

Repressive autonomy Discourses on and surveillance of marriage migration from Turkey to Austria

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Abstract

Transnational marriages and family reunification have recently been assessed as two of the main obstacles to integration in Austria. They have been increasingly problematized and kept under surveillance when partners from third countries – in Austria, particularly from Turkey – have been involved. Nonetheless, a great number of Turkish migrants and their descendants prefer to marry partners from their “country of origin”. In this paper I discuss practices of and discourses on family formation across borders, based on ethnographic fieldwork in a small town in Austria. My findings show that transnational marriages in Austria are often conflated with forced and fictitious marriages and consequently rejected as fraudulent or “violence in the name of tradition”. Furthermore, legal provisions against problematic marriages do not liberate women but repress their autonomy.

Keywords: forced marriage; sham marriages; autonomy; Austria; Turkish minorities.

Introduction

In her review paper on family-related migration, Eleonore Kofman (2004) pointed out the remarkably little attention given to family and marriage migration, despite the fact that family reunification had been the dominant mode of legal immigration to Europe for more than two decades. However, since then, family and marriage migration have become a major concern of public and scholarly debate. While critics of multiculturalism have seen transnational (forced and sham) marriages as an expression of failed integration and of ethnic segregation, its adherents, on the contrary, have insisted on the right to free choice of marriage partners and to family reunification as a precondition of successful integration. In the last decade, transnational marriages have thus become highly contested in the name of equality and women’s rights and have

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been one of the main – and overemphasized – targets of anti-multiculturalists in the EU.

In the course of this amplified attention given to transnational marriages, the EU has established a directive to determine the rights of third-country nationals to family reunification. “The objective is to protect the family unit and to facilitate the integration of nationals of non-member countries” (EU Directive 2003/86/EC).¹ However, member-states have tightened their legal regulations on family reunification with partners from third countries and intensified measures to avoid problematic sham and forced transnational marriages. Studies in migration research have thus increasingly focused on the restrictive regulations of marriage migration and institutional practices and their effects on transnational marriages. They warned particularly about the negative effects on family life and about human rights violations (e.g. Messinger, 2013; Raghuram, 2004; Ruffer, 2011).

Simultaneously, numerous contributions in transnational and gender studies have shown the fast and profound transformation of kinship, family and marriages against the backdrop of globalisation (e.g. Beck-Gernsheim, 2007; Fog-Olwig, 2002; Grillo, 2008; Kraler *et al.*, 2010, 2011). In this context, feminist scholars have dealt with the “*problematic* aspects” of transnational family lives – for example, with global care chains and children and the elderly left behind (Baldassar, 2007; Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2002; Hochschild, 2012) or with polygyny, forced marriages or marriage at a young age (e.g. Okin, 1999; Phillips, 2007; Razack, 2004; Strasser and Holzeithner, 2010; Volpp, 2000).

In the face of these challenges, feminists have developed different or, rather, contradictory positions. Liberal feminists blamed Western democracies for their inactivity and naïvety concerning the culturally legitimized control of sexuality and violence against women and young people within minorities, supporting “parallel societies” instead of establishing inclusive protection (Kelek, 2005; Okin, 1999; Wikan, 2002). Post-colonial and multicultural feminists, however, warned about the stigmatizing effect of the whole debate on violence against women, with its homogenizing assaults on ethnic and religious minorities (Phillips, 2007; Razack, 2004; Volpp, 2000). Nonetheless, this debate contributed to the shift from diverse forms of multiculturalism to new integration or “post-multiculturalism” (Strasser, 2014; Vertovec, 2010). While some scholars have referred to the media and policy debate on forced marriage as essentialist and itself a marker of difference between so-called native and immigrated citizens (Grillo, 2008: 31; Strasser and Markom, 2010: 113–14), it nonetheless had a strong and restrictive impact on migrants’ everyday lives, particularly those of Muslim minorities (Strasser and Markom, 2010).

