

**Heidi Armbruster<sup>1</sup>**

## TRAJECTORIES OF MOBILITY: INTERGENERATIONAL NARRATIVES OF RELOCATION AND ACHIEVEMENT AMONG VIENNESE SYRIAC CHRISTIAN MEN

### **Abstract**

This article analyzes narratives of emigration among Syriac Christians who migrated from Turkey to Vienna, Austria. It sets out from a starting point of exploring the different ways that migration affects family life and reproduction. By using “linked biographies,” the discussion focuses upon intergenerational aspects in order to explore the ways in which history is understood and reproduced by individuals with their own narrative but interconnected with the biographies of family members. Through the analysis of the narrative strategies of three men and their sons, it is shown how the individuals draw on cultural idioms of Syriac family and masculinity when telling their stories and simultaneously negotiating their moral agency. The paper argues that the analysis of biographical material reveals that postmigration intergenerational loyalties are not only about negotiating collective identity but also about pressures for social mobility.



### INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on ethnographic research among Syriac Christians (*Suryoye pl./Suryoyo sg.*)<sup>2</sup> in Vienna, Austria. The “route to Europe opened,” as many of my research participants put it, in the early 1960s, when Turkish guest workers were recruited into booming European economies. The Syriacs whose origin was in Eastern Anatolia, joined the guest worker programs somewhat late. However, it eventually gave rise to a steady exodus, which, once concluded in the mid-1990s, had nearly depleted ancient Christian villages of their former citizens. In what follows, I discuss a set of responses to this process, which are reflective of both individual experiences and more widely shared communal narratives. I draw on fieldwork conducted in Vienna in 2010–2011 among a Syriac community, which I first came to know in the early 1990s. The aim is twofold: First, to chart Syriac migration as part of a wider historical minority experience. Second, to explore

*Heidi Armbruster is a social anthropologist and associate professor in social anthropology and German cultural studies at the University of Southampton, UK.  
Email: [H.Armbruster@soton.ac.uk](mailto:H.Armbruster@soton.ac.uk)*

individual stakes in Syriac migration history as a moral resource that is concerned with the ways in which the past is made morally meaningful for the present and for claims of membership in the Syriac community.

In reflections on their diasporic experience, Syriacs in Turkey and in German-speaking contexts typically referred to the family and to themselves as family members. This echoed not simply that the post-1960 emigrations from Turkey had largely been “family” undertakings, with entire families and kin groups relocating elsewhere, but also that these movements had affected the ways in which “family” could be lived and reproduced. Thus, migration stories typically related how “one had pulled the other,” how kin groups had become scattered, how moral orders of “family” had been challenged, or how the family had offered a space of safety and assistance in difficult new circumstances. “Family” thus became apparent not simply as a major social and emotional reference point, but also as a social network through which individuals experienced and told history. Hence, I situate this discussion in an intergenerational family frame, to explore the ways in which history becomes meaningful for individuals with distinct, yet interconnected biographies.

#### SYRIAC EMIGRATION FROM TURKEY

The Syriacs I refer to in this paper belong to the Syriac Orthodox Church, a community comprising approximately 15,000 in Turkey today, most of whom live in Istanbul. While numbers in Turkey have steadily decreased over the course of the twentieth century, their population in Europe is estimated to have grown to about 220,000 today.<sup>3</sup> The community I focus on here originated in Tur Abdin, a small mountain plateau in southeastern Turkey, close to the Syrian border. As the Syriacs’ historical heartland in Eastern Anatolia, it hosts their most ancient monasteries and churches, the earliest of which were founded in the fourth century. Before emigration, the Syriacs mostly lived as peasants, smallholders, and craftsmen in what was historically a multiethnic region and is today predominantly Kurdish. Currently, only about 2,500 Syriacs are left in Tur Abdin.

