the mother of five children. She, of course, has no trouble at all combining a board meeting with picking up her son from soccer practice. She doesn't even need a nanny. And let's not forget the romantic candle-lit dinners (cooked by herself, of course) after the kids have been tucked into their beds.

With 'role models' like this, it is not surprising that many Dutch professional women - women like Ms. K. - feel that they have failed when they are unable to combine careers and family in this elegant way. The problem with the 'we can have it all' discourse is that it puts women in a double bind. They have been given equality, so they should be happy. Although material constraints continue to make the combination of a high-powered career and family life difficult for many women, the responsibility for failure is squarely placed on the shoulders of the individual. If a woman is dissatisfied, she has only herself to blame.

In conclusion, the sociological significance of this biographical interview is not only that it provides a glimpse at the constraints and possibilities facing highly educated women in contemporary Japanese society. More importantly, it shows how small the discursive space is for women to think critically about their situation. Understanding the discursive limitations for developing critical consciousness is, in turn, a step toward uncovering the workings of gender and the obstacles toward equality between the sexes in the workplace and at home.

As for our discussion about methods of biographical analysis, I hope that I have convinced you that it's important to follow feelings of unease when doing biographical research, to look carefully at our informants' struggles, and to listen to the's not being said as well as what is being said.

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Identifying and Explaining Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Middle Adulthood: The Life Story of Ms K

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Introduction

One of the most popular questions in large-scale surveys on individual lives and living is whether people are happy and satisfied with their lives (e.g. Asian Barometer, Eurobarometer, General Social Survey, World Value Survey). Macro data generated by such surveys allow us to identify tendencies among respondents and to make generalized statements on the way we humans live on the basis of these tendencies. There are, however, aspects of individual lives that are hard to scrutinize with this approach – aspects that involve ambiguities and ambivalences, the state of betwixt and between, the process of pondering and deciding or even not deciding (on the importance of this ambiguous state of individual decision-making, see Tanaka-Naji 2009).

The life story of Ms. K is a good example of this aspect of the nature of human life. In her narratives, Ms K frequently says she thinks that she has been “fortunate” or “lucky”. However, she also talks a lot about the worries and problems that have arisen in recent years of her life. This leads her to conclude her storytelling by saying that she “feel[s] the difficulty of living [more and more] as [she] get[s] older” (I.852).

In this paper, I will analyze Ms K's life story by focusing on ambiguities and ambivalences in her work and family life. I will attempt to identify these ambiguities, whose contours become more and more visible in her narrative as the interview goes on. I will explain them with particular reference to Japanese gendered society, and in so doing, I will address the importance of culturally specific structures in an individual life.

Analytic Procedure

A life story interview with Ms K was conducted as a part of the research project, “A Study of Life/Consciousness and University Evaluation after Graduation”. Conducted by Japanese sociologists Tazuko Kobayashi and Mikiko Muramatsu among others, this project studied the lives of alumni of N University, particularly middle-aged women graduates living and working in the Tokyo area. Ms K was

one of the respondents in this study. The first interview was conducted in 1997, when she was 39. The second interview was in 2006, shortly before she turned 48. This second interview is the material to be analyzed in this paper. The transcript of the second interview was distributed for the session on “Different perspectives on biographies” organized by the Research Committee on Biography and Society (RC38) for this year’s ISA World Congress of Sociology.

To get a rough idea of the interview, and also for the practical reason of needing to submit an abstract before the conference, I started my preparation for analysis with an explorative reading of the transcript. After reading the transcript three times, I prepared an initial abstract of this paper. At this point, I decided to focus on ambiguities and ambivalences surrounding Ms K’s life.

At this stage, I produced supporting materials of three different types for analysis. First, I produced a biographical calendar that shows Ms K’s major life events in chronological order (see Appendix 1). This calendar consists of five sections, including some of the major aspects of the human life course, such as (i) social/historical background, (ii) biological family, (iii) reproductive family, and (iv) education and work. To fill out this calendar, I used the transcript and the notes I took during my last explorative reading. At this stage, I also inserted significant events in Japanese society that are likely to have had an impact on Ms K’s life and her surroundings.

Second, I made a chart based on the biographical calendar. Though similar to the calendar, this chart differs in that it maps out the major life events shown in the calendar and shows either the actual or the most likely association between these events. Because it is a chart, it allows a researcher to make brief comments on a particular event or a particular association between several events (see Appendix 2).

After producing the calendar and chart, I returned to the transcript and read it once more. Then, I began to work on the third supporting item, an edited life story (see Appendix 3). This is an edited version of the transcript in which the most important parts of the original life story are picked up, most responses of the interviewer(s) are omitted, and a series of ‘narratives’ of the subject are arranged along the time line of the subject’s life (Okubo 2009: 33). This should ideally be done without losing the original ‘thickness’ (see Geertz 1973) of the narratives carried by the transcript.

To produce these three supporting items, I relied on the methods proposed by Takaji Okubo, a Japanese sociologist and life course/life story researcher (see Okubo 1985, 2009; see also Okubo and Shimazaki 1995). He is aware of the possible risk of losing such original thickness and the probable criticism that the original transcript should be read as a primary source. Nevertheless, he contends that the original transcript tends to be too lengthy, redundant and diffuse as material for analysis. He therefore stresses how important it is for a researcher to “make efforts to condense the amount of the original transcript without leaving out the narratives” (Okubo 2009: 33). He also suggests that a researcher should produce an edited life story, with the readers – particularly other researchers who may use the edited version – in mind, and should include this in the final report as an appendix. To analyze Ms K’s life story, I applied Okubo’s method and edited the original life story. The length of the edited life story was slightly less than the half of the original transcript (see Appendix 3). During my analysis, I often returned to the original life story to double-check, although Okubo (2009) does not specifically prescribe this.

Identifying Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Ms K's Life

Ms K graduated from N University, Tokyo, in 1981. Upon graduation, she started working for Y department store. It was the first time in the history of this department store that female college graduates had been hired through open recruitment. Ms K was one of these first 15 women. She later married and gave birth to two children, and continued to work for the department store. Of the 15 women, ten left their jobs because of marriage or childbirth. Today, Ms K is one of the five women who are still working there.

Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Work Life

In her work life, Ms K thinks she is fortunate. She has worked for the department store since being hired in the 1980s. It has been over 25 years. Through long service, she has also now reached a managerial position. Accordingly, Ms K earns more or less the same amount of money as her husband does. This enables her household to maintain a certain standard of living. For example, they seem to have invested a lot of money in the education of their children, who go to private schools. However, what in particular makes Ms K think that she has been "very fortunate" (l. 49) or "very lucky" (l. 103) in the past ten years is the fact that she has been able to enjoy favourable work shifts.

While her children were small, she benefited from a reduction in her regular working hours. She was satisfied with this 'childcare shift' system, because she could finish working around 3.30 p.m., go home and have dinner with her family. After five years of working the childcare shift, which was available at that time only for employees with pre-school children⁸, Ms K started working standard shifts. This meant that she now needed to be ready to work much longer regular hours. However, the company's transfer policy⁹ turned out to be very 'friendly' to Ms K. She was first transferred to a wedding salon at the B Hotel¹⁰, which closes at 6 p.m., earlier than the department store, which closes at 8 p.m.. Two years later, she was transferred again to the funeral business section of the main branch of the department store. This funeral gift section, an off-site sales department, closes somewhat earlier (usually at 6.20 p.m.), which allowed her to get home around 8 or 8.30 p.m.. Later, she was transferred to another section. She was appointed to a position as a gift salon manager at the main store. This position was very hard because of the two work shifts and regular long hours. When she worked the late shift, she would get home around 9 p.m., too late for her to have dinner with her family. However, an organisational restructuring of the department store, probably due to the economic recession, led to another, unexpected, transfer to a section that was newly created through the restructuring. In this section, Ms K was in charge of in-house training of workers. At the time of this interview, she had been

⁸ As Ms K mentions in her interview, the 'childcare shift' was extended later to employees with children up to second grade. Although both male and female employees are entitled to work the childcare shift, in reality, most of those who take it are women.

⁹ One of the main features of the Japanese employment system is the practice of rotation or frequent transfer. The rotated staff are prospective managers, because most companies prefer future managers to be generalists rather than specialists. Rotation offers opportunities for employees to experience various work environments and situations and to develop personal networks within and beyond different sections, sometimes even companies. Usually, workers are not able to express their wishes about which section they are transferred to.

¹⁰ In Japan it is popular to hold wedding receptions at hotels. It is customary for guests to bring a gift of money, and in return the organizers (the bride and groom and/or their families) give special gifts to the guests. I assume that the B Hotel offers a wedding package and the department store where Ms K works runs a special salon or shop at the hotel specializing in gifts for wedding guests. The department store probably sends some of its employees to this salon as a part of its rotation practice.

working in this position for two years. In this position, she can finish her work at 6.20 p.m., again early enough for her to get home to eat with her family.

Ms K feels fortunate about these transfers, because she never asked for any particular favourable treatment. It just turned out to be favourable for her, since she prefers to go home early enough to have dinner with her family.

Ms K's satisfaction, described above, mirrors only the one side of her work life. The tone of her saying she was fortunate and lucky is mixed with her uneasy feelings about some other aspects of her workplace. Ms K shows her dissatisfaction with the long working hours of the department store in general. After her children were born, she personally experienced the hard work shifts (the early and the late shifts) only for about a year. This is why she thinks she was very fortunate in being able to enjoy exceptional working hours. However, the department store in general requires employees to take rather difficult shifts. That is why Ms K says, "I have continued to work, but I think I was just lucky and I ended up here this long. I really do wonder if department stores provide an ideal work environment for women" (ll. 642-644). This means her luck comes from a situation that is in some ways 'unlucky' or 'unfavourable'. Ms K is clearly aware of this structural feature of her work environment.

There is another aspect of Ms K's work life which makes her feel uneasy: the question of her career formation, particularly with respect to the "director exam", an exam or screening of workers for promotion to directors' positions. Ms K says, "if it [hadn't] come around, I would have been happy" (l. 168); "my feelings were that I didn't want to take it, I didn't want to study for it. [It came to my turn] so I took it and I failed" (ll. 169-170). According to company policy, she is senior enough to take this exam. She is not obliged to take this exam, but is expected to do so. She wants to work hard and brush up her skills and expertise, but she does not feel she is ready to move up the career ladder to work in a top management position. She even "discovered a new sense of sadness" (l. 216), when she decided to take this exam. She is not motivated to take it alongside her colleagues, because "after all, it's all these active, gung ho career men that take these exams" (l. 273). Taking this exam unwillingly, she even started thinking about doing something different, something related to social welfare, a subject in which she majored at college. Her dilemma is that she cannot just decide not to take this exam, because then "it's over" (l. 264). She may be motivated in the future, but currently this exam has caused her much distress.

Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Family Life

In her family life, Ms K's ambivalent feelings have developed out of her concerns about her children. She wanted to have children "so badly" (l. 378) and realized her dream of becoming a mother. Today, however, she feels strongly that "raising children is very difficult" (l. 388).

A major factor that contributes to her worries about her children is a conflict between her children and her husband, the children's father. The children have now reached puberty. The elder son in particular clashes with his father and Ms K often mediates between the two. According to Ms K, it is difficult for her husband to understand why the children rebel so strongly, because he was the one who looked after them attentively when they were small. For example, he fed them, because he often came home earlier than Ms K.

When her children were young, they were not particularly unhappy about Ms K's employment. But now they are teenagers, Ms K experiences the father-son conflict at home. This makes her feel it is difficult to raise the children that she really wanted to have.

Explaining Ambiguities and Ambivalences

As described above, Ms K's work and family life is characterized by the coexistence of satisfaction and distress. To explain the ambiguities and ambivalences arising from this state, I would like to discuss what Ms K has experienced in the past ten years in the Japanese context. I will relate my discussion particularly to features of Japanese corporate society and the patterns of women's employment and gender roles specific to Japanese society.

Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Work Life: Ms K in the Gendered Work Organization

As mentioned above, it used to be standard in Japan for working women to stop working when they married.¹¹ Today, marriage is no longer a reason to quit a job, but still many women stop working when they become mothers¹². There are various reasons for this, but one is the relatively long working hours in Japanese companies.¹³ The childcare leave law was enacted in 1991 and came into effect in 1992. This law prescribes that workers have the right to take childcare leave for up to one year.¹⁴ Ms K, who worked the childcare shift from 1993 to 1997, belongs to the first generation of women workers who had an opportunity to utilize the "childcare shift" system. This is the background against which Ms K feels very fortunate about her work, particularly in terms of working hours.