In this paper, I focus on the complex interdependence of the two, often

¹ Council Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32003L0086:EN:NOT>).

separately discussed, debates on “problematic aspects” of transnational marriages – depicted as fictitious or forced – in everyday life. Examples of ethnographic fieldwork in a small town in Austria² will demonstrate how already existing local tensions between “Austrians” and “Turks” are fuelled by discourses on and practices of marriage across borders, independent of whether these are self-determined (against the will or with the consent of parents), arranged, forced or fictitious. Studying transnational marriages and the impact of national as well as EU measures at a local level allows a better understanding of the exclusionary effects of allegedly women-friendly claims for gender equality among Turkish minorities in Europe. The characteristics of these liberal moralities are shaped by the interrelation of compassion and repression (Fassin, 2005)³ and contribute to what I call “repressive autonomy” – an autonomy which is meant to promote integration in a liberal-rights framework but which, in fact, is restricting agency and prompting inequality between citizens and non-citizens instead of unifying families and liberating minoritized women (Strasser, 2014). In addition, studies on integration in small towns and rural areas are rare and, although immigration to these regions has increased recently, “these places passed under the sociological radar” (Waters and Jiménez, 2005: 122).

Marrying across borders: a problematic practice?

Whereas marriages across borders have been facilitated within the EU over the last decade, they have been increasingly problematized and kept under surveillance when partners from third countries – in the Austrian case, particularly from Turkey⁴ – have been involved. Migrants from Turkey and their offspring, at about four million people, constitute the largest single immigrant group in Europe (Crul *et al.*, 2012: 15).⁵ There is a trend among Turkish migrants in Europe to marry someone from the country, or even region,

² This paper is based on the findings of the NODE Project “*Contesting Multiculturalism. Gender Equality, Cultural Diversity and Sexual Autonomy in the European Union*”, 2006–2008, sponsored by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Strasser and Holzleithner, 2010). During 6 months of fieldwork, Christa Markom and I conducted 44 biographical interviews, expert interviews at local and national levels and several group discussions, alongside participant observation and informal talks (Strasser and Markom, 2010).

³ Fassin seeks to understand the driving force behind morality that brings about both inequality and solidarity when applied to the poorest, the most unfortunate and the most vulnerable people. He suggests studying moralities as strictly sociological and ethnographic questions (Fassin, 2012: 3).

⁴ Immigrants from Turkey and their descendants represent the third-largest and most vulnerable group of migrants in Austria. Only 45% of Turkish women in Austria have a regular salary, and an average yearly income of 12,600 Euro (70% of the salary of Austrian women). Almost three-quarters (74%) have not more than a mandatory school education and their unemployment rate is 14.1% (total in Austria 6.3%) (Österreichischer Integrationsfond, 2012; the statistics include foreign citizens and women born abroad).

⁵ The largest proportion, around two-thirds, live in Germany, followed by the Netherlands, France and Austria. In Austria, 17.4% (247,500 people) of all migrants have a background in Turkey – about 113,000 are Turkish citizens (Österreichischer Integrationsfond, 2012).

of origin (often of their parents' country). Inter-marriage rates of Turkish migrants across ethnic boundaries in Europe are below 10% and 50–70% of marriages with Turkish partners in the different EU countries take place with a Turkish-born person (Hamel *et al.*, 2012: 263). Furthermore, almost 95% of Turkish women usually marry in their early twenties⁶ and without prior unmarried cohabitation (Hamel *et al.*, 2012; Huschek *et al.*, 2011; Milewski and Hamel, 2010). This high percentage of transnational and young marriages⁷ is widely seen as an expression of strong transnational ties which either support segregation and patriarchal structures of marriage arrangements across borders (even by coercion), or provide an option for the issuing of a residence permit via family reunification. Yet, marriage across borders is itself contributing to transnational spaces and might also be caused by experiences of social exclusion in the country of residence. Research in this field shows that, in addition to economic inequalities between regions and an unbalanced sex ratio, close relations with kin and expected mutual obligations have contributed to the shaping of transnational patterns of marriage. These conditions have enhanced a wide choice of marriage partners for migrants in their ancestors' countries of origin, attractive particularly to those migrants and their offspring who expect moral superiority or transformed gender relations through marriage across borders (Huschek *et al.*, 2011; Milewski and Hamel, 2010; Straßburger, 2004; Timmermann *et al.*, 2009).

In Austria, 55% of men and even 68% of women of Turkish or Kurdish-Turkish background marry a partner from their parents' or grandparents' country of origin (Hamel *et al.*, 2012: 263).⁸ Direct family and parental influence on partner choice is reported to be high among Turkish families in the different EU countries. In Austria, according to these findings, the influence is particularly high and even more salient for men than for women (Hamel *et al.*, 2012: 261).⁹ During our fieldwork in a small Austrian town in 2007 we found this characteristic marriage pattern among "Turkish" residents, shaped by transnational relations and obligations, a lack of local inter-relations across

⁶ Second-generation Turks in Austria – compared to Germany and Switzerland – marry earlier than or at a similar age as those in Turkey. Hamel *et al.* (2012: 235) suggest that national and local contexts sway union formation patterns among the Turkish second generation.