The Syriac experience in Eastern Anatolia is marked by a history of persecution and discrimination. They suffered great losses during the Christian massacres in Ottoman Anatolia in 1915,<sup>4</sup> and were confronted with oppressive state nationalism after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Unlike Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, Syriac Christians were not granted official minority status under the

Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, and, as a consequence, were denied identity and language rights. In the wake of the massacres in the early twentieth century, many had fled to other regions in the Middle East and the Americas.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1960s, when internal labor migration was already established in Turkey, European guest worker policies attracted communities to leave the poor and periodically troubled region of Eastern Anatolia. The increasingly violent conflict between Kurdish guerrilla forces and the Turkish state, which dominated the political landscape in the southeastern provinces since the 1980s, further heightened emigration pressures. During the 1980s and 1990s the Christian communities found themselves targeted by the warring parties and sectarian militias. Entire village communities left for Europe. While Syriac Christians in Turkey today are still denied ethnic minority status, political reforms and a more minority-friendly stance of the Turkish government, gave rise to a small return movement in the mid-2000s. However, the war in Syria, as well as a renewed eruption of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict, and a nationalist-Islamic shift since 2010 have brought this to a halt, and have made the future for Christians in the borderlands of eastern Turkey yet again deeply uncertain.<sup>6</sup>

The Syriac Orthodox community in Austria began to form in the early 1970s when the first individuals were recruited into Austrian companies as guest workers, alongside other migrants from Turkey. The labor migrants were followed by asylum seekers in the 1980s and 1990s, which reflected both aggravating political conditions in Turkey and a changing immigration regime in Austria. In Austria, most Syriacs of Turkish origin settled in and around the capital and grew to a community of about 3,500. Most immigrants from Tur Abdin had a rural background and limited access to education and economic opportunities before their arrival in Austria. While the first immigrants were incorporated into the manual labor force, their descendants have achieved a marked degree of upward social mobility. Today most have Austrian citizenship.

#### NEGOTIATING HISTORY THROUGH A MORAL STANCE

A key premise of this article is that migration for the Suryoye I interviewed was a geographical and cultural relocation inscribed into their lives as a process of living, doing, and relating well beyond the first generation. I look in particular at the ways in which migration becomes part of a historically evolving intergenerational relationship and is also narrated as such, by placing a specific focus on fathers and sons.

This relationship inevitably evokes notions of masculinity – filial and paternal – and the ways in which gender becomes attached to managing family affairs and livelihoods. Male migrants frequently acted as pioneers, in that they were the first ones to leave Tur Abdin.<sup>7</sup> In doing so they were not simply seeking a better life for themselves, but embraced a migration project on behalf of a family or groups of relatives whose lives would also become entangled in the process. This was often tied to later reunions, when pioneers paved the way for family members still in Turkey. The individuals I address below share an emigration history from Tur Abdin that began in the 1970s, typically with young (in some cases teenage) men following guest worker routes to Vienna and pioneering their family's emigration.

In first-generation narrations and memories which I heard during different periods of fieldwork in Austria and Germany, this emigration was typically conditioned by discrimination experiences in Turkey, not by the search for labor. Biographical narratives of those who had spent formative years in Tur Abdin were strongly marked by themes of interethnic conflict in the homeland, and often evoked a radical difference between Muslims and Christians. In these stories, migration was a way out of a pressurized existence in Turkey, marked by an overpowering, ultimately intolerant Islam among the institutions of the state and neighboring Kurdish populations.<sup>8</sup>

However, I would argue that these narrations also negotiated history through a moral stance, in which tellers forged connections between where they had come from and where they lived, seeking orientation and recognition in relevant moral frameworks. These moral frameworks interwove past and present experiences in at least three ways. First, leaving Tur Abdin could be read as a moral act in itself. During fieldwork in Tur Abdin in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I heard stories that chided the emigrants for having left in such large numbers and “orphaned” those who had remained. Frequently, this was associated with the charge that they had given up Tur Abdin in order to pursue riches in Europe. While this reproach may have been unfair and eclipsed the emigrants' remittances and donations that supported those who had stayed behind, it had its counterpart in Europe. There, the perception that the large emigration flows had risked rather than preserved “culture” was a moral concern. In first-generation conversations, the departure from Tur Abdin was often (morally) ambivalent: a gain of communal security on the one hand, yet an experience of social rupture and cultural dislocation on the other. The older generation (typically the parents of the fathers cited below) often

expressed nostalgic yearning for Tur Abdin, their home villages and churches, and a culturally more intact past. Even though some had been guest workers too, they tended to live exclusively in Syriac social spaces and left it to their younger family members to bridge life to the non-Syriac world.