Belonging to this first generation, Ms K is also one of the very few women who have continued to work for 25 years at Y department store. As mentioned earlier, she was one of the first 15 female college graduates recruited by the department store. According to Ms K, only five of them still work for this department store. The other ten women left the company when they married. Her continuous work experience of 25 years there has given her a certain level of skill formation and promotion up to section manager level. While this gives her a certain level of satisfaction, she confronts problems in moving further up the typical career ladder. Distancing herself from the majority of male colleagues, who are eager to take the director exam, she does not really identify with them and with the company in terms of its personnel policy.

In Japan, very few women can be found at the higher levels of management. A study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on women's share of administrative and managerial jobs and

¹¹ The Sumitomo Cement Case in 1966 is one of the famous court cases relating to this issue. This case concerned the company's women-specific retirement policy that women should retire upon marriage or at the age of 30. This policy was judged as unconstitutional. According to a study by the Ministry of Labour, in 1977, 7.4 per cent of the companies had women-specific regulations on retirement upon marriage. Since then, particularly after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was introduced in 1985, most companies have abandoned such personnel policies.

¹² According to an official study conducted in 2001, 67.4 per cent of mothers who were employed a year before childbirth remained unemployed six months after childbirth. See Ministry of Welfare, Health and Labour (2001): *Dai 1 kai 21 seiki shuseiji odan chosa*.

¹³ In 2009, the average monthly working hours for female regular workers were 126.2, including 5.1 hours of overtime work, while the hours for male regular workers were 158.5, including 12.4 hours of overtime work. See Japan Government, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2009).

¹⁴ The law has been amended several times. Since 1999, the law has referred to care of the elderly as well, and since 2002 it has referred to both male and female workers.

share in total employment (1994-1995) shows that Japan's figures were 9 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. The figures were much higher for other industrialized countries, for example, 43 per cent and 46 per cent for the USA, 43 per cent and 42 per cent for Australia, 33 per cent and 45 per cent for the UK, 28 per cent and 40 per cent for Switzerland, 25 per cent and 47 per cent for Finland, 19 per cent and 42 per cent for Israel¹⁵.

In the 1980s, when Ms K was first employed, equal employment was politically a hot issue. The Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1985. The Japanese government needed to introduce this kind of law in order to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, policy change is not necessarily accompanied by social and cultural change: indirect discrimination against women continues to exist. While the past decades have witnessed an increase in opportunities for women who want to pursue careers, women managers are still rare, and these rare individuals are often marginalized at various levels of the male-dominated employment system (see Ogasawara 1998).

On the one hand, Ms K is grateful for the way her company has treated her differently from her male colleagues by transferring her to positions with work hours that have generally been favourable to her. On the other hand, she has difficulty identifying with the company when it comes to promotion. She even shows her frustration about the fact that only "gung ho men" take the director exam and that very few women have taken and even fewer women have passed this exam. Ms K's narrative may be interpreted as an example of gender segregation and the partial integration of women workers in Japanese corporate organizations.

Ambiguities and Ambivalences in Family Life: the Father's Involvement in Childcare and its Consequences

Ms K expresses in her life story how lucky she feels to have been able to have children while pursuing full-time work, and how fortunate it is that her husband could go home early and take care of their children. According to Ms K, it would otherwise have been extremely difficult for her and her husband to raise two children without Ms K's quitting her job.

In her life story, it is interesting that her husband has been involved in childcare and childrearing. In Japan, many people still espouse traditional gender roles¹⁶, and most fathers are not actively involved in parenting.¹⁷ Even if they want to be, it is extremely difficult in the current employment system, which requires male regular workers to commit themselves completely to their companies. In this system women are supposed to play a supplementary role, either as peripheral workers or as wives who stay at home or work only part-time. For Ms K, it was 'luck' that her husband is a local civil servant who

¹⁵ Though the numbers of women in management are increasing, there are still very few women in higher managerial positions such as *buchō* [heads of large departments] (4.1 per cent, in 2008) and *kachō* [heads of middle-sized departments] (6.6 per cent in 2008). See Ministry of Welfare, Health and Labour (2009): *Hataraku josei no jitsujō*, a study of companies with more than 100 employees. The figures for Japan in the ILO study (9 per cent) refer to all the positions of *buchō*, *kachō*, and *kakarichō* [heads of smaller sections].

¹⁶ According to a study conducted by the Cabinet Office in 2009, while 55.1 per cent of the respondents are against the idea of the male-breadwinner family model, 41.3 per cent still support the idea. See Cabinet Office (2009).

¹⁷ According to the White Paper of the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Labour (2006), Japanese fathers who have small children (under 6 years old) spend only 25 minutes per day on childcare, whereas Japanese mothers spend 3 hours and 3 minutes on average. The figures for fathers are much higher in other countries, for example, 1 hour 13 minutes in the United States and 59 minutes in Germany.

has less overtime to do than those who are employed in private companies. Moreover, his workplace appears to be not very far from home. As Ms K works for a department store where the working hours are relatively long, it was good for this couple that at least the husband has family-friendly working conditions and that he was also ready to take part in parenting. This makes the case of Ms K's family an interesting case of gender roles in terms of childcare and parenthood. Because of her husband's "extra" involvement in parenting, Ms K perhaps worries much more about conflicts between her children and her husband.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the life story of Ms K, a Japanese working mother with two children. Her life story highlights her mixed feelings about her "luck" and "distress" or "worries" at work and home. I have examined in particular these mixed feelings or ambivalences in her life from a gender perspective in the Japanese context.

My analysis reveals that the structure of Japanese gendered society probably contributes to the construction of these ambiguities and ambivalences. It is particularly interesting to see how typical personnel practices of the Japanese employment system regarding transfer and promotion have affected Ms K both favourably and unfavourably. As a mother, she enjoys being treated differently by her company, particularly in terms of favourable shifts and transfers, but at the same time she is unwilling to join her (male) colleagues in aspiring to study hard for the director exam, pass the exam and climb the career ladder. Her rejection of the conventional kind of career formation does not mean that she has no ambition or aspirations concerning her career. She is motivated to improve her skills and contribute to her workplace. However, the company offers very limited space for its workers like Ms K who do not necessarily desire to be promoted vertically in the organizational hierarchy. Her workplace obviously fails to grasp the different concept of career formation espoused by Ms K.

Ambiguities and ambivalences in Ms K's family life are centred on her children and their relationship with their father, her husband. Given that traditional gender roles prevail in Japan, there is no doubt that Ms K is "lucky" in having rather egalitarian gender roles in her marriage. It was her husband who fed the children at dinner when they were small, which was rather unusual in Japanese society. Such egalitarian gender roles at home may promote women's labour force participation. However, on the level of social structure, they are not affecting the existing gender order at work. In other words, women's increased participation in paid work is occurring without changing the way of working in society, and in this sense neither egalitarian gender roles at home nor childcare shifts at work seem to exert more than a very limited influence on the gender order in contemporary Japanese society.

What kind of life story will Ms K have to tell ten years on from her last interview? At least the following two questions seem to be relevant. First, will she develop new strategies to cope with her worries at work? Currently, she worries a lot about the director exam and further career formation. It would be interesting to see whether Ms K will develop certain strategies to cope with her dilemmas at work or in her career formation. Alternatively, the company might introduce a new personnel policy that would help solve her dilemma, such as introducing a new career track that enables workers to continue to have challenging tasks and opportunities to further improve their skills without moving up the career ladder.

Second, how will her partnership with her husband develop in the future? Her relationship with him may involve different meanings in the future, after her children have left the nest. In her life story, she says that she does not know what kind of life her husband wants to live in future. Will she learn more about her husband in the coming years? Whatever the case, the question of partnership will probably increase in significance in her future life.

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Appendix 1: Ms. K's life: An Overview

| Year | Japanese era | Age | Historical background | Original/ Biological family career | Reproductive family career | Educational/ Employment Career | Others | |
|------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1958 | Showa 33 | 0 | | Born September 1958 | | | | |
| 1959 | | 1 | | Grows up in countryside of Yamana-shi Prefecture | | | | |
| 1960 | Showa 40 | 2 | Japan's high-speed economic development (1955-1973) | | | | | |
| 1961 | | 3 | | | | | | |
| 1962 | | 4 | | | | | | |
| 1963 | | 5 | | | | | | |
| 1964 | | 6 | | | | | | Olympic Games in Tokyo |
| 1965 | | 7 | | | | | | |
| 1966 | | 8 | | | | | | |
| 1967 | | 9 | | | | | | |
| 1968 | | 10 | | | | | | |
| 1969 | | 11 | | | | | | |
| 1970 | 12 | Oil Crisis | | | | | | |
| 1971 | 13 | | | | | | | |
| 1972 | 14 | | | | | | | |
| 1973 | 15 | | | | | | | |
| 1974 | 16 | | | | | | | |
| 1975 | 17 | | | | | | | |
| 1976 | 18 | | | | | | Enters N University | |
| 1977 | 19 | | | | | | | |
| 1978 | 20 | | | | | | | |
| 1979 | 21 | | | | | | | |
| 1980 | Showa 50 | 22 | Economic boom (1980-1982) | | | Graduates from N University, starts working at Y department store as one of first 15 women college graduates employed through open recruitment | | |
| 1981 | | 23 | | | | | | |
| 1982 | | 24 | | | | | | |
| 1983 | | 25 | | | | | | Recession (1983-1985) |
| 1984 | | 26 | | | | | | |
| 1985 | | 27 | | | | | | Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOC) passes through Parliament |
| 1986 | | 28 | | | | | | EEOC comes into effect; Bubble economy (1986-1991) |
| 1987 | | 29 | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-----------|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1988 | | 30 | | | | | |
| 1989 | Heisei 1 | 31 | | | | | |
| 1990 | | 32 | | | First son born | Childbirth/childcare leave | |
| 1991 | | 33 | Childcare Leave Law enacted | | | Childbirth/childcare leave | |
| 1992 | | 34 | | | Second son born | Childbirth/childcare leave | |
| 1993 | Heisei 5 | 35 | Lost Decade/Heisei Recession (1993-2002) | | | Childcare shift (works until 15:30) from 1993 to 1998 | |
| 1994 | | 36 | | | | | |
| 1995 | | 37 | | | | | |
| 1996 | | 38 | | | First son enters primary school | | |
| | | | | | First son in second grade, second son in final year of nursery | | |
| 1997 | | 39 | | | | | First interview |
| | | | | | | Returns to fulltime work hours; transferred to wedding salon at T Hotel, working outside department store for first time. | |
| | | | | | Second son enters primary school | Works there as salon manager for next three years. | |
| 1998 | Heisei 10 | 40 | | | | | |
| 1999 | | 41 | | | | | |
| 2000 | | 42 | | | | | |
| | | | | | First son takes entrance exams for junior high school | Transferred to funeral gift section at Y department store. | |
| 2001 | | 43 | | | First son graduates from primary school and enters junior high school | Transferred again due to organizational reform of department store | |
| 2002 | | 44 | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Appointed as gift salon manager at Y department store (one year) | |
| 2003 | Heisei 15 | 45 | | | Second son enters junior high school | Appointed as manager of new kimono section, in charge of staff training | |
| 2004 | | 46 | | | | | |
| | | | Childcare Leave Law revised (now Childcare and Family Care Leave Law) | | First son enters senior high school | First experience of director exam for promotion | |
| 2005 | | 47 | | | | | Second interview |
| | | | | | | | August 2006 at age 47; 48th birthday next month. |
| 2006 | Heisei 18 | 48 | | | | Awaiting next transfer | |

| Year | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------|------|
| Age | 20 | 25 | 30 | 35 | 40 | 45 |
| Social/ Historical background | Progress in women's policy making | | 1986-1991: Bubble economy | | 1993-2002: Recession | |
| Original family | Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOC) 1965/1986 | | 1981: Childcare Leave Law | | Organizational restructuring Y store? | |
| Reproductive family | 175 international women's year '80 CEDAW signed '85 CEDAW ratified UN decade for women | | Father died | | entrance exam | |
| Education/ Employment | college graduation | | employed by Y dept store | | Childcare shift (92-97) | |
| Others | as one of first 15 female college graduates recruited through OPEN recruitment. | | first son born | | second son born | |
| | first open recruitment for women colleges students | | 196: first son primary school | | 198: second son primary school | |
| | marriage: only 5 of 15 women continued to work after marriage | | 192: first son junior high | | 195: first son senior high | |
| | Childcare shift (92-97) | | 192-193: Manager, gift salon | | 193: Present: Manager, Kimono section | |
| | 197-199: Transfer to wedding salon at Hotel (shorter work hours ~ 3:30pm) | | [Coping with long work hours] | | 195: takes director exam for promotion | |
| | failed | | re-discovers interest in social welfare | | clash between children and their father | |

↓ 1st interview

2nd interview ↓

Appendix 3: Life story interview of Ms. K: an edited version**Interview date: August 22, 2006 | Interview location: Tokyo**

I grew up in the countryside of C Prefecture. I graduated from N University in March 1981. In April 1981, right after graduation, I started working for Y department store. It was the first time in the history of this department store that women college graduates had been hired through open recruitment. Fifteen such women were hired. I was one of these women.