⁷ Statistically, Turkish women marry seven years earlier than female Austrian citizens born in Austria (Österreichischer Integrationsfond, 2012).

⁸ The lower numbers of transnational marriages in Germany (12%) can be explained by the high percentage of Turks in Germany who encourage marriage to second-generation Turks within the country (70%) (Hamel *et al.*, 2012: 262; Huschek *et al.*, 2012; Straßburger, 2004: 224).

⁹ Findings from the TIES project (Crul *et al.*, 2012) show that young migrants in Europe generally said that they had found their partners on their own and only 1 per cent referred to direct parental influence and 10% to indirect encouragement. Yet in Austria, an unexpected 17% of partner choices by men were presented as influenced by parents compared to 12% of women's choices. Only in Germany, and there only for women, did the authors find a similar pattern of parental influence (16% women and 5% men). Differences in education and school systems are advanced as possible explanations (Hamel *et al.*, 2012: 261). Austria's school system is repeatedly criticized for its differentiating instead of compensatory effects (Herzog-Punzenberger, 2009).

ethnic boundaries, racism and a strong emphasis on honour and virginity among immigrated minorities and their descendants (Strasser and Markom, 2010).

A small town of anxieties

Turkish residents are rarely invited to participate in the town's political, social or cultural activities, yet they do transform the perception of the place by their sheer physical, cultural and economic presence in the city centre.¹⁰ Maybe their visibility in the old town's centre contributes to the persistent calls for adaptation. "They do not have to assimilate, yet they should at least adapt to the local culture", said an Austrian hairdresser, age 21. Yet, instead of fulfilling this widely shared expectation among Austrian majorities,¹¹ the perception of many of the native population is that members of the Turkish minorities prefer mosques to bars, speak their own language, act in gangs and marry among themselves. Many Austrians, including teachers and policy-makers, assume that a high percentage of young women are forced into marriage. "Turks", on the contrary, generally perceive themselves to be well-adapted, having sufficient German language skills, living a decent life and ready to take responsibility for their families and their social environment. "Yet, the more we are like them, the less they like us" (Turkish businesswoman, 42). The gap between the two groups is remarkable, intermarriage is an exception and social interaction beyond school and the workplace is rare. Alcohol and sexuality are identified as the most-pronounced markers of difference by both sides.

During fieldwork in this town, I spent a lot of time in a travel agency that simultaneously functioned as a private advisory centre for Turkish immigrants in the region. Waiting for an interview with the owner of the agency one day, I was listening to an interesting conversation about local anxieties and transnational relatedness. One customer – a middle-aged woman, mother of four and a housewife – rushed in and asked the travel agent (and self-appointed social worker) about the handling of an electronic air ticket. Before he could answer the questions about the ticket, she told us that she was just organizing the flight for her daughter, who was expected to come from Istanbul the next day. Adding quickly that she had a convincing reason for sending her on this trip on her own:

¹⁰ The town has over 20,000 inhabitants, of whom 17% are foreign citizens from 83 different countries. Immigration from Turkey into this typical Austrian rural industrial centre began in the 1960s. Today, 5% of the population has a Turkish passport and about 8% is of Turkish background (local government statistics, not quoted for reasons of anonymity).

¹¹ Independent of their citizenship and the diversity within ethnic and national groups, people of Turkish background identify themselves and are referred to as "*Türken*" (Turks) and ethnic Austrians as "*Einheimische*" (natives).

Kızımızı evlendirdik! (We have married our daughter). But we did not force her, just in case you would suspect, we would not do that, she wanted it, she has chosen her husband herself! We approved this marriage, of course! I have always said to my daughters: “Tell me you will marry a gipsy and I will agree, but do not run away (*kacmak*)”.

Satisfied with her dutiful daughter, the successful marriage and the wedding ceremony in Turkey, she was, nonetheless, worrying about the problems that would possibly come up next during the legal process of family reunification. Would her daughter earn enough? Would the dwelling comply with legal requirements and, in particular, would the legislation change again before the family managed to bring their *damat* (groom and son-in-law) to Austria?