Second, relationships to Turkey were also part of wider controversies around identity. Within the first decades of settlement in Europe, the Suryoye developed serious internal conflicts about how to name themselves as a diasporic ethnoreligious minority, and the ways in which this played out had as much to do with their history of origin as with the migration regimes and prevailing politics of nation, religion, and secularism in the countries in which they found themselves. Eventually two major ethnopolitical groups took shape: Assyrians and Aramaeans.<sup>9</sup> The conflict surrounding these self-designations was paradigmatic in articulating both a desire for a postmigration ethnonational identity, and a struggle over narratives of origin in the Middle East with a more secularist orientation (Assyrians) on the one hand, and one that claimed biblical roots (Aramaean) on the other. While these designations referenced new opportunities for immigrant incorporation, public recognition, and resource allocation from the state (particularly successful in Sweden<sup>10</sup>), on a social level they could be deeply morally charged, involving debates about dis/loyalty to community, village, family, and above all, the Christian faith. The Assyrian national narrative – essentially claiming historical roots in a pre-Christian civilization – was often seen by its opponents as conflicting with Christianity, even though it was carefully calibrated to emphasize the Christian identity of the Assyrians. The Aramaean narrative drew its central credentials not simply from claiming ancestry in Christianity but in Christianity's foundations in the Middle East and became positioned as the ethnohistoric origin story of all Christians. The church came out in support of the Aramaean camp and also worked to discredit those who embraced Assyrianism in the early 1980s.<sup>11</sup>

In Vienna a strong grouping of Assyrians formed in the late seventies/early eighties; however, the majority of the Syriacs in the city eventually aligned themselves with Aramaeanism. All of the fathers introduced below became active Assyrians and described their activism as an important phase of consciousness raising and confidence building in their younger years. In Turkey, they said, the community only knew itself as "Christian," any sense of ethnic self-awareness had been stifled by Turkish oppression, and Assyrianism

was like a breath of fresh air. All of them experienced conflicts with their own parents and others in the community to whom Assyrianism was alien or an expression of disloyalty to the Syrian Orthodox Church. They, in turn, had critical views of the church and its powerful hold on the community, but were far from rejecting their Christian identities. In fact, “being a Christian” carried strong purchase as a category that transcended boundaries of nationhood or opinion, and was often used to activate forms of moral kinship which recognized that, under the skin, everyone was Suryoyo.

Christianity as a form of moral kinship could, in some ways, also include Europeans. This was particularly illustrated in stories of disappointment among the first immigrants who had expected recognition from Germans and Austrians as fellow Christians, only to learn that “being a Christian” could mean little in European secular societies. Evidently, articulations of “being a Christian” are not fixed but historically and culturally shaped. During my intermittent fieldwork in Austria, the experience of not having been recognized as partners in faith to Europeans, but relegated to the racialized category *Ausländer* (foreigner) and frequently taken for “Turks” was a cause of frustration and resentment that was as strong in the nineties as it was in 2010. On both personal and communal levels, there was a sense that one’s Christianness regularly met with ignorance in the host society which failed to associate an origin in Turkey with the Christian faith and routinely racialized people with dark hair and nonwhite phenotypes as “foreign” or “Muslim.” So, in many ways, the Syrians saw themselves put (again) in a situation where they “disappeared” among a much larger Turkish and Kurdish immigrant presence in Vienna, and felt they had to specifically position themselves as “Christian” to claim their distinctiveness. I often found that young people, in particular, were unhappy with being “Turkified” in their everyday worlds. Many performed this sentiment symbolically by wearing large visible cross pendants or bracelets with Christian motifs, or, as it was becoming fashionable among male youths, had Christian symbols or parts of the Lord’s Prayer in Syriac script tattooed on their bodies.