Several years later, I gave birth to my first child. Two years later, my second son was born. As a working mother of two small children, I used the company's childcare shift system, which enabled me to work only until 15:30, thus a few hours less than the regular work hours. Employees with small children could take this shift until their child entered primary school. Today, the period is extended up to children in the second grade. I benefited from this system during these years (1993-1997). It was about this time when the previous interview was conducted.

I started working fulltime again in 1998. Before that, I was asked whether I would like to be transferred to the wedding salon of the department store at the B Hotel. I accepted this transfer.

It was the first time I had worked outside the building of the department store, but I liked working at the salon and the B Hotel, which had a reputation as one of the best hotels in Japan. What I liked most was the work hours. While the department store closes at 8 p.m., this salon closes at 6 p.m.. This meant that I could finish my work earlier. I was the first [female fulltime worker] to start working again after the childcare shift period ended. So this transfer was probably based on the company's consideration of my family responsibilities. I think I was very fortunate, because these shorter work hours allowed me to be home by 7 p.m. and have dinner together with my family.

Two years later, I thought I would stay another year there, but then, I was transferred again. This time, I was transferred back to the main department store, where I was put in charge of the funeral-related business section. At the department store, there are two shifts: from 9.50 a.m. to 6.50 p.m. and from 11.10 a.m. to 8 p.m.. During the gift-giving seasons in the summer and at the end of the year, I had to work until 6.50 p.m., but I could still be home around 7.30 p.m.. I could also get by for another three years without doing the late shift. I think I was very lucky.

After that, the department store was reorganized. The off-site sales and gift salon merged into the same counter. I became the head of this new section. The new gift salon closes at 8 p.m. There, I experienced both the early and late shifts for the first time. The late shift was very hard. The early shift ends at 6:50, already later than my previous work hours. On the late shift week, I was home around 9 p.m. It was hard for me not to be able to have dinner with my family. My husband fed the children.

I could not ask for a transfer to another section because of the shifts. So I expected to stay there for another two or three years. Then fortunately, again, a reorganization led to my next transfer. This time the kimono section and the service sales section merged and I became the manager of this new section. I have been the manager there for the past three years. My main task is to train and educate employees. The training finishes at 6:20 p.m.. I think I am very fortunate and I am very grateful for this transfer. I never asked for special treatment because of my family responsibilities.

Today, I am one of the five women who were the first women college graduates who were hired by Y department store and who have continued to work despite being married. I am one of the longest-serving female workers there. When I entered this company, fifteen women graduates were hired. Only five of them are still working. Among these five women, two have no children. These two became directors. The other three have children. These women, who took the childcare shift, have not yet passed the director exam.

This exam consists of a written test and an interview. I took the exam last year and failed. Every year, we are asked whether they want to take it or not. If we don't pass, we have to take it every year. I felt I was not ready and did not study. I don't know I was ever too concerned with being upwardly mobile. Looking back, I think I was very energetic in the beginning, even ten years ago. This Thursday, I will take this exam, and my colleagues who are taking this exam are studying hard. Seeing them, and comparing myself now with myself ten years ago, I have mixed feelings.

I worried and thought long and hard about what to do about this exam or promotion. If I say I won't take the exam, then it is over. So I just took it and wrote anything. The fact is that I participated in the exam. The exam caused me such distress. After all, it's all these active, gung ho career men that take these exams. Last year, when I took this exam, many were much older men and only one in ten were women. Very few people passed

this exam. At the Tokyo store, about fifty took this exam and only four people passed. Only one in ten did. Fifty people nationwide. The sex ratio of the test-takers is one to ten and of those that pass, two in fifty, i.e. only one in twenty-five is female.

I will continue to work, but I think it would be nice to start something new, in a completely different place. I want to continue to work at Y department store until retirement, and to give depth to my career, to study, gather information, I have to continue like that, but if I worked somewhere other than Y department store, I would like to make use of what I studied in college, social welfare. When I was a student, I was not sure whether welfare could be a job, so I chose to work for a private company. But I am now beginning to think that something else, which would help people more, volunteering, unrelated to work, would be OK too.

Young people want to absorb everything regardless and work harder. I used to work this way, but now I can see the goal, where I am headed, and I don't do that any more. I think about how I will do my work. Many people think about early retirement, but it is not that simple. There is an economic issue - if I didn't have my income, that would be difficult, because I receive a certain amount of money for my work. For the household budget, it is absolutely necessary to have my income. Now, it is exactly fifty-fifty, what my husband, a civil servant, earns and what I earn.

---How about your home life during the last ten years? Is there anything in particular you would like to discuss?

The children are difficult, though I desperately wanted to have children. Things don't always go the way I would want them to go. Maybe it is a time when they are especially difficult. Particularly since my elder son started going to senior high school, things have become very difficult.

I think high school kids today live the way we did in college. It also has to do with the fact that he entered a junior high school affiliated with a senior high school and a university and he has no need to prepare for an entrance exam. He can go to college, as long as he doesn't flunk. At least he has no part-time job. It is against the school policy [though many students do work part-time]. It is particularly difficult during the school vacation, because otherwise the school gives some restrictions and structure to his life.

My children give me a lot to worry about. I grew up in the countryside. Raising children in Tokyo, I see there are too many choices. For example, which school you want to put your kids in. I can deal with my problems, but not my children's. I think that is one of the reasons why I feel reluctant about taking the director exam. I feel like I have bigger issues, which concern my children, and I worry about them very much. For example, children do not always listen obediently to what a parent says and do what they want, which is really difficult. I wanted children so badly, and there is no one to blame, but I really do want my children to be independent sooner rather than later.

I get along with my husband very well. We respect each other's work. We seldom have different opinions. We respect each other and we have come this far protecting our own lifestyles. But lately, we clash. It is 100% about the children. I tend to act as the mediator between my children and my husband. It is very distressing. If it happens without any diversion, it turns into a very big fight. It is very difficult right now.

My husband is a local government employee. He rarely works overtime. That is the reason why we could continue this (both working and raising two children). If we had both worked in the private sector, it would have been extremely difficult. Because he can go home on time, he fed our children when I was on the late shift. His office is not far from home. I didn't think about hiring a babysitter or helper. We never had any assistance for housework. When I worked at weekends, he would cook lunch and feed the children.

My husband was very close to the children. An enthusiastic type, personality-wise, he tended to be more dedicated than me! So he would be too attentive. That is why things are so sad for him now. He does not understand why the children are rebelling excessively and why he is treated in this way, because he did so much for the children.

--- What do you think your husband would like to do in the future?

I don't know. We haven't discussed things specifically, but we will be in Tokyo and continue to work for the next ten years. He likes sports and has been involved in baseball clubs. I don't know what he is thinking, but I think he would like to continue work and spend his leisure time like that.

----How about you?

Me? So far I have been working and taking care of the children. So I would like to start something, a hobby or something I can continue to do, like counselling. I don't know whether that would be my work or I would volun-

teen. I have two days off every week and I have the desire to enrol for a course, but it is a practical problem whether I can do that. We have to allocate our time to events at children's school, for example.

These days, I am starting to lose energy and endurance physically. I come home and I just feel so worn out. It really feels different from ten years ago. So I am wondering how I will make the time.

I would like to go to the gym for my health. I used to play tennis at college. But I often do something for the baseball club where my son plays. The staff are all volunteers. We parents prepare lunch for them and the children, make sure the children are properly hydrated. I did have fun and I experienced many things, but those aspects of the baseball club are ending. My son is retiring from the team. So I think that has influenced me in wanting to start something new.

Because my sons are boys, it's just eating that parents have to be involved with. Food, clothing, and shelter. That is what connects us parents to the kids. That is why we have to feed them well, because otherwise the connection will be lost. That is how important I feel food is, so I pay special attention to our children's meals.

When I was at home, on holiday, I said to my younger son jokingly, "from today, I am on holiday too", as though I had quit my job, then my son said, "then Mom, you'd better find someplace new, fast" (laugh). So I don't think they expect or want me to be home. Maybe they're not at that age any more, but for me to be working is normal. I think my children understand the financial aspect.

--- When they were younger, did they ever voice envy of their friends' mothers who stayed at home?

Our children did not say it explicitly, but they said they were surprised. They were surprised that their friend's mother was home, because they didn't know that some mothers stay at home.

I do think they were lonely [because I was not at home]. I remember, my younger son said, he doesn't like it, he doesn't want to do the same. When he has a family, he doesn't want his wife, his partner to work and leave the children in daycare, and when they come home, there is no one home.

When he said that, I told him, then he would have to work hard to cover for that. He would have to feed the family. And it would depend on what his partner thinks. I asked him what he would do if she wanted to work. He said in that case he would acknowledge her wishes and let her work.

--- Have you ever told him that since you have the income of two people, there were financial advantages?

Yes. But my husband is a civil servant, so his income is lower than those who work in the private sector and have wives who do not have to work. So I don't think my children have the impression that we have an especially higher income than other households. I did not want to say that we were affluent. I would rather want them to understand that we could not manage if it weren't for the double income. We aren't working just for money. In reality, if we both had not worked, we could not have sent our kids to private school. The children are beginning to understand that.

-----Eventually, your children will finish school, grow up and leave home, become independent. How do you and your husband plan on spending your time? This relates to what we talked about before.

I don't have a specific vision yet.

--- For now, you see yourself still involved with the children?

Yes, I believe they will still be dependent. They will probably go to college in Tokyo. I would like them to commute from our house. Their lifestyle may change a little, but they will continue to live at home for another seven years. So by the time my children are independent and living on their own, we will be close to retirement. That's why I think things will remain the same.

--- How is your parents' health? Do they need care?

Not yet. My father died before my sons were born. My mother is in good health and lives with my brother in C prefecture. My husband's parents are also healthy. They live in D prefecture on the same plot of land as my husband's brother and his family. I hear about people starting to have to care for their parents, but fortunately I haven't yet.

--- So you mean there is no likelihood of a direct factor contributing to a change in your lifestyle in some way?

That is correct. I don't think we will move, or anything like that, for some time to come.

-- *You will be 48 this year. You are still young, but you spoke of a drop in your energy levels little by little. As you continue to work, are there things you do or try to bear in mind to retain your beauty and health? Or any concerns you may have?*

That is something I really think about in terms of physical energy. I can't lose weight as easily any more. I really feel I need to exercise and if I do, I know that it will be a good emotional release. I have those hopes and expectations. So I do feel that I want to start something. In terms of beauty, I don't really do anything.

-- *Do you take care of your health? Try not to get ill?*

Yes. We have health checks regularly at work. I have yet to get a complete medical checkup.

--- *In the last ten years, did you have a major illness?*

I did not get sick once. Nor did anyone in my family. We were lucky.

--- *Are there any recent graduates from N University working at Y Department store?*

Not recently. I am wondering why, but in the last few years, there have not been any graduates from N University. It feels a little disappointing.

---- *It's a good environment for women to work in, right? The childcare shift system is amazing.*

Is that so? I feel that it is a difficult place to work. Things are OK, while you are on the childcare shift, but the store is open until 8 p.m.. You also have to work weekends. I think it is difficult for women to work.

--- *But you have been working there for twenty-six years¹⁸.*

I have been continuing to work, but I think I was lucky and I ended up here this long. I really do wonder if department stores provide an ideal work environment for women. There must be other better places.

--- *Is there a problem with work hours?*

Yes, difficulty with the working hours. I think there is no way to shorten the working hours.

I think the actual content of the work is very suited to women. I think being a civil servant is good too. What do you think? I also think it is a big plus if you have proper qualifications. I think I should have studied more specialized fields. I wonder what would have happened, if I had gone into social work. It's a different era now. When I graduated, that would have been difficult in terms of the type of job, if I did not have a certain level of ambition and aspirations. If I were able to use my knowledge now and my life experiences, I would consider social work. Would I be able to do that now? Could I not? I wonder. If they provide this kind of information at college, I would be interested in social work, including volunteering.

My supervisor at the university was Professor S, who had a wider interpretation of practical work. Other professors tended to be very technical in their seminars. On a separate note, I would have liked to specialize my expertise and get qualifications. When we were at university, we could get employed just by the name of the university we graduated from. I think students today are more specialized and more active and creative in their job hunting.

On the other hand, if you enter a private company that does not require a specialized field, it does not matter which company you go to.