This encounter shows how transnational relations, the Austrian migration regime, the transformations of moralities and the emotions of minorities and majorities are entangled in the discourses on forced and fictitious marriages. It highlights the simultaneous anxiety of illegitimate sexuality and elopement, of marriage and free choice and, finally, of the migration regime’s regulation of family reunification. Observations on sexuality, marriage and morality in the town will strengthen my argument that public discourse and legal amendments do not contribute to the intended liberation of minority women but, rather, restrict their limited autonomy.

Virginity, marriage patterns and the anxiety of elopements

In general, members of the Turkish minority in the small town share ideas about virginity before and fidelity after marriage across generations and gender. One young woman, married to an Austrian partner, is still defending virginity and insists on the fact that Austrian women’s intervention against early marriage was frankly Euro-centric, since they would try to prevent her from having sex at the appropriate time – i.e., respecting chastity before and fidelity during marriage. Whereas a proper marriage is either arranged or approved by the couples’ parents, concluded with a wedding ceremony and rewarded with a flat provided by the groom’s family (patrilocality), an increasing number of young women complain about the unequal treatment of young men and women in marriage arrangements. Elopement is a widespread threat and a well-known (not even new) practice among youth in cases where parents do reject their marriage preferences or try to coerce them into a marriage not to the children’s liking. It is dangerous for young women to run away, since this might cause violent outbursts or several years of social exclusion from the family. Parents do not usually want to lose their children, though they know that their daughters are well-informed about legal support, enjoy public encouragement (within and beyond their identity group) and “cannot to be treated like a commodity (*mal*)” anymore (Turkish businessman, 45).

Some young men, particularly those collaborating with various European Muslim organizations, strongly support gender equality, insisting that they themselves would never have sexual relations before marriage and would even avoid staying in a room with their girlfriend on their own (i.e. without a chaperone). They disapprove of their parents' differentiation between their children and blame a lack of religious education for their inappropriate treatment of young women. Several young men have already told us about their sexual relations with Austrian girls yet, when it comes to marriage, they mainly expect their future bride to fit into their family, and share their own religious orientation or socio-cultural expectations such as honour (*namus*) and respect (*saygı*). Throughout our research we encountered only one nationally mixed couple who lived together after the Turkish man's divorce from his Turkish wife, and two Turkish women married to an Austrian man.¹²

Again and again, young women emphasized their preference for partners from Turkey since they expect them to be less spoiled than young Turkish men in Austria. "Our men here in Europe are willing to mix salt and sugar, this does not work!". This divorced and devoted Muslim woman criticized the fact that men want to have an obedient wife at home "*a la turka*" (Turkish style) and enjoy themselves in clubs "European style". Marriage partners from Turkey are described as caring, thoughtful and reliable. This and similar narrations (irrespective of the picture drawn of Turkish men) of course contradict the widespread perception of young women being married to relatives in Turkey in order to bypass immigration regulations or forced into marriages with relatives.

Turkish parents have to deal with the fear of losing their good reputation and respect within their own social and ethnic environment if their female relatives demonstrate inappropriate sexual behaviour. Yet, if they put too much pressure on their children, they might lose both them and public recognition. On the other hand, young people not only opt for a preferred marriage partner, but elopement simultaneously prompts (at least temporarily) their ethnic, social and religious exclusion.

Forced and fictitious marriage: the anxiety of being blamed

The rapid rise of forced marriage as an issue of public concern provoked media representation, policy interventions and amendments of legislation. In 2004 Federal Minister Maria Rauch-Kallat (Austrian People's Party) was introduced to a victim of forced marriage; she thus became convinced that she had encountered merely the "tip of the iceberg". Despite the amazingly little information available about these issues, she declared the struggle against forced marriage and female genital mutilation to be the main topic of gender policy and the primary concern of her ministry during the Austrian EU presi-

¹² One woman represents a religious ethnic minority, separated from the dominant Turkish group in any case, and the other is depicted as "sick" after an extreme experience of family violence (Strasser and Markom, 2010).

dency in 2007. Hence, six female Austrian ministers introduced activities to combat “violence in the name of tradition”. Panel discussions and conferences were organized, studies conducted and experts interviewed. However, the conceptual distinction between “arranged” and “forced” in the case of marriage became no clearer, and it was still not possible, in spite of the ministers’ best efforts, to gauge with any accuracy the numbers of young people of both genders affected (Latcheva *et al.*, 2007; Strasser and Holzleithner, 2010). Yet, due to media coverage, the topic became quite popular and was discussed widely.

The Marriage Convention¹³ and Austrian law had clearly demanded the free consent to and registration of marriages and stipulated a minimum age. Nonetheless, amendment of the article on “grave coercion” (Article 106 of the Austrian Penal Code)¹⁴ added forced marriage as an incident of duress, included spouses on the list of possible culprits, turned coercion into a public offense and extended punishment by up to five years of prison (Beclin, 2010; Latcheva *et al.*, 2007). Activists have criticized the inexpensive yet also ineffective focus on legal interventions. All experts emphasize that special shelters and prevention are more relevant than these rather symbolic legal amendments – in its first year, this newly introduced legislation on “grave coercion” was applied to only one single case of forced marriage (Rössl, 2010: 166–167).

All the Turkish parents we talked to in the small town also strictly rejected the accusation of any form of coercion in relation to marriage. Some (regionally, from Central Anatolia) described arrangements planned for their children, yet insisted they wished to avoid any restriction on their offsprings’ freedom of choice. My findings show that immigration and police officers, and Austrian neighbours, are, nonetheless, sceptical about the right of Turkish immigrants’ children to freely choose a convenient marriage partner. Furthermore, for this project, both local and national policy-makers whom we interviewed usually assessed transnational marriages as being a threat to young women as well as to their family’s social integration.

While we heard of many examples of forced marriages from Austrian teachers and policy-makers in the first weeks of our fieldwork, it turned out that most of the reported incidents could not be verified. “Well, it is not only me who is suspicious [of forced marriage], we all are quite suspicious in general, when a girl [...] is moved out of the class because she had been married off to someone” (Austrian teacher, 47). One local Austrian policy-maker, a committed young woman of 38, even claimed to have “facts about the situation of young Turkish women”: some whom she had known pretty well, and had talked to from time to time, suddenly disappeared for about six months.

¹³ Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (9.12.1964), Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/convention.htm>, last accessed 12 December 2012.

¹⁴ <http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Dokumentnummer=NOR40077295>, last accessed 14 January 2014.

When they returned, she continued, they had changed: “They never wore headscarves, but now they do they look the other way, when you try to greet them, and it is impossible to get in touch with them again”. She is convinced that young women are kept under surveillance and sent to Turkey if they do not obey and she assumes that they are brainwashed there.

Since we could not trace these cases nor relate them to particular individuals, we continued our search for practices of forced marriage among Turkish experts. We learned about three marriages perceived as cases of forced, or at least attempted forced, marriage in the small town: one was caused by sexual orientation, one by the tradition of *berdel*¹⁵ and the last one by an incident of sexual honour (*namus*). All of them remain concealed from the Austrian public and none of the young women and men involved were able to be protected by the amended Austrian law.

I remember an incident, when three girls were meeting boys whom they knew from the Internet. They went to another city in order to limit the risk of being detected, but missed the last train back home and thus the whole story was revealed. Scared to death, they went to the next police station (Turkish businessman, 45).

When their parents learned about this event, things got out of control and the Turkish businessman and self-appointed social worker was invited to the police station. “Only one parent or, I should rather say, one mother, decided after this event to arrange a marriage for her daughter in Turkey immediately. The others were grateful to have their daughters back”. The mother’s plan was to take her daughter (16) to Turkey and arrange the consummation of an already existing *Imam nikah* (religious marriage). The public view (*millet*) supported the otherwise obedient young woman, who rejected this arrangement and criticized her mother. Since events like this are seen as a family affair, Turkish people had a clear standpoint on the matter, but did not interfere. The day her family wanted to take her to Turkey, the girl called an Austrian colleague from her workplace and informed him about the planned journey’s aim. He immediately called the police and officers went to the girl’s house in order to confiscate her passport. The young woman told me later that they also took her to the police station, but she would never have complained about her parents. “I knew that they always wanted nothing but the best for me”. This was the first case of this kind for the officers in charge, but their colleague from the border-control unit assumed that girls often do not dare to speak up when they are threatened and forced into marriage in Turkey. Again we could not find any proof of this claim in practice. The campaign had ar-

¹⁵ *Berdel* is a traditional marriage of siblings (brother and sister) of one family to brother and sister of another family. This marriage represents exchange and is expected to strengthen kinship ties between two families or clans.

rived in the small town yet, instead of protecting young women, it appeared to increase the existing mistrust between “natives” and “Turks”.

No doubt, several “Turks” had an interest in *ignoring* or *rejecting* the accusation of forced marriage. Others, however, are actively *combating* violence against women and proclaiming arranged marriages as backward and wholly unacceptable. Austrians, on the other hand, see “violence in the name of tradition” as an *imported problem* and thus blame culture and ethnic/religious belonging. They tend to *overemphasize* and perceive each change in a girl’s life as a sign of forced marriage. The Austrian immigration regime aims to prevent the “import of brides (and grooms)” by restricting family reunification. Raising the minimum age for family unification to 21 and demanding a German-language certificate were among the measures employed, together with the demand that the migrant have a regular income, a decent flat and proper insurance – all measures meant to protect young women and vulnerable subjects.¹⁶

These constant allegations and the restrictive measures were complicating the situation for young women. To reject arranged marriages in this context means, next to personal conflicts, betraying your ethnic and religious identity group. Furthermore, family reunification is considered as manipulated by the police in order to prevent minorities from being reunited with their spouses. Measures and sanctions against residence and sham marriages were already mentioned in the Alien Law of 1997. However, a marriage in order to bypass immigration legislation and obtain a residence permit became a criminal offence under the Austrian Alien Law of 2006 (Messinger, 2013). Since then, registrars have to report all marriages with Third-Country Nationals to the aliens’ police. Austrian citizens can also be sentenced to up to one year in prison if they accept a marriage of convenience. In contrast to forced marriage – conceptualized as part of an immigrant’s culture, religion or traditions, a marriage of convenience is seen as an abuse of marriage for the purpose of immigration. Feminist organizations and NGOs hold contradictory positions on marriage across borders, yet all agree upon the need to transform the law on family reunification. Reunified spouses still tend to be dependent on their partners and women have to provide proof of violence before receiving a residence permit independent of their spouse (Latcheva *et al.*, 2007).

¹⁶ In the meantime, based on the “standstill clauses” in the EEC-Turkey Accession Agreement, all restrictions of requirements for family reunification from 1970 onward have been lifted for Turkish citizens by the European Court of Justice (15.11.2011) and the Austrian Higher Administrative Court (19.01.2012). In Austria, amendments after 1995, the year of EU accession, have been declared void. In addition, the EU Commission’s Green Paper on the Directive 2003/86/EC in 2011 (COM(2011)735 final) questions mandatory provisions such as a minimum age and language tests (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0735:FIN:en:PDF>; last accessed 19 January 2014). (<http://dejure.org/dienste/vernetzung/rechtsprechung?Gericht=EuGH&Datum=15.11.2011&Aktenzeichen=C-256/11>; last accessed 19 January 2014).

Repressive autonomy: a summary

Recent studies among the descendants of immigrants from Turkey in different European countries have referred to a marked preference for transnational marriages. Ethnographic fieldwork in a small town in rural Austria confirms this pattern, but also reveals how “Austrian natives” often conflate transnational and problematic (fictitious and forced) marriages and consequently reject them as fraudulent or “violence in the name of tradition”. Combatting this assumed violence and claiming gender equality among minorities thus entails the danger of simultaneously creating limits to free choice in family formation across borders. Legal provisions to prevent forced and fictitious marriages affect all transnational marriages. Turkish minorities, on the contrary, describe transnational marriage as a freedom of choice and its restriction by law as devaluation and discrimination. Hence, young women of Turkish background either suspected of being forced into marriage or accused of bypassing migration legislation when they decide to marry across borders, see this legal protection as restriction of freedom. Since transnational marriages and family reunification have been assessed by majority groups as one of the main obstacles to minorities’ social integration, they are increasingly problematized and rejected by Austrians. “Violence in the name of tradition” is perceived by many Austrians as essential to “Turkish culture” and as an imported phenomenon. Immigration legislation is meant to prevent not only the immigration of spouses but also the “import” of traditions, languages and religions in order to protect minority women. Young women are expected to identify with their ethnic group and comply with arrangements in order to avoid confirming the natives’ assumptions of forced and fictitious marriages. Combatting violence against women and immigration by restricting transnational marriages in general, independent of the actual accomplishment of particular partner choices, actually essentializes culture and creates tension in everyday life instead of reducing it. The seemingly women-friendly claim for gender equality among Turkish minorities and the actual restrictions on the free choice of marriage partners by law thus do not promote but repress minoritized women’s autonomy.

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