However, there were also alliances and well-established networks between the Syrians and the Austrian Catholic Church which had provided substantial financial and infrastructural support to the first Viennese Syriac priest and his growing parish in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> During fieldwork in Vienna, I was present at a number of community events at which municipal politicians and district councilors were

guests of honor. In their welcome speeches the Syriac priest and other community representatives always stressed that the Suryoye were, *as Christians*, exceptionally well-integrated in Austria and had immigrated to the country because of religious persecution in their homeland. While this was, of course, true, it was also a way of creating legitimacy in the face of racialized national discourses which problematized immigrants and their ostensibly “sham” motives for coming to Austria. This was particularly resonant publicly during my stay in 2010, as it was a municipal election year.<sup>13</sup> The right wing Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ) was quickly gaining popular support through an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim election campaign, and poised to upset the traditional Social Democratic stronghold in Vienna.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally the elections became a conversation topic. Some of the Suryoye I knew told me that the FPÖ party chairman was wearing a Serbian Orthodox prayer bracelet, and there were voices of approval for a politician who was “for Christians.”<sup>15</sup> So, “being a Christian” could also mean “not being Muslim” and provide situational symbolic agency in a politicized anti-immigrant atmosphere.

The cultural and historical narratives about Christians, Assyrians, and Aramaeans represented situationally resonant moral horizons against which individuals positioned their own lives and experiences. However, in the context of biographical stories, identities were not simply about self-attachments to ethnonational or faith-based group narratives but were also forged in relation to familial gender and generational norms, which informed individuals’ daily lives. This brings me to the third moral framework through which collective and personal histories were told. I locate this framework in the family where connections between past and present resonate with intergenerational bonds. At family level it would have been misleading to assume that someone’s personal story neatly overlapped with an ethnonational or religious group narrative, despite the fact that families often embraced *en bloc* one particular ethnonational leaning and loyalty to the same church.<sup>16</sup> As Seyla Benhabib reminds us, even in contexts where marginalized minorities’ self-esteem may have been deeply historically damaged, and a politics of recognition becomes part of a vital struggle for recovery, individuals may or may not submit themselves to collective identity claims that “their” groups or group activists may make on their behalf.<sup>17</sup> In fact, young people often suggested that they grew up with insecurity about “who” they were as a people, and voiced frustration about not being able to explain much

detail to Austrians or others who asked them. Taking into account stories of the second-generation, in particular, illustrated that life course positions and familial relations were often much more immediately involved in personal negotiations of moral and affective loyalties than ethnonational or faith-based convictions. It was also in these narrative contexts where migration as a story about ambitions for socioeconomic mobility most prominently came to the fore.

In looking at emigration as a transformative historical process that strongly affected this community, I have identified three morally charged questions and communal debates at this point: The first concerns the right kind of relationship with the culture of origin. The second, the appropriate signification of a collective identity that reconciles “being a Christian” with legibility in spaces dominated by modern secularism. And the third addresses the ethics of intergenerational ties that secure “culture” and upward social mobility at the same time. While I specifically focus on the third question below, the examples will show the interplay of these concerns in biographical stories.

#### MIGRATION, THE FAMILY, AND FILIAL PIETY

The Suryoye arrived as labor migrants in Austria throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>18</sup> Their working lives were typically characterized by blue collar factory work, such as in the textile industry, or in trades. Many of the first-generation men I knew extracted themselves from factory labor after a few years to establish their own small businesses, in tailoring, fashion retail, dry cleaning, or in trades, and often recruited family members to work for them. Self-employment promised more self-determination in the world of work and more status as men in the community. Stories around first-generation working lives (including those of women) were often characterized by principles of hard work, thrift, and the focus on postmigration socioeconomic stabilization. As the examples below show, their sons often reflected this focus on work and career performance in their stories and embedded themselves in parental expectations for familial social mobility.