--- *In future, rather than trying to get promoted or be on the management side, you said you would like to continue to work until retirement. At the same time, you would like to pursue other interests outside work. Some kind of volunteering perhaps. Do you think the fact that you majored in social welfare had an impact on your decisions?*

Yes, I feel I will end up going in that direction. I don't know if it's because I studied it, but when I think of a different field, welfare is the only area I think of. I would also like to support women. I want to help women who are working. Those are the things I am interested in.

---- *When did those thoughts begin to cross your mind?*

¹⁸ It is really over 25 years, but this is what the original transcript says.

Until I started working fulltime again, I was concerned with how to raise my children and keep working at my job. I was busy doing that. Once I was fulltime again, the work itself started in earnest. Working under those conditions, I started to think in that way. Regarding the welfare area, I should have done more. I have been wondering if there might have been a different path.

--- So, your work hours became longer. Was that one of the main reasons your attitude changed?

Yes. Also, at the self-satisfaction level, there is a desire to work and in some way remain satisfied in yourself and have others acknowledge you and your existence. However, in a large organization, you can of course desire such things, but I don't know.

Our work is valued by position. The salarymen try to climb to the top of the pyramid. They receive recognition by moving up the corporate ladder, not the content of the work. That makes me feel a sense of desolation.

We now live in a competitive society. They told us women, we can join in the competition, but we can't even get in the ring. We are disadvantaged. There is the sense that we can't quite beat the competition. I really feel like that. Then I feel that for women, it is probably a good strategy to have some expertise and use it as a weapon in order to survive and stick to one's path. I envision this, rather than competing with men with nothing.

But for me, I wanted both children and a career. That has always been my desire from the beginning. Because of this, I might not survive the competition, but I feel I must be satisfied with this, trying to have both and I must and would like to continue in this way.

---- Maybe this is going back to the director exam you talked about. Every year you are asked whether you take the exam.

Yes. I end up feeling like it is impossible [to pass]. And we know who passes and who fails. Some men decide not to take the exam any more after they have failed several times. I do think a lot about my decision. I realize it is important to work and keep morale high, even if you decide not to take the exam.

----- The final director exam has a very high competition rate. After that, no more tests?

That's right. That's where competition begins. Not all who passed can become store managers and then directors. Many receive that salary, but work on the sales floor. If you are back to working in sales, you will be placed in a position with a lot of responsibility. So I don't know if that is good or bad. There is a lot to think about for people in that situation. So in reality, once I have come this far, I am at a point where it is not just about whether the job is interesting or not. I see the composition of the organization.

--- However, you do not have any feelings of wanting to leave this organization?

That's right. I don't feel like leaving the organization. I like Y Department Store. And considering my situation so far, I am satisfied with the idea of continuing to work. Remain like this, not leaving, continue to think about this and that.

--- Looking back on the last ten years, what is the thing that has changed most for you?

I wonder what. If I say, I am still 47, but I feel, I sense the difficulty of living, as I get older (laugh). If I say that, people older than me will tell me I haven't seen anything yet. But ten years ago,I didn't have any deep worries, about parenting or about work. I was looking toward the future. I was looking forward to working and parenting. There was a proper policy in place, and I did not feel any daily stress and I felt fulfilled. Ten years on, I have a lot of mundane thoughts, not as serious as worries, but I do feel there are a lot of problems. Having begun to understand a lot of things I did not know before, I cannot get by free from care. To be honest, I was more light-hearted back then. I am now wearier than before. I feel the difficulty of living [more and more], as I get older.

Understanding a “Blocked Modernisation”. Interpretive notes on the second interview of Ms. K

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Introduction

I definitely missed the first part of the interview – the presentation of the family of origin, the development of educational aspirations in up-climbing Japanese lower middle classes from rural areas. It might have been a dramatic symbol of the particular modernisation of Japanese society in the mid of last century, the subtle changing of traditional family ties, the relatively slow modernisation of gender relationship and the ongoing gendered working careers. Nonetheless, the follow-up interview gives a lot of implicit indications, hidden traces so-to-speak which help to understand what is actually going on.

So, what I try to do is first a relatively superficial interpretive reconstruction of the second interview (1), including a focused reduction of the complexity of available information. Secondly, a ‘post-Weberian’ explanation of the background dynamics of the life story (2) using some ideas of grand theories especially some Habermasian stuff. And by the end of the day, I suggest a conclusion (3).

1. A gendered individual modernisation

Mrs. K’s start into her second interview is the issue of **work**. Even though she marks the *‘last year of child care shift’* it is not the children’s situation which touches her but the fact that *‘after six years, [she] worked full hours again’*.

The concrete work – inside and outside a hotel business, concentrated first on wedding affairs later on funeral related activities – is far away from being connected with her own fantasies, ideas and needs. She just decided *‘to work full time’*. *‘My boss said that he was considering putting me in charge of the wedding salon...’* Phrases like this are repeated in variations: *‘I was then put in charge of the funeral related business ... I was put in charge of training ... I ended up becoming a manager.’*

Mrs. K seems not to be a person of her own. Even if she gets a career in a certain sense, she dramatically depends on the strict regulations of her bosses. This fact becomes extremely clear when she describes the shift system. *‘Then, when it’s the late shift, I finish at 8 pm. So I don’t get home until a little before 9 pm. That meant, it was impossible to have dinner with my family ... When I was on the late shift, I couldn’t cook dinner, and I couldn’t eat with my family ... On top of that, even on the late shift, I couldn’t sleep in ... it was really tough on my body’*.

In a particular way, Mrs. K describes a situation of being apart – apart from her family, apart from a self chosen time table, even apart from her own body. She mentions a biographical feeling of being alienated in the classical Marxian sense. However, the working situation changed. She got used to train sales people (again: **she was put** in charge of training) – an activity which finishes at 6.20 pm.

Nevertheless, the time stress continues at a higher level. The subtle expectation of the company to get her at a directory post is accompanied by ambivalent feelings on her side: *‘Having worked for 25 years, as long as I don’t have a strong desire or determination, I would not ask to be put in specific positions because then I would be held responsible for the outcome. I feel, I would rather work at the position my company desires me in.’*

At a first glance this quotation seems to show that Mrs. K refuses responsibility and puts herself in a subaltern position definitely determined by her company. However, following considerations within

the interview don't strengthen this interpretation. The long passages on the annual directory exam, on the one side her distance (*'If it didn't come around, I would have been happy, my feelings were that I didn't want to take it, I didn't want to study for it. It came to me, so I took it and I failed.'*) but on the other side her ambivalence (*'So people who are going to take the exam, they are working very hard, and when I see people like them around me, I feel a little bit sad that I turned my back on that, I don't have any regrets, but I do have mixed feelings about it. So comparing myself now to myself ten years ago, I had just working full time again, so I had strong feelings about working hard at my job again, those feelings were stronger.'*) – both distance and ambivalence show that she is not really clear about her 'inner' valuation of work.

Nonetheless, Mrs. K's working experiences – taking more than three quarters of her second interview – are, apart from all her *'mixed feelings'*, the distinct basis of her individual modernisation. It is the fundament of her very own hidden interest in further training – for instance in counselling affairs. It is the background of her plausible critique on profit oriented working areas instead of welfare oriented jobs. She is thinking of a possible future as a social worker. If you so wish: the fact that she works for 25 years now is her **'symbolic capital' to create possible alternatives**.

However, this individual modernisation is strictly limited by a Japanese gender role. Mrs. K is a wife and a mother of two boys. The interview documents ('in between the lines', so to speak) that homework, cooking and cleaning remain to be her duties. Beyond the stressing shift work, she's supposed to manage the household and – more or less – the education of her boys. Her husband may be quite a good example (compared with the Japanese average), he is able to fry the pre-cooked meals in the shift-evenings. But he is doing his work and arranging his leisure preferences after work – apart from the stress she has to compensate. Of course, he takes the boys sometimes with him to sport events or to their own sport activities. But since they cause difficulties, it is again the mother who has to mediate the conflicts.

Mrs. K is somewhat like a **'double worker'**. She is a qualified manager, but she remains to be a housewife in a traditional Japanese sense. She is remarkably touched by her son's opinion that his wife-to-be should not work rather than being at home expecting husband and children instead.

Nonetheless, for Mrs. K it seems to be irreversible that she works and that she will continue working in the future. Her own culture, however, is not yet prepared to guarantee this modern way of female living. So we are confronted with a gendered – and that means in fact – a **'blocked modernisation'** which is not that far away from European social reality (before the feminist movement).

2. Crises symptoms of modern Japanese lifeworlds?

If we take another level of looking to the facts given explicitly or even implicitly in the interview, we may distinguish three general levels of orientation (using a distinction of the Parsonian theoretical framework which has been adopted by Habermas in his master piece *"Theory of Communicative Action"*), namely **culture**, **society** and **personality**.

To apply this idea to concrete social reality, to link the structural dimension to the dimension of distinct action, we need a concept of 'intra-action environments' (a suggestion which I take from Jeffrey Alexander), that express the general levels from the perspective of the actor: culture could be complemented by the taken for granted certainties of our **lifeworld**; society will be strongly experienced through the social milieu we live in; personality is expressed by the biography we are identifying as being ours.

Having explained this, we are able to create a relative simple but obviously not so stupid tool or model how to understand the crises of late modern societies theoretically (possibly including the contemporary Japanese society).

Fig. 1: *Symptoms of crises in '(post)modernised' societies*

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| general levels of orien- tation | culture | society | personality | general levels of orien- tation |
| intra- action en- vironments | | | | re- sources |
| lifeworld | <i>erosion of traditional lifeworlds</i> | 'colonialisa- tion' of everyday life settings | loss of 'trust' | tradition |
| social milieu | irritation of collective orientation | <i>breakdown of classical mi- lieus</i> | feeling apart (<i>'habitus dis- location'</i>) | solidarity |
| biography | lack of images | loss of motivation | <i>disappearing of 'normal' life course scripts</i> | identity |

taken from Alheit 1994, p. 187, slightly according to Habermas 1981, II, p. 215

I would now like to apply this tool to the interview text – taking into account that it is not European and possibly rather different. However, capitalist modernisation has – besides an obvious cultural contextualisation – some **universal** aspects.

If we take first the core areas where the general levels and the fitting intra-action environments cross each other, we receive somewhat like a critical prognosis of societal changes during the process of (post)modernisation: we are facing the trend of an **erosion of traditional lifeworlds**. In the case of Mrs. K there are two strong indicators indeed which underline the mentioned trend: there is the moving from a traditional rural area to the capital, a real metropolitan city, and there is a remarkable shrinking of conventional family ties.

If we look at the next core area, we find the prognosis of a **breakdown of classical milieus**. I am unfortunately not familiar enough with the social structure of Japan, however, just taking the up-climber career of Mrs. K we may imagine what kind of distance must be experienced between her parents' and grandparents' situation and her own urban family. Classical milieus may not disappear in a radical sense but they are obviously in a shrinking process.

The third core area prognoses the **disappearing of 'normal' life course scripts**. We can definitely ratify this trend in Mrs. K's life story: the contradictory planning strategy of her working career and the irritation of the very conventional gender role give us an impression that (post)modern individuals – in Japan as well as in the Western capitalist societies – have to create very particular and very personal scripts of their own lives.

And even less important trends like the **'colonialisation' of everyday life settings** can be found in the interview. The shift problems show distinctly how the capitalist company determines time and life of its clerks. The **loss of motivation** trend is touched as well when Mrs. K compares her early and her latter engagement within the work place. And there is even a hidden **loss of trust** aspect when she reflects her relationship to the husband who is planning his time independently without any careful interest concerning her own future plans. There is obviously a hidden communication lack.

So we face a situation in the modern urban Japanese society which is not that far away from developments in Western Europe or North America, causing diagnoses like the presented Habermasian approach suggests. But there remains a remarkable difference which I will stress in my conclusions.

3. Conclusions

Mrs. K often emphasises in her interview that she is thankful, even lucky about her working life. On the other side, she feels uneasy, ambivalent, and full of ambiguities when she describes her working career or her family situation. Both dimensions within her life seem to be presented honestly, both are identical parts of her cultural existence. However, this means that her biographical knowledge is somewhat **'split off'** in two different parts which are not really linked together: She does not 'act as...' – she **is** a conventional Japanese mother like her own mother was. She does not 'act as...' – she **is** a qualified manager in a gendered Japanese labour market. But there is **no "bridge"** between the two aspects of her existence. She can identify *'mixed feelings'* about her situation, but she is unable to reflect the contradictions in her situation and to draw consequences.

Of course, this is not a question of intelligence or competence. **It is based in the cultural context of contemporary Japan**. Obviously there is no strong and relevant public discourse to address those con-

traditions, apparently a feminist or trade union strategy to improve women's working and life situation is actually missing. Work-life-balance discussions may be just at the beginning.

So for individuals like Mrs. K there is a lack of images, practices, performances to understand, express and perhaps change her own life. Her personal experiences are full of potential changing strategies but it needs a public discourse to lend her words and ideas just to find her own way, to **"bridge" the gap** between feelings of being lucky and emotions of shame not to reach a pragmatic synthesis between a successful family life and a recognised working existence.

Worms in the Apple: Mrs K confronts home/work tensions

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Abstract

At first glance this carefully crafted life story apparently focuses on the narrower window of Mrs. K's working conditions at the somewhat dreary sounding large department store chain in a Japanese city. It is the second of two interviews in this study, taking up the story some 10 years after the first interview in 1996. It opens unremarkably enough, but then, with the gentle digging by the (fine) interviewer the story grows, develops and deepens.

I began to think about developing my analysis from Czarniawksa's (2004) own building on the 'hermeneutic triad' of explication, explanation and exploration or from Riessman's (2001) efforts to analyze narratives as performance. Both these approaches, and many others, offer complex and nuanced interpretations of narrative material, but neither approach captured what I was hearing as Mrs. K spoke and was listened to. Instead, I thought of an onion, with the layers gradually peeling back towards its core. It is through this metaphor that I will explore what Mrs. K says about her experiences of working in a particular institutional framework, how she has negotiated the relationship between her work and her family and how that, in turn, has led her to a critique of capitalist society and the injuries it inflicts on women as they try to conform to conflicting demands on their commitment.

Introduction

RC 38 Biography and Society, has a long and respected tradition of asking a number of narrative scholars to interpret or comment on the same interview transcripts. These transcripts are not from their own research and they are provided with minimum contextual or other information. They are 'on their own' with one intermediate step in narrative research – the transcript of an interview. I first took part in this fascinating and enlightening process by interrogating a transcript of an interview with a male Russian émigré to Germany, called "P". In that presentation I focused on the difficulties of interpreting across language translations, the layers of interpretation involved in recording, transcribing and laying out such a transcript and the multiplicity of agendas among the participants (including the other members of "P"s family). In doing so, I tried to uncover some of the many unacknowledged ways in which

we, as researchers, 'construct' the interview as well as its interpretation, and the active way in which a reader – any reader 'reads' biographical material.

This transcript is somewhat different. Even on my first reading of it, I realized something of its complexity and richness and decided that I would try to understand it using some of the methods laid out by other biographical scholars that have helped me with my own transcripts. Like mine, this was a 'focused' life story – not one that was entirely open, unprompted and uninterrupted – but more like a cross between a standard qualitative interview and a life story interview. For this reason, I did not find the 'pure narrative' analyses so ably developed and described by the likes of Wengraf (2001) or Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, Zilber (1998). While many of these rest on the idea of the life as a story and develop sophisticated ways of understanding the ways in which a biographical life follows narrative patterns, they do all depend on a complete 'life', beginning with birth and ending with the date of the interview(s). In this case, the time scale is a mere 10 years, from the date of the last interview, with the salient features of her life remaining much the same (similar job, same company, same family, albeit with older children, same home). While the primary focus on work acts as a jumping off point to other, wider issues, it is, nevertheless, a pre-determined topic, rather than a pure account of an entire life. Instead of looking for the pure narrative within this interview, I looked, instead, for ways of approaching more proximate bodies of interview material.

I began by referring back to Czarniawska's (2004) building on the 'hermeneutic triad' of explication, explanation and exploration. Read simply these can be 'stages of analysis' from a relatively simple account of what was said through more sophisticated (and possibly dangerous) forms of analysis. In a sense, what we are asked to do in these sessions is a version of the second stage – an explanation based in our own reading and the theories we adduce to support it. But Czarniawska leads on from this methodology to explore, from the perspective of post structuralist literature studies the 'morphology of a fairytale'. After describing a number of highly technical way of analyzing such stories she says 'a story grammar is the analysis of the text, a search for intntio operis, or a semiotic strategy; a story schema is the repertoire of plots typical for a certain interpretative community' (2004:62) There are ways in which her approach is very similar to other attempts, such as that by Riessman, to discover the structure of the interview as a story or a drama. But I could not discover a 'story' in Ms K's interview. What was going on seemed more subtle than this, more circular, more quietly developed. I needed not to force any kind of dramatic or story telling analysis on this text.

Even so, I went back to Riessman's efforts to construct interviews as dramas. Her examination of an interview with 'Gita' arose not only from 'the narrative turn' in analysis, but more particularly from her observation that participants often resist our attempts to focus their recollections on topics that interest us, and instead tell 'long stories' that do not, on the surface have much to do with the question we asked. Ms K is much too diffident to do this as overtly as 'Gita' does, but as the interview develops it encompasses much more than the topic of the careers of the graduates of N university. However, Riessman takes large segments of continuous talk by Gita and both as performance and as dramatic script. While the focus on 'turning points' is useful (and quite common in narrative analysis), Ms K was not the same kind of person, and her interview required a quieter form of interpretation, a different way of listening.

Hollway and Jefferson's interesting uncovering of the 'defended subject' was useful in this case precisely because it was clear from the outset that Ms K was a sophisticated 'defender' of her inner thoughts and feelings. Trying to pick apart some of the defences and find what lay behind them was

especially useful in the earlier more 'defended' parts of the interview – and later, as Ms K grew in confidence and hence openness, it helped me to pay attention to the signs that the Ms K in the later parts of the interview had allowed TK, (and then us) to see past at least some of her defences. We can never know, of course, which part of the interview represents the 'real' Ms K, if any do – and it may indeed be that the earlier more 'defended' parts represent Ms K just as much as the later, more 'progressive' analysis does. But certainly 'anxiety' in both the lay and the Kleinian senses is apparent in much of Ms K's account and Hollway and Jefferson help us to identify it and attempt to understand it.

In the end, I decided to simply read and react to the interview and to record, as faithfully as possible, the subtle way in which both the interview develops and my own reading changes in response. This account could be organized as 'chapters' but it seems to me that it develops in a much more complex way. I prefer to think of it as a series of 'layers' each taking us deeper into Ms K's thinking and analysis of her experience, but also looping back in a series of spirals as she re-visits her earlier comments and introduces other aspects of her experience that might change both her and our view of them. Denzin (1989) long ago pointed to the 'hermeneutic circle' and the endless interpretative process. Maybe we have become more used to this conundrum over the years and learned to live with it. Certainly, I offer this interpretation as just on small segment of the hermeneutic circle of interpretation of this one interview.

Ms K: The interview:

The transcript we have before us 'Life Story Interview of Ms K' is, in many ways less complex than that of "P". We are provided with some details about where and when the interview took place (August 22nd 2006 in Tokyo), and the fact that it is the second in a series of interviews with this person. We also know that the project for which the interview was conducted focused on 'Life/Consciousness and University Evaluation after Graduation' and that the participants were women who graduated 1978-1981, and who had lived and worked since then in the Tokyo area. So we know that the participants are women, that they work, that they are university graduates, that they are around 50 at the time of the interview and that the context is large urban and Japanese. It's a lot to go on. We also learn that the same interviewer (Tazuko Kobayashi¹⁹) interviewed Ms K nine years before this one, in spring 1997. We are also told that the intention of the interview is to talk about events in Ms K's life since the first interview and her circumstances and daily life now. I was uncertain what Life/Consciousness was and it seemed to sit awkwardly with the second, more practical focus of the study. We soon also learn that Ms K has worked for the same large department store in various capacities since she graduated, that she is married and has two sons and that she is 47 years old.

So I was feeling well prepared when I sat down to read this transcript for the first time. I had a picture in my mind of two Japanese women, who already knew each other slightly (from the first interview), that the interviewer was highly professional (from the way in which the transcript was set up) and the participant educated and thus probably articulate. I was not disappointed on either count.

¹⁹ With Mikiko Muramatsu, although the second interviewer appears to take no active part in the interview

The 'ideal' employee, wife and mother: the rosy apple

As the interview went through the early stages I found myself disconcerted – it all seemed rather boring and low key. Ms K seemed so content with what seemed to be a humdrum job and heavy domestic responsibilities. TK extracted lots of detail from Ms K about her job and the arrangements for her hours, and especially the way the shift system accommodated (after a fashion) her child care needs.

Ten years before, at the time of the first interview, when Ms K's children (both boys) were in Kindergarten and Grade 2, she was working 'the child-care shift', which entailed shorter hours, finishing at 3.30pm. This particular concession to working mothers lasts until the youngest child enters elementary school. At that point Ms K went back to full time work and her considerate boss offered her the position in charge of the wedding salon at B Hotel, where she had been working before. Ms K's response is that of the ideal employee,

"Before I was to start full time again, my boss asked me how I wish to continue working? So I told him that from now, I am going to work full time, so I would like to work hard, to make up for the times I couldn't work."

She is also rapturous about the hotel in which the salon was located.

"I really felt that B Hotel offers the best hospitality and service of any hotel in Japan. "

One advantage of the location of the salon in the hotel was that it closed at 6pm thus enabling Ms K to get home earlier than at the department store, which closed at 8pm. But Ms K was soon moved back to the main department store and, ironically, into the funeral related business, although still dealing with gifts presented on certain occasions. It is at this point, para 35, that we begin to get a whisper about the difficulties of long hours and shift work for women. The department store shifts were 9:50-6:50 and 11:10-8:00. These are long hours, especially for a mother with young children, which is why Ms K was grateful to be let off at 6:10 when she worked at the hotel, so that she could be back home by 7:00, although not to rest. "I could have dinner together with my family, even though it would be a little bit late. It was an easy routine, comparatively."

This issue of scrambling to combine long working hours with domestic responsibilities moves to centre stage in the next part of the interview. The interview is lightly, and skillfully, guided but essentially while Ms K provides plenty of detail about her work over the years, she chooses to focus on particular issues as is the case with the discussion about hours of work and shifts. Although, as we shall see later, we are only getting one version in this part of the interview.

"K: So for the first time, I experienced the late and early shifts, and that was extremely hard.

TK: The late shift. Because you get home late?

K: Yes. Even with the early shift, you cannot go home early. The early shift ends at 6:50pm, so it's already later than my previous work hours. Then, when it's the late shift, I finish at 8pm. So I don't get home until a little before 9pm. That meant it was impossible to have dinner with my family. We would take weekly turns on the late and early shifts, so on the late shift week, my husband would feed the children every night. I would prepare the meal in the morning, so that my husband could just fry or bake it, and have my husband prepare one dish on his own. I would prepare things so that it would be easy to understand what to do with them. When I was on the late shift, I couldn't cook dinner, and I couldn't eat with my family. That continued for a year."

In fact, it gets worse.

“K: On top of that, even on the late shift, I couldn’t sleep in. I had to feed the children breakfast and send them off to school. So it didn’t matter if I was on the late or early shift, I would have to wake up at the same time every morning. In the late shift mornings, I would then have time to clean the house. Even use the vacuum cleaner. Mornings on the early shift, there would be no time for that. So I would vacuum, and go to work, and so in that way, it was really tough on my body.”

Ms K does not complain about this impossible routine and the demands from her sons, her husband and her employer but endures it until there is a change in structure at the department store and she becomes a trainer and able to finish work at 6:20 pm 'which I'm very grateful for'.

At this point (para 90) that I am aware of my growing anger that Ms K puts up with these demands, not only without protest, but being 'grateful' for the least relief. KT probes gently about Ms K feeling 'lucky' in her shift and she replies: "Yes, I think I was very lucky." Although, as she explains, there is cycle of three years, after which the shift would not be as favourable. But "if we could somehow get through three more years until my younger son graduates from high school, once the children are in college, I think our living styles will change..."

Ms K has never challenged the shift system or the work she has done.

"I've never talked about my work hours, nor voiced what kind of work I wanted to do. Having worked for twenty-five years, as long as I don't have a strong desire or determination I would not ask to be put in specific positions because then I would be held responsible for the outcome. I feel I would rather work at the position my company desires me in.

My socialist suspicions about this ideal employee were tickled. It's such a rosy apple; surely there is a worm somewhere! Is my response of growing anger at this point appropriate? Remember that I am a reader - not, in this case, a researcher. My job is to document **how** I read and emotional responses are part of this interactive process of narrative research. I also have to consider my cultural background. Ms K (and her interviewer) are Japanese; I am Canadian with a very different history of political activism and expectations of social and workplace justice. How can I inflict these responses on the agreeable Ms K? I will come to why I think this response is justified when I have explored a little more of Ms K's interview.

Career ambitions and competition: Cracks in the façade.

Of course, the interview is not as closely organized as my analysis suggests. As with all narrative interviews, the conversation moves back and forth between topics, often returning to the same topic under slightly different guise. But the central section of this interview is largely focused on the issue of the promotion examinations and career hierarchy practiced by this department store.

We begin with Ms K still singing the praises of the company “Y has a sound examination system”. While she was on the child-care shift her “advancement was on hold”, but since then she has been under pressure to participate in the competitive exams that determine advancement. Everyone is expected to sit the relevant advancement exams. In Ms K's case, this was the director exam for which she qualified the year before. For the very first time, we hear a different voice, “I didn't want to take it”. She took it anyway, and failed, and the following paragraph represents a turning point in the inter-

view, and opening in the façade. The tone of Ms K's speech is quite different and another side of her appears.

"When it came, I went home and said, "the exam, it's here" and my son asked, "Mom, if you pass the exam, are you going to be able to come home?" Until then, they were very encouraging, when I was taking the test for the section chief they were cheering me on, but once I came to the division chief exam, their attitude became, "maybe you don't have to take it anymore". The way I said it too, that "it's here" as though it caught up with me when I was trying to avoid it, maybe that affected how they felt. My husband said, "maybe it's ok if you don't take it, things are fine the way they are". So my family's attitude changed, with my children worrying that I wouldn't be able to come home, that I would no longer be just working the early or late shift."

In the following paragraphs we also learn that promotion would mean no longer having the protection of the labour union; of not having a time card, but of working longer hours with much more responsibility. The director exam has faced Ms K with the contradictions of her life. She cannot move up the ladder as expected and still fulfill what she sees as her duties to her family. On the other hand, if she does not move up the ladder, then she is failing the expectations of the company. She does not, in any case, feel confident or competent to either pass the exams and interviews or to carry out the work that would then be expected of her. Her dilemmas overwhelm her "I kept thinking, what should I do? What should I do". As the exam comes up every year, Ms K has to make the decision whether or not to attempt it. It is heart wrenching to hear Ms K struggle with the impossible choices she faces, but we also see her coming to a new sense of who she really is and what her limitations are.

"Every year, we are asked, 'will you take the challenge?' This will continue as long as I stay, until aged sixty. So every time, we say we will, or will not take the challenge, but as far as I can tell you have to at least take it once. It's ok as long as you keep trying, it's ok if you fail every time, as long as you are making an attempt. But to not bother trying, that is quite the decision.

So it came to me again this year, so, I'm wondering what to do. I have not made a decision, but if I'm going to try for it again, I have to start preparing around the time the new year starts. I couldn't prepare. My feelings were not ready so I did not study, so I was asked whether I would take the challenge in June of this year, and I said I would not. I would like to continue working hard at my job, and continue strengthening my expertise in service sales, but in terms of trying to move up into management positions, and taking exams to do so, I've decided not to continue trying. Once I've decided on that, I've discovered a new sense of sadness, that I can see the future. I don't think I was ever too concerned with being upwardly mobile, but I see now, that I was aspiring, that I've been working with the desire to do things more like this and what not."

From experience to analysis: It's not just me

Ms K is a smart, observant woman. In the next sections she provides detailed figures that make it clear that women, especially women with children, are at a severe disadvantage in the company's system. Her cohort was the first group of female college graduates to be hired by open recruitment. None of the women hired the previous year had stayed 'they all quit', and of her cohort there are five women left. The two without children have got promotion to director, the three with children have not. Ms K goes on to present detailed figures that show how very competitive the exams are, with one in ten

passing and how few of these are women (2 out of 50 nationwide), and how even fewer are women with children. As Ms K puts it "It's all these active, gung ho career men that take these exams." Systemic sexism is still very alive in this world, and women are no more able to combine career with children than they ever were and Ms K is in no doubt about the structural nature of her problems.

The whole discussion has caused Ms K to think much more radically about her own life. Not only is this the moment when she begins to voice her dissatisfaction with the company and with the system it operates on, but it is also the moment when she steps back from her own life and where she is in it - as her children approach adulthood - and the opportunities that might provide - "I think it would be nice to start something new." It then transpires that Ms K, like many women, took a number of decisions when she was at university that have limited her. At college, she studied social welfare, and this was her real interest but "I wasn't confident could do social work, so I chose a department store", but now "I'm beginning to think that something else, something that helps people more..." As someone who went into school teaching after graduation because my Dean told me that teaching would fit so well with having children, I know exactly how Ms K felt and why she sold herself short as she clearly did.

Meanwhile, on the home front: the worm in the apple

TK now gently guides the interview towards a discussion of what has been happening on the home front over the last ten years as the children have grown from small children to teenage boys. First, it is clear that Ms K works to support her family. Her salary is equal to that of her civil servant husband, although he works much easier hours. She has no doubt that it is their double income that has enabled them to send their sons to private schools and maintain a middle class life style. In other words, her job is "absolutely necessary. Without a doubt." Having established that, TK asks about home life and immediately Ms K says "The children are very difficult." As when the façade cracked when she discussed the exams, the difficulty of controlling her teenage boys allows Ms K to assert stronger opinions and voice more emotion. She discusses in detail what the difficulties are, and how the fact that her elder boy is in a college affiliated high school and therefore does not have to worry (as much) about college entrance. With both parents working it is hard to control a wayward teen and while the older boy causes the most problems "my children give me a lot to worry about", especially in Tokyo, where there are "so many choices." "I really feel that raising children is very difficult. You want children, I really wanted children very much, so there is no one to blame." It is another contradiction, another dilemma in her life.

Her relationship with her husband is also beginning to crack, as the disagreements, always about the children, increase.

"So, it tends to be me, acting as the mediator, going between my children and my husband. And that has become distressing. But if it just happens without the diversion, it turns into a very big fight. So that is very difficult right now." In many ways, Mr. K's problems are recognizable and stem from his active participation in parenting.

"My husband was very close, and very enthusiastic, and personality-wise, he tends to be rather dedicated, more so than me! So he would meddle, be almost too attentive, and that is why things are so sad now for my husband, because he was so close. Because of this, the children are rebelling exces-

sively, and my husband doesn't understand why, he did so much for the children, but why he is being treated in this way."

It also becomes clear that both Ms K and her husband have been adding a third major role to their lives - participating in the sports activities of their sons. Ms K has very little vacation time - ten days off during spring vacation plus weekends and public holidays. As she points out,

"Then that means, even if I have eight days off in a month, three of those days are spent on baseball duty, and perhaps two more days are spent on my children's school events that I must go to. Then I'm hardly left with any days off that don't involve any obligations."

And the obligations are considerable: "Be at the field the entire day and prepare lunch. The staff, who are the captain, field manager, and coach, are all volunteers. We prepare lunch for them, and make sure the children are properly hydrated. If we have away games, people who can provide cars drive to the games, actually, just last week I finished my final duty. But I had work, on Saturday and Sunday, so I could only go on days I had my duty, but even then, I went to my son's baseball three times a month."

Furthermore, it is apparent that her sons are not the least appreciative of the sacrifices she has made. "I said to my younger son jokingly, "from today I'm on vacation too" as though I had quit my job, then my son said, "then Mom, you better find someplace new, fast." (laugh) So I don't think they expect or want me to be home."

This comment arose in the context of talking about the difficulties of child care. As far as I can make out both boys had been left alone at home from quite an early age. Ms K had certainly never had any assistance with child care or domestic work. It is another source of worry - that the children were lonely and felt neglected when she had to work long hours. While they appear to have taken the situation for granted, even expressing surprise when they went to houses where the stay at home mother was present, Ms K worries that her younger son "when he has a family, he doesn't want his wife, his partner to work and leave the children in daycare, and when they come home, there is no one home. Now that I think about it, he has said that he wouldn't like that."

Perhaps to compensate, Ms K puts a large amount of energy into feeding her family, partly because she sees it as the only way she can participate in their lives (apart from the sports). "Because they are boys, it's just eating, what parents have to be involved with. Food clothing and shelter. They have clothing and shelter, so eating. That is what connects us parents to the kids, I feel."

Life/Consciousness: more worm than apple

Ms K and TK have now been talking for more than an hour. Ms K has also worked through and expressed things that she may not have thought about so clearly before. As she returns to thinking about what she might do to improve her life, she also sharpens her analysis. TK goes back to check whether she really is as satisfied with her employer as first appeared, stressing, as Ms K did herself to begin with, the child-care shift system. Ms K replies "Is that so? I feel that after all, it is a difficult place to work" turning the question back to TK by saying "...but what do you think?" going on to point out that with the store opening for longer and longer hours it will be more difficult for women to work there. "I really do wonder if department stores provide an ideal work environment for women....there must be other places that are better. I may be saying that because I don't know better", recognizing that "there is no way that working hours would ever be shortened. It may be lengthened, but it will never be

shortened". This is a very different perspective than the happy worker, grateful employee of earlier in the interview, although Ms K still recognizes that the content of the job is "very suited to women."

But it is not as well suited to Ms K as social work would have been. While she continues to blame herself for not studying in more specialized areas and not pursuing her interest when she began her career, she now also blames the college for not providing more information. Ms K is not only drawn to social work for her own satisfaction but also because she now wants to support women, in particular "I want to help women that are working."

At the same time, Ms K is developing a much stronger critique not only of her own company but of the social, political and economic structure in which it is located. The following extract is long, but it provides a good view of how Ms K structures her thought, how the different parts of her life are intimately connected, and how she moves from her personal situation to a recognition of how society works against women, especially women as mothers.

"Until I started working full-time again, I was concerned with how to raise my children and keep working at my job. I was busy doing that, and once I was full-time again, the work itself became more full-fledged, and I worked under those conditions, and I started to think in that way. That's when I started to think, regarding the welfare area, I should have done more, I was wondering if there might have been a different path. Until then, I was just concerned with being able to continue, rather than the actual job content itself, I wanted to continue working at any rate. I was most concerned if I would be able to do that.

TK: So when your work hours became later, that was one of the bigger reasons your attitude changed?

K: Yes. I think that is a part of it. Also at the self-satisfaction level, there is a desire to work, and in some way remain satisfied in yourself, and have others acknowledge you, and your existence. However, in a large organization, you can of course desire such things, but I don't know. If that happens to be expertise or knowledge about a job or if it is contentment, appraisal from those around you, those types of things can be achieved in a different way. I feel that way. Our work in this day and age, is in some ways valued by position. The salary man tries to climb to the top of the pyramid. The salary man, it is that type of society for them, rather than the content of the work, they receive recognition by moving up the corporate ladder. That makes me feel a sense of desolation. We now live in a competitive society. Women are being told, we can join in the competition, but we can't even get in the ring, we are at a disadvantage, I mean, women who have the capability and strength, they compete and prevail, but there is the sense that we can't quite beat the competition, and we hit that wall of reality, I really feel like that. Then, I feel that as women work, in order to survive, to stick to one's path, it is probably a good strategy to have an expertise, to use that as a weapon. Rather than competing with men with nothing, I envision a way, and ideal situation that I think about is where we become experts in a certain field and use that as a weapon. But for me, wanting children and to also have a career, I wanted both, and that has always been my desire from the beginning. That is what I tell myself. I often do that. Because it is what I wanted, the reality that I might not be able to win the competition, the fact that I might not survive the competition, but what I desired, my purpose was not that, so I feel I must be satisfied with this, trying to have both, and I must continue in that manner, I would like to continue in this way, that is the way I feel."

So her increasingly sharp analysis is matched with a desire to participate and be active, and more significantly, to relate her own experience as a working mother to the problems of other working women.

Conclusion

As I read it, then, this interview opens with the mundane account of Ms K's various posts within the departments store, the 'child-care' shift system and her equally mundane and conformist responses to her employer and her working situation. Her account and her responses then become more complex and more critical as she uncovers her contradictory responses to the exam based promotion system in her company. In this section she uncovers her profoundly ambivalent views about her 'career' and its relationship to her domestic and mothering responsibilities. She also uncovers and documents the inherent bias against women, and especially mothers, in the company system and begins to critique the structural constraints within which gender is used and negotiated to disadvantage women. The next section connects and builds on these ideas when Ms K focuses more explicitly on the 'home' part of the home-work conundrum. Despite her obvious love for her family, Ms K peels back more and more layers of unhappiness as she describes the impossible tasks that face her and her disquiet at the way her husband and sons are responding to the situation. Finally empowered to re-visit her earlier preferences and ambitions, that lie in the area of social work, Ms K begins a serious re-think of how she wants to live the rest of her working life. At the same time, she builds a nuanced and critical evaluation of the society in which she lives, and especially of the way in which women's mothering roles are used to limit and constrain their options in the world of work. With that, comes a realization of just how deep the structures of capitalist society are and how necessary it is for women to work together to establish a measure of autonomy.

This is not an especially theoretical account of Ms K's transcript. It has not needed to be. As an interview it flows and develops. In this way it is more finely shaped than many other narrative interviews. It reflects in its structure and chronological order not only what happened in Ms K's life but the development of her thinking. I found a number of 'methods' by which I could 'read' Ms K's story – but none more powerful than the one provided by TK and Ms K themselves. The meaning of this interview arises from a reading by each reader (and mine is not the only one). I hope that I have provided enough of my own intellectual, political and emotional reaction to the text to show this next layer of interpretation – what I as a particular reader heard in this particular interview.

The excitement arises mostly in the way in which Ms K and her thoughts develop in the course of the interview and the way in which they are directly and perceptibly based on her experience and the ways in which she re-lives and re-interprets those experiences from her perspective in the present. Beginning with an account of a mundane work experience and a set of responses that I found alarmingly un-reflective and conformist, Ms K moves (gently guided by TK) to describing the interconnection between home and work and thus to a more mature understanding of the social and political structures that underpin her experience – and that of millions of other women in similar situations. The best image I can find for the way Ms K describes her thoughts and my reading of them is of peeling an onion. It is tough and tasteless on the outside, but as one peels the layers back one by one, more layers are revealed – each tastier and more colourful.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

Remembering, Identity, Discourse

On 4th and 5th of December 2009 in the Council Room of the Faculty of Social Sciences of ELTE University a conference with this title took place. The event was organised by professors of the Institute of Sociology: Mr. Peter Bodor, Ms Aniko Illes and Ms Maria Heller. The aim of the two days was to enhance the dialogue between the branches of social sciences dealing with remembering and identity. The organisers also intended to reveal the nature of the connection and the interaction between these three notions. In accordance with the aim of interdisciplinarity the lecturers were experts of different fields: history, literature, aesthetics and linguistics.

The sorting of the 22 presentations into different categories is quite challenging. Most of them were reviews of recent research results: for example projects about childhood remembrances (fx.: how a 2-3 year old child forms his/her ideas about him/herself, or how they recall stories).

Another group of the projects dealt with the question of Jewish or European identity of the Hungarian people. In two local communities the remembrance of the holocaust trauma has been examined; in one of these towns, in Kőszeg (a small Hungarian city at the western border, near Austria) a film was shot about the non-Jewish inhabitants of the town, who had witnessed the events of the tragic months in 1944. In these days local Jews had been deported and other transports of deported Jews arrived to the town due to the work-camp and ghetto situated here. It was very moving to see, how the witnesses dealt with these remembrances and how they faced (or did not face) their possible responsibility.

Another type of the speeches was rather theoretical: Mr Gábor Gyáni was talking about the relation of the collective memory to historiography. Ms Eva Kovacs gave a lecture on the history of memory researches, Ms Aniko Konya described the nature and features of flash memories, Ms Zsuzsa Hetényi discussed the name choices of Russian immigrant writers in the 1920's in Berlin. The linguist Mr Kontra was explaining about how the normative practice of the present Hungarian literature-teaching damages the collective Hungarian identity.

Mr. Nikosz Fokasz and his colleagues had followed the lifespan of sensational reports in the largest Hungarian newspapers since 2000. Ms. Julia Vajda and Mr. Peter Bodor revealed that our relation to Europe, i.e. our European identity is quite ambivalent. Ms Aniko Illes had examined the attitude of graphic artists towards their profession, Ms Maria Heller reported about an international comparative examination in which Spanish, French and Hungarian young people were asked to recall their personal memories, and these memory-particles had been later analysed and the differences had been detected.

In conclusion it can be said, that the themes of the presentations were coherent and they reflected on each other in their content, due to which the listeners could get a complex picture of the state of the remembrance and identity- researches in the field of sociology and in its neighbouring disciplines.

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'Creating Knowledge—A Theory-Building Workshop in Case-Reconstructive Research in the Social Sciences'²⁰

Conference, November 19th and 20th, 2010, at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences, Georg-August University of Göttingen, Germany (URL: <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/151614.html>).

'The issue of theory building is a constant accompaniment, requirement, and goal of many knowledge creators and scholars.' - as the organisers of the conference had stated in the call for papers already. As doctoral candidates²¹ of the Center of Methods in Social Sciences at the Georg-August University of Göttingen we had organised the international conference under the supervision and with the kind help of Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal and Dr. Nicole Witte. The aim was to enable a discussion amongst junior researchers and with two prominent representatives of two theory traditions about the issue of theory-building in case-reconstructive research. Our common starting point was a principle of case-reconstructive research: Generalisation is not based on frequency of occurrence or the criteria of allocation. Rather, the point is to elaborate the general features observed within the individual reconstructed case study and to compare cases contrastively.

In order to discuss the issue from different perspectives, we had chosen two popular sociological traditions which have – amongst others – theoretically and methodologically contributed to case-reconstructive research and to the interpretive paradigm. Firstly, the sociology of knowledge which, particularly in the tradition of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, is one of the main sources for the methodology of case-reconstructive research as well as for the concept of theoretical generalisation. It deals strongly with the question of creating knowledge. Secondly, figurational sociology whose process-oriented perspective and strong interconnectivity of empirical and theoretical work contribute in different ways to the issue of theory building. It was one of the challenges of the conference to discuss a fruitful combination of these two theoretical perspectives from a methodological point of view.

The conference attracted around 50 participants from different universities and countries. Many of them are linked by the fact that they are intensively involved with methods of data collection and analysis that follow in the tradition of interpretative social research. While conducting their empirical researches – particularly as a part of their dissertation projects – all of them sooner or later have found themselves confronted with the issue of generalisation and theory building.

On Friday afternoon, the conference opened with a plenary session featuring the key speakers PD Dr. Roswitha Breckner from Vienna (Austria) and Dr. Cas Wouters from Amsterdam/Utrecht (The Netherlands). The session took place in the historical surroundings of the "*Historische Sternwarte Göttingen*" (the Göttingen Observatory). The first key speaker, **Dr. Cas Wouters**, as a representative of figurational sociology, seemed to refer to the historical surroundings of the plenary session by presenting in his paper a socio-historical reconstruction of manners and human discipline over the last centuries. Currently, Cas Wouters is a researcher at the Utrecht University and affiliated to the Amsterdam School of Social Science Research. In particular, Cas Wouters' research is concentrated on processes of formalisation and informalisation, emotion regulation, dying and mourning, sexuality, and the emancipation of women and children from a perspective of figurational sociology – an outstanding reason to let the

²⁰ The authors want to thank Johannes Becker and Gabriele Rosenthal for their remarks on the conference report.

²¹ The doctoral candidates of the conference board are: Ina Alber, Johannes Becker, André Dingelstedt, Niklas Radenbach, Anna-Christin Ransiek, Viola Stephan, Agnieszka Zimowska.

conference be opened by his paper 'The Slippery Slope – Changing Balances of Power and Control'. In his paper he discussed the civilising process in dependence on Norbert Elias focusing the changes from a formalisation of manners in the 19th century to an informalisation of manners in the 20th century. He emphasised the contribution empirical theory can make to create knowledge.

The newly elected president of the Research Committee 38 'Biography and Society' of the ISA, **PD Dr. Roswitha Breckner** from Vienna, discussed the question of theory building from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge. The title of her paper was: 'Structure and/or Type? Ways of Generalisation in Interpretive Sociology'. Roswitha Breckner is currently a member of the Department of Sociology at the University of Vienna. Besides biographical research her interests are methodology and interpretative social research. In recent years she has played an important role in developing 'visual sociology' through her empirical and theoretical works in the field of picture analysis. She has strongly contributed to the sociology of knowledge with her case studies and methodological reflections. In her lecture she showed not only the theoretical and methodological backgrounds of interpretative social research from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge (Alfred Schütz, Berger/Luckmann, Karl Mannheim), but she also referred to her core research topics, namely in the areas of biographies and transformations as well as East-to-West migration.

After the key lectures, Ina Alber and Niklas Radenbach led a panel discussion between both key speakers. They posed the question how to deal with heterogeneity and historical and geographical particularities and yet to find theoretical generalisations. The importance and gains of case-reconstructive research and of the process of finding general rules in every particular case were emphasised. However, questions like 'How many interviews did you conduct?' or 'How frequently did you do participant observations?' and thus references to the paradigm of frequency of occurrence were still posed in the discussion. This seems to emphasise the difficulties to disengage from numerical generalisation. Another question in the key speakers' discussion dealt with the perceived gap between micro and macro levels in social sciences and possibilities to bridge it. The advice given to the junior researchers was to keep on thinking in relations instead of micro-macro-dichotomies.

On Saturday, there were four sessions designed for junior researchers to present and discuss their projects focusing the issue of theory building. They took place in the modern building of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Two parallel German-speaking sessions were held in the morning. They served to embark on the question of theoretical generalisations of case studies. One of the sessions focused on biographical research and discourse analysis whereas the other one dealt with ethnographic research and network analysis.

During the first session, chaired by Anna-Christin Ransiek and Ina Alber, **Grozdana Pajković**, currently a PhD student at the University of Vienna, presented first theoretical findings from her PhD project dealing with biographies of migrants who have been clients of social workers because of their drug consumerism. She strongly showed the theory building potential of biographies if they are analysed in a (case) reconstructive way. **Hanna Haag** from the University of Hamburg gave a paper on the results of her diploma thesis for which she had conducted semi-structured interviews with unemployed women in Eastern Germany. Thematically, Haag focused on the question of (social) memories in times of social change. Theory-building in her work was done by means of a typology which she presented convincingly. **René Lehmann** from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg discussed methodological challenges of a qualitative case study by using preliminary results of his PhD project. In his study he analyses different patterns of interpretation and remembrance in families (two or three generations). On the basis

of patterns of interpretation, he developed types on different levels which were discussed by the participants of the session. His colleague from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, **Anna Musioł**, presented results of her recently finished dissertation project whose core is a comparative discourse analysis of anti-Semitic dimensions of the politically and historically relevant 'Walser-Bubis'-debate in Germany in comparison to the so-called 'Jedwabne'-debate in Poland. She discussed theoretical generalisations of her results focusing the question of collective and discursive identity.

The parallel session on ethnography and network analysis was led by Viola Stephan and Niklas Radenbach. The session was kicked-off by anthropologist **Viola Thimm** from the University of Göttingen who presented first results from her PhD project. Her study deals with female Malaysian migrants who come to Singapore to study and to achieve success in education. She discussed the diversity of the migrants and argued that in ethnographic research mainly in the tradition of anthropology (*Ethnologie*) the focus was on the particularities of small groups. The aim was to analyse some few cases and to show the varieties within them. As well coming from the field of ethnographic research, but connected to urban sociology was the second speaker of the session, **Dr. Thorsten Benkel** from the University of Frankfurt/Main. He started his presentation by giving the theoretical background to his study on the '*Frankfurter Bahnhofsviertel*' (a quarter close to Frankfurt/Main main station) and so-called 'deviance' in public space. The main part of his presentation focused on the results of his empirical research based on ethnographic research in the areas of prostitution, gambling, drug consumerism and other phenomena which can be observed in this public sphere.

In the afternoon followed two further sessions. The first one was in German, chaired by Dr. Nicole Witte and Johannes Becker, dealt with general questions on the creation of theory by explicitly focusing on possible combinations of the sociology of knowledge and figurational sociology. **Niklas Radenbach** suggested methodological stimulations to biographical research in the tradition of social constructivism generated by figurational sociology. He emphasised in relation to the work of Norbert Elias, whose contribution to the sociology of knowledge Radenbach stressed, to think of the individual and the society dialectically, to respect a historical perspective and to analyse balances of power in empirical studies. His colleague in the research project 'Collective myths and their transgenerational impacts. Ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union in Germany' (University of Göttingen), **Viola Stephan**, presented a fitting example from a perspective of figurational sociology. Stephan examined a case study from her PhD project on multiethnic families from the former Soviet Union to explicitly show a process-oriented analysis of the established and outsiders in her study as well as an analysis of power relations in the families. A third figurational approach was represented in **Melanie Frerichs'** paper on the '*KVP*' (CIP – Continuous Improvement Process) in the German automobile industry. Frerichs has only recently started her PhD research project at the University of Hamburg as a scholarship holder of the Volkswagen Foundation. She presented the design of her work in progress in the light of the sociology of work and industry. The session was concluded by **Ana Mijić** from the University of Vienna. In her paper, based on her PhD research on the transformation of patterns of interpretation in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, she followed the perspective of social constructivism according to Berger/Luckmann. She showed that the assumptions of Berger/Luckmann can contribute fruitfully to an analysis of the post-war society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Chair of the English-speaking session was Dr. Rixta Wundrak (Göttingen). It put a focus on the question of possibilities and limitations of empirical methods in the qualitative social sciences, in particular the combinations of different approaches. Thus, in their presentation, **Ina Alber and Anna-Christin Ran-**

siek from the University of Göttingen were concerned with methodological challenges of the relation of biographies and discourses. Presenting a case study on the experiences of racism from Ransiek's PhD-project, the scholars demonstrated how discourses become relevant in life stories and what kind of methodological procedure is needed to elaborate this phenomenon. Like Ransiek, Alber also traces discourses in interviews of her PhD study on civic engagement in Poland under conditions of transformation. Both of them work on the triangulation of biographical case reconstructions and discourse analysis. Coming from the University of Göttingen as well, **André Dingelstedt** does his PhD research on the criteria of quality in quantitative research designs. He discussed the possibilities and limitations of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Dingelstedt presented ideas from different representatives of quantitative and qualitative paradigms and their ideas on the cooperation. What became clear in a long discussion afterwards was that maybe the trench is not marked by qualitative versus quantitative. Rather, the limitations become salient when trying to combine approaches on the one hand based on reconstructive analysis and on the other hand based on categories (subsumption). The session was concluded by **Yasemin Soytemel** from the project 'Cultural Foundations of Integration' at the University of Konstanz. She gave a paper on the first findings of her PhD project about collective self-descriptions of Turkish-German teenagers in Berlin and the way they create collectivity by using codes and a certain codex. The results are mainly based on the method of group discussions with the teenagers and through categorisation and development of a certain typology.

The atmosphere in the sessions stimulated very lively and open discussions. There was a strong commitment among all participants to share experiences and to critically reflect the theoretical and methodological challenges of the conference. This has shown that the issues of 'Creating Knowledge' are indeed of a critical importance. A warm thank you to all participants and everyone assisting in the organisation of the conference.

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PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESEARCH PROJECT

| | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Project: | Collective myths and their transgenerational impacts |
| Principal investigators: | Prof. Dr. Gabriele Rosenthal |
| Researchers: | Dipl.-Sozw. Viola Stephan; Sonja Owusu Boakye, M.A.; Dipl.-Sozw. Niklas Radenbach; |
| Research assistant: | Marieke Ulrich |
| Funded by: | Sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG), from 2005–2006 a pilot study was sponsored by the Evangelische Kirche (Evangelical Church in Germany) |
| Duration of the Project: | January 2007 until April 2011 |

Project Description:

Our study deals with the family histories and the life stories of three generations of migrants who came from the (former) Soviet Union to Germany and have an ethnic German family background. Based on biographical interviews, family interviews, the study of historical sources and participant observations we examine possible effects of the collective and the familial past on the present life of members of those families.

We addressed the question how members of this grouping of migrants remember their past before the migration and which versions of collective, familial and individual histories they present today. We examined the factual interdependence between the collective and the family histories and reconstructed their transgenerational impact on past and present lives (see Rosenthal 2006).

In the course of our project we conducted biographical-narrative interviews with members of 53 families who have an ethnic German background and who have migrated from the former Soviet Union to Germany where they currently live. These interviews were conducted in German and Russian. In order to gain further insight into their collective histories prior to their migration — as well as an insight into the process leading to their decision to migrate — we also conducted 37 biographical interviews with Germans and their non-German family members who are still living in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.

The results of this study clearly show the necessity to take a long-term perspective on the collective and familial history. Thus, we are able to explain the observed difficulties in the families of this grouping of migrants in Germany and especially of the youngest generation in the present. In particular it illustrates the doubts of the youngest generation concerning the credibility of the family history as it was and is transmitted to them. In this connection the relevance of the family history for the individual's construction of belonging has to be emphasized (see Rosenthal 2005: 53ff.). In fact, people do not construct their ethnic or national belonging individually or on the basis of an independent solitary decision. "Instead, these attributes are acquired as a result of their positions as **members of families**" (Bogner & Rosenthal 2009: 13). Therefore, non-refillable gaps and empty spots in the family memory,

as they appeared in interviews with ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union, can render one's sense of belonging brittle and problematic.

Furthermore our empirical analyses make clear that the grouping of ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union developed an extremely homogeneous, stereotyped we-image (see Elias 1987/ 1991: 293ff.), which refers to a homogenized collective memory.²² This homogenous we-image could be formulated briefly: „We **all** were condemned in 1941²³ and we **all** were exiled in **1941** to the Asian part of the Soviet Union“. This includes the myth that this is true for almost the whole grouping. However, it covers an extremely heterogeneous past of this grouping. For example, at most fifty percent of the ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union were deported in 1941 — a very generous estimate²⁴.

First of all this myth ignores the fact that in 1926 more than eleven percent of the ethnic Germans lived east of the Ural Mountains in the Asian regions of the Soviet Union — Kazakhstan, Siberia, Kyrgyzstan, and other Asian republics (Dietz/ Hilkes 1993: 20; Dietz 1995: 33 et seq.). In 1941 it may have been approximately twenty to thirty percent. Second of all this myth includes the false image of nearly all ethnic Germans living in the Western regions of the Soviet Union being banished to Siberia, Kazakhstan, and other Asian regions already **in 1941** as a result of the collective sentencing of ethnic Germans. This image flatly denies the fact that between 1941 and 1943/1944 approximately 25 percent of ethnic Germans remained in the western areas of the Soviet Union which were occupied by the German army and the SS killing units between 1941 and 1943/1944 (Buchweiler 1984: 338). This aids covering up the fact that during that time period many ethnic Germans welcomed the German occupation and many of them participated in Nazi crimes against Jews and other parts of the local population. Furthermore, around 275,000 Germans emigrated from this region to Nazi Germany between 1941 and 1945. They became German citizens but were later re-deported by the Red Army to the Asian regions of the Soviet Union after the Third Reich had collapsed in 1945.

The remarkable power of this homogenizing we-image is, on the one hand, due to the immense damage done to collective memories of discriminated groupings in the Soviet Union and the collective silence about the cruel aspects of Soviet history, both of which were (mainly) caused by state repression. On the other hand, it is also due to the increasingly tightened conditions of the laws governing their admission into Germany. This myth is corresponding with the public image of ethnic Germans as it was created by others in Germany and as it is dominating the public discourse in Germany as well as the scientific discourse in general.

Furthermore our interviews show that in the communities of ethnic Germans in Germany the biographical self-presentations and the discourses often also conceal the successful job careers of many

²² For a conception of collective memory in its interaction with „individual“ remembering see Rosenthal (2010). It refers to the concept of family memory by Maurice Halbwachs (1925/ 1985) and his work on the social conditionality of memory and to the memory theory of Jan and Aleida Assmann (1988; Assmann 1992).

²³ In 1941, the Soviet Union imposed a collective sentence on all Germans based on their supposed collaboration with Nazi Germany, and the ethnic German population then living in the western part of the Soviet Union was banished to the Ural region, Siberia, Kazakhstan, and other Asian regions. Men and women were drafted into so-called labour battalions where they were used as forced labour, usually under the most horrific conditions.

²⁴ A 1939 census, whose statistics cannot be considered reliable from the outset, counted 1,427,200 Germans in the Soviet Union (Dietz/Hilkes 1993: 23). All told, approximately 900,000 persons were deported (see Brandes 1993), but this number also includes those who were only deported after the Red Army recaptured the western areas of the Soviet Union as well as those people who emigrated to Germany between 1941 and 1944.

of the middle generation in these families. And this success was often connected to a strong identification with the Soviet system (see Fefler/Radenbach 2009; 2010).

On the basis of interviews, participant observations and with the external evidence of historical sources it was not only possible to reconstruct the stocks of powerful collective memories, but also the heterogeneous familial pasts which lie behind them. Even though the aforementioned construction of a homogenized and homogenizing we-image is strongly dominating the collective memory of ethnic Germans from (and partially in) the former Soviet Union²⁵, we can identify at least six structurally very different, but characteristic types of family history trajectories in our sample. These types differ particularly with regard to the time of migration or banishment into the Asian part of the Soviet Union (long time before 1941, between 1941 and 1945 or in 1945 during „Repatriation“ or later).

Furthermore, our analysis indicates that the *transgenerational* effects differ significantly in terms of generational belonging and the diverse family histories (see Rosenthal/Stephan 2009a and 2009b). Additionally to the investigation of these differences we also explored the following research questions: What kind of functions and which biographical impacts do the established myths have in the families? We have assumed a defensive and a protective function of myth in the sense of systemic family therapy (Stierlin 1975: 150ff.) and tried to apply this concept to larger we-groups. Our particular focus has been devoted to explore the transgenerational impact of diverse family pasts and of different forms of dealing with these pasts on various families, various family members and diverse generations in terms of a denying or an open dialogue. In this context, we are interested in the current dynamics within German families from and living in the former Soviet Union, the relations between genealogical and historical generations²⁶ and the development of their communities in different geographical regions – and, in particular, the effects of these circumstances on the biographies of members of diverse generations.

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²⁵ Among those currently living in the former Soviet Union, this mostly applies to Germans in the Ukraine while the Germans in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan often have not learnt and established this homogenizing memory and thus have a by comparison fragmentary memory.

²⁶ Based on our empirical findings we reconstructed not only genealogical generations but also historical generations in the sense of Karl Mannheim.

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COLLABORATION**Latin America - Denmark**

During some years I have developed some contacts in Brazil with an emerging academic community of biographical and life history research. I would like to share some information about this link. It has given me an insight into an "Iberian" context which is different from my own – German-Anglophone – and also given the opportunity to present some of our own work to an audience which is mostly oriented in Francophone and Iberian traditions, but also very open-minded in terms of theory and methodology.

In 2004 I was invited to a conference in Porto Alegre, Brazil on (auto)biographical research in education – Brazilian colleagues had read about the Life History project at Roskilde University on the Web. At that occasion I gave a lecture based on the article "The Learning Subject in Life History – a Qualitative Research Approach to Learning" in: Maria Helena Abrão (red): *A Aventura (Auto)biografica*, Porto Alegre, EDIPUCRS 2004, which reflects on the background of our research project in educational studies, the development of its themes and some empirical cases.

The Brazilian researchers have organized a stable network, meeting every second year. This year I attended the "4. Conferencia Internacional pro Pesquisa (forskning) (Auto)biografica" in Sao Paulo (IV CIPA). It was a big meeting with around 700 researchers and teacher educators from all over Brazil. They have organized an association, Associação por la Pesquisa (Auto)biografica, with researchers from education, anthropology, historians, psychologists, etc. The format of these conferences is very nice: Invited papers and all other contributions are collected beforehand, edited in themes and published – for this conference 6 books with thematic collections of articles appeared. The point of departure is in education but the scope is wide and covers very specific as well as more basic epistemic interests. I was invited to give a lecture on the psychodynamic and societal aspects of the interpretation of biographical empirical material, more or less a portuguese version of an article published in *Studies into the Education of Adults* 2007, no 2, "Theorising Learning in Life History: A psychosocietal Approach", now published in portuguese in Maria Helena Abrão/Paula Vicentini (red): *Sentidos, Potencialidades e Usos da (Auto)Biografica*.

In same connection I was invited to a *Simpósio Memória, (Auto)biografica e Ruralidades* at Universidade Estadual de Bahia (UNEB) in Salvador – a multicampus-university for the state of Bahia. Participants were researchers, phd- and master students, and teachers in teacher and pedagogical education, around 120. The theme was *Desafias para a Pesquisa (Auto)biografica*, i.e. challenges to biographical research, and I talked about the challenge which is following from the obvious strength of biographical approaches, namely to give voice and attention to the specific individual – title: *Life History beyond individualism*, which will appear in a book edited by Elizeu Clementino Sousa.

As a spin off of these Brazilian contacts I have met people from other parts of Latin America, and just now I am on my way to visit the Universidade Pedagógica Nacional in Mexico, also a multi-campus university, to make "similar" presentations. The Mexicans also gave me an additional assignment: Give a presentation about why you work with biographical methodology – reflected in the context of your own life experience. Interesting – one of the things that is thought provoking in the latin american

discussions is the combination of academic rigour and personal engagement beyond the academic horizon – always with a societal and political outlook

Language is a problem. Although working with (very qualified) simultaneous translation in the big audiences, and although some Brazilians speak English or German I have had to revive my hibernated French – not very good – and learn to read some Portuguese. I have had great help from a few bi- or multilingual colleagues from Spain and France. But of course in the language difficulty adds a complication to the cross cultural understanding of interpretations.

Henning Salling Olesen, Denmark (hso@ruc.dk)

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