Abstract – The Importance of Posture in the Visual Message of/about Migration

The proposed abstract is part of a PhD thesis with the underlying research question of what do “guest workers” photographs and letters show/tell about life in Austria to family members and acquaintances back in Turkey? The project deals with “guest worker” photographs and letters that were sent back to family members in Turkey from the 1960s to the late 1980s. These photos and letters are to be complemented with official documents (e.g., working certificates) and recently conducted biographic-narrative interviews. Consequently, this ensures that the complexity of the interaction between the following dimensions is given: verbal or written/visual, now/then, private/official and here/there.

The project follows a reconstructive approach by triangulating interpretative methods such as biographical case reconstruction (Rosenthal, 2005) and visual segment analysis (Breckner, 2010). Of particular interest are interacting narratives created by biographical interviews, photos, letters and documents that provide information about migration experiences. The aims are (i) to reveal how these narrations complement and differentiate from each other, (ii) to gain a differentiated visual representation of migration which goes beyond stereotypes, and finally (iv) to contribute to migration studies and the debate on integration by providing a long term perspective on labour migration by focusing not only on the actual time of migration, but also by taking the biography into account.

Analysis is done with a case study approach according to theoretical sampling. In this paper, results of one case study will be presented. The analysis reveals that the crucial point of showing that the person is doing well is rather the clothing then the background and posture. Taken the discourse back then in Turkey this seems to be important both for the sender but also for the receiver. The visual communication is given rather through the clothing. This includes the following message: „I have finally overcome the poverty”. Moreover, the photograph sent to the family shows a type rather than a person: a European-oriented person trying to break (old) conventions.

Keywords
Guest workers, migration from Turkey, biographical research, visual segment analysis, posture