Even though I am using the term “generation” freely here, a note of caution is necessary. Used in migration studies and popular understanding, “migrant generations” generally evoke the existence of bounded groupings. In the German-speaking context, for instance, scholarly and public debates on “migrant generations” have often revolved around the “culture conflict thesis.” It suggests that migrant

children are caught between the cultural “traditionalism” of their families and the “modernity” of the receiving society, and that their social integration becomes a potentially destabilizing process, generating identity conflicts or social deviancy.<sup>19</sup> While these approaches have been duly criticized,<sup>20</sup> there has nevertheless been a tendency to foreground host society concerns with adaptation or assimilation in the construction of the migrant family. This perspective includes the habitual understanding of migrant families as being fragmented into separate generations, whose cohort boundaries revolve solely around family members’ stakes in migrancy, that is their age at arrival, or place of nativity. In my work with Syriac Christians who entered Austria and Germany under changing immigration regimes (guest worker recruitment, asylum, tourism, family reunification) over the period of about twenty-five years, and who came as individuals or as family units, the categorization in “migrant generations” or “migrant types” offered only limited inroads into understanding people’s premigration experiences or postmigration reconstructions of family and identity. As will be seen in examples below, there was nothing inevitable about how different places of birth or lengths of stay in a given society created boundaries between family members; nor did migration inevitably forge bounded generational cohorts with distinct cultural identities and ideological outlooks. While the value sets of first-generation siblings could diverge, those of parents and children could converge.

In the historical constellations I address here, the first generation of migrants arrived throughout the 1970s and their children were typically born in Vienna. However, the pioneer’s family of origin could be large and include siblings close in age to their own children or older parents who arrived later. So, while these individuals may represent varying “migrant generations” to a migration scholar, the generational focus I take below foregrounds familial generation and its cultural entailments.

As indicated above, “family” figured strongly in these life stories as a major ethical and social matrix of relations in which narrators placed themselves. At the level of the individual story, family often referenced the life course and the ways in which transitions into gendered or age-based kinship roles conflated with a wider collective history. As I showed elsewhere,<sup>21</sup> women sometimes explained their early marriage or lack of education in pre-emigration Turkey by associating their own youthful vulnerability with the vulnerability of the Suryoye as a group which had to protect their women against

potentially hostile Muslims.<sup>22</sup> Becoming a spouse also typically framed female migration biographies in that women generally moved to their husband's homes upon marriage and, thus, connected their own transition into a different family role with a larger diasporic experience. Quite a few women I met in Austria, for instance, had migrated twice, first as infants (Turkey to Europe) and again as brides (from elsewhere in Europe to Austria).

In stories told by fathers and sons, the significance of masculine identities as attached to familial positions, obligations, and expectations clearly emerged. As research on migrant men has shown, norms of masculinity will often be renegotiated postmigration in contexts where different types of masculinity may open new or challenging spaces for shaping male identities.<sup>23</sup> Evidently the Viennese-born children were more intensely socialized into Austrian culture than their parents and some of the intergenerational negotiations of these different acculturations also affected gendered positions, as will be shown below. The masculinity of migrant Suryoye and their sons were tied to notions of "filial piety,"<sup>24</sup> which address ways in which filial identities are transmitted and performed. Being dutiful as a son generally involved a set of morally charged obligations: to be responsible and loyal to family, to marry a Suryoyo woman while in their twenties, to establish a family of their own, to look after younger siblings and elderly parents, and embrace a spirit of educational, economic, or entrepreneurial ambition in the service of contributing to family livelihoods, reputation, and shared social mobility. I heard many stories of young men being cast into parental aspirations of becoming a doctor or lawyer and being confronted with strong pressures to perform well at school – while also facing difficult hurdles in working class households where parents could not offer help with school work and where university study typically had to be reconciled with paid employment.

Those who struggled to perform or conform in terms of these idealized life course models often invoked the "*Aybo System*," or, as a young man in Vienna put it in German Aramaic – *das Aybotum* – as the set of gendered and generational norms and values they were expected to emulate. *Aybo* translates as "shameful" or "inappropriate" and the *Aybotum* revolves around a cultural ethics of respectability that determines a person's moral worth. It ties the individual into a concern for the reputation of their family and associates notions of respectability with the ordered life path evoked above, and, for men in particular, the ability to support one's family and enhance one's social

and financial status. *Aybo*-codes of ethics were gendered, involving for women notions of sexual decency, the virtuous embrace of motherhood, and caring domesticity. The daughters of the first immigrants often related to a sense of gendered control as they were growing up, such as not being able to go out without male chaperones, and the expectation to perform female respectability through styles of dress, talk, and comportment in Suryoyo publics. As one woman in her mid-thirties, talking about her youth, put it, "Everything was *aybo*, even sport!" Men often stressed having to grow up quickly and demonstrating responsibility for the family. Among them too, accounts were common of strong familial control of their movements as teenagers, rooted in parental anxieties about sexual and moral liberties in the European host society. First sons found themselves particularly exposed to parental desires for respectability and obliged to provide role models to their younger siblings. Importantly, *aybo* ethics emphasized a sense of performing not just for family, but under the watch of a close-knit moral community of Suryoye whose judgments could make or break family reputations.

In many ways, the ethics of kinship expressed through "family," organized around an ordered hierarchy between men, women, and children, and virtues of interdependence, care, and loyalty among kin, were associated with the ethics of kinship as Christians. Suryoye in Austria and Germany consistently stressed that the way in which they lived "family" was what made them different from mainstream society, and, at the same time, preserved their faith. Sarah Bakker Kellogg's observation that "Christianity is an inherent, rather than an optional, dimension of Syriac Orthodox personhood," and hence engrained in cultural ideologies of kinship, resonates here.<sup>25</sup> The strong link that was assumed between practicing loyalty to one's kin and practicing loyalty to faith (and by extension to community) emerged most vividly in the conflicted issue of marrying non-Suryoye. While a minority phenomenon in Vienna, those who had married "strangers" generally wrestled with the disapproval from their relatives and could be blamed for threatening their family's respectability. In the context of the patriarchal family tradition, marrying an outsider provoked more anxiety and was more consequential for sons than for daughters, as it was his rather than her role to reproduce the patrilineal family. In all cases I heard of (which involved more females than males), the Syriac Orthodox Church was called upon to ritually sanction the union. It transformed the non-Suryoyo partner into symbolic kin by baptizing them prior to the

wedding and performing the wedding ritual.<sup>26</sup> While still contentious, people choosing a non-Suryoyo partner nevertheless showed that the ethical norms of “family” are not historically fixed and that working out a compromise could be part and parcel of creating cultural continuity. Relatedly, the stories I collected among younger family members often described how they had resisted certain *aybo* norms or pushed for change and wanted different relations with their own children. For instance, while it had been generally assumed to be *aybo* for a man socialized in Tur Abdin to show physical affection to his children, younger fathers in Vienna often said they wanted to change these masculine styles and were keen to soften the traditional patriarchal distance between fathers and children.<sup>27</sup>

#### THE NARRATIVE METHOD

To bring out some of these gendered complexities of postmigration identity, I employ a subject-centered approach, based on narrative interviews. The narrative extracts presented below are drawn from biographical interviews I conducted among members of the same families as part of ethnographic research in 2010–2011. This approach is informed by sociological and anthropological scholarship which makes use of biographies and life stories to explore subjective experiences and perceptions of history.<sup>28</sup>

In particular, I engaged what I came to call “linked biographies,” that is, gathering and analyzing biographical material within familial contexts.<sup>29</sup> This reflects the understanding that life stories are not isolated creations, but form within smaller and larger social collectives and simultaneously engage with them. As such, they offer insights into more widely shared narrative and interpretive scripts, and the ways in which historical experiences are negotiated among intimate communities.

I draw on insights from narrative theory about the fundamental relationship between narrative practice and identity.<sup>30</sup> As Ochs and Capps put it, human beings use narrative genres to craft a “reflective awareness of being-in-the-world,” to bring their experience to awareness, situate themselves in time and place, and negotiate social relationships.<sup>31</sup> Related to this is the interface between the personal and social which permeates personal stories. As such they are at once the properties of individuals, and the articulation of more widely shared interpretive conventions and moral norms into which individuals become socialized.<sup>32</sup> The narrative perspective also draws attention to

the activity of telling, or the notion of “narrative work” as a social practice, bound by time, occasion, and audience. This points to the performative and collaborative dimension of narratives, as well as to their partial and fluid character. Thus, while narratives do not offer unreconstructed access to someone else’s life, they represent a vital resource of experiential meaning-making and for negotiating social, cultural, and moral belonging.

In conducting life story interviews among different members of Syriac families, I aimed to explore how narrators who shared an intimate yet historically evolving social environment would reflect on their experiences in Turkey and Austria, and how these stories would relate to, and simultaneously shape, wider discourses on history, community, and identity. I did not intend to establish the veracity of stories or to reconstruct people’s lives. I was interested in the stories people were prepared to tell in response to broader questions about their biography, in narrators’ stakes in wider communal and historic scripts, and the values and beliefs they would weave into their accounts. All individuals who are featured below were interviewed on their own, yet were aware that I interviewed other family members. In most cases, I had known family members for a number of years. However, the presence of the tape recorder on these occasions brought a certain formality to the encounter and produced a tangible desire for narrative control on the part of some of the interviewees.

Produced in face-to-face interviews, the extracts quoted below address no more than facets of complex lives. The longer quotations offer the reader a narrative flavor of the stories and are interpreted here as practices in which narrators situate themselves, their protagonists, and actions in contexts of meaning and time, and thus frame their commitments to communities of belonging. While my request to relate their life stories produced different types of stories and ways of telling them, most people engaged the idea of life as an ordered “path,” structured by the rhythms of the life course and a morally informed self-negotiation within the worlds of family and community. All individuals presented below share their family origin in the same town in Tur Abdin.

#### DANIEL – A PEOPLE’S BIOGRAPHY<sup>33</sup>

Daniel was the family’s migrant pioneer in Europe. He moved to Vienna in 1970 as a teenager, joining what was then a very small Syriac community in the city. He had lived in Istanbul as a labor migrant

before coming to Austria through a guest worker scheme. In 1975, his father, who had been a seasonal migrant in Syria and other parts of Turkey, arrived and began work in the same factory. More family members joined over the following years, leading to the departure of the entire extended family from Turkey. Now self-employed, Daniel was keen for his sons to gain university degrees and move into better paid positions. This is how he related his biography:

My name is Daniel bar Joseph. We call it Bar Joseph the name of the father. That is, I am the son of Joseph, from the Joseph family. This is the family name, Joseph. Now when you look at my passport it says Özcan. However, Özcan is not the name of our family. After Turkey became a republic, the Turks gave the Suryoye Turkish names, family names, because they were not a recognized minority. Everybody was given a Turkish name and because of this we got the name Özcan. That is why I call myself Daniel Özcan. Like everybody else from our community, we were forced to accept the name.

[He continues on to describe how the Suryoye were split through the drawing of borders in the Middle East after the World War I.]

The Suryoye of Tur Abdin were not a people who asked for their rights. They remained a minority without a leadership. There was only the church who was at their head but since Turkey did not acknowledge the Church as their head the Turks were calling them Turkish *Süryanis*. The Turkish Suryoye. But the Suryoye are not Turks.

[He continues on to talk about the lack of human rights in Turkey and the discrimination they experienced as a tiny minority, and goes on to say:]

This is our land. For six–seven thousand years this has been our land. We didn't go to the Turks; the Turks came to us. The Suryoye have *never* [emphasis by speaker] used violence against the Turks or fought them; they have never even asked for anything, and still they [the Turks] saw them as their enemies. Surely life there was very difficult. Running a trade

was very difficult. Being a craftsman and studying was very difficult. We worked in our crafts, the crafts that we inherited from our fathers and grandfathers such as tailoring, goldsmith, ironsmith, farming. These skills had been ours for thousands of years. The skills of the Suryoye.

[This leads on to addressing Christian-Muslim relations:]

From the fathers and forefathers we learned them, not from the strangers that lived around us. Still what we produced we couldn't sell easily to the outside. They sold it but didn't receive any money. And when they killed some of us we didn't even dare go to the police. They accepted the murder of one or two, so that it wouldn't get worse. This has been the philosophy of the Christians, until now, in the Middle East.

[And, finally, he addresses the emigrations:]

This went on until we saw an opportunity to leave for other countries. Which countries? Because our belief was strong we thought the Christian countries would be good for us. And then in the early 1960s the departure for Europe started. And then Germany and Austria let Turkey know that they were prepared to take in workers from Turkey. And I too, I was fifteen when I came to Austria and went to a factory that was producing sportswear. It wasn't only me from our town but about fifteen others, all youngsters, fifteen-, sixteen-, seventeen-year-olds. I came here before I turned sixteen. They had sent us tickets for the plane, and we arrived at three o'clock in the morning. We arrived here at the factory and slept until six o'clock when the foreman got us out of our beds, and at seven o'clock we were in front of the sewing machines. This is how it was.<sup>34</sup>

Daniel's self-immersion in the collective of the Suryoye and their difficult history in Turkey is striking. I heard these narrative intersections between personal biography and collective history in both Austria and Germany. They were informed by a premigration experience and also by postmigration consciousness raising and forms of political socialization (in this case Assyrianism) that became part of

the young pioneering migrants' efforts to build a distinct national identity in Europe. Many individuals told their own life story as a case study of the wider ethnocollective and its historical suffering. I came to see these often passionate and emotively rendered testimonials as restorative, in that they reinstated a collective history and identity to a community which was dispersed and barely holding on to its homeland,<sup>35</sup> and whose members saw themselves stereotyped as "Turks" or "Muslim" in immigration countries such as Austria.

The rhetorical refinement of Daniel's narrative may have been informed by the presence of the tape recorder. At the same time, it represented a style of talking that was, in some ways, a symbolic enunciation of being a respectable male. Men often held the floor in monologue style and frequently laid claim to superior historical knowledge. The collective Daniel appeals to conjures up both the history of oppression in Turkey and the history of migration, which are causally linked. Only after a long prelude Daniel introduces his own biographical experience, which too is emblematic of the wider collective. The journey ends, in Vienna, at the moment when they are dragged out of bed on the first morning to be directed to the sewing machines on the shop floor. While this powerful *mise-en-scène* represented a narrative "turning point"<sup>36</sup> that indicated a major change in his life, Daniel made it clear that he was not simply a labor migrant but part of an ancient community which had been violently pushed out of their homeland.

#### LUKAS

Lukas is Daniel's youngest son. At the time of our conversation he was newly married to a Suryoyo woman from Germany who was, he emphasized, from a family his parents knew and liked. He had started a university degree but left because he had to get a job and earn a living. Lukas' storytelling developed as a highly poised chronological account in which he placed himself in his parents' migration history and in a moral relationship between father and son:

I am thirty-two years old and was born in Vienna. My parents came to Vienna in the early seventies and I experienced what you experience as a child, mostly nice things of course. My parents worked *very* [emphasis by speaker] hard to bring us up culturally aware, that is by maintaining our Assyrian culture, the language, the dances, the yearly festivals such as the New

Year celebration and the autumn festival, with the idea of course to integrate into society in the country you live so that you have it easier and are not excluded, like other cultures who apparently don't want to integrate. I finished school and did my *Matura* [exam for university entry], then I went to university. . . . In my youth I began to play football, well, that is to do with my father, he was a real football enthusiast. The main reason he took me and my brother to football was because sport is good for your body, it's healthy but mainly because you were off the streets, so that you don't get silly ideas, because one knows this about youngsters that they do stuff out of boredom, they think of all kinds of *silly* [emphasis by speaker] things to do, you know, and of course I did a few silly things with friends when I was sixteen. I stayed out for too long and my father woke up and realized I wasn't there. But this must have been the worst thing I did to him [giggles]. He kept us far away from or wanted to keep as away from drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, all kinds of stuff. Well, my brother and I we experienced a lot of good things, very family, very, very family-oriented.

Throughout his account, Lukas maintained the emphasis on the family; it framed his principal social relations, provided a source of ethics, and the guide to a good life. Later in the conversation, he framed "family" as both a refuge from racist exclusion in Austria and a haven of ethnic belonging in the face of the community's dispersal and statelessness.

Notably, Lukas construes his family's Assyrian ethnicity as a characteristic that promotes integration, in distinction to other cultures who ostensibly refuse to do the same. Without naming those "other cultures," he invokes the prevalent Austrian anti-immigrant discourse to assert the Assyrians' exceptionalism. In many ways, this echoed the fundamental cultural distinction between Syrians and Turks which was a strong motif in Daniel's account. Daniel, who remains a towering figure in Lukas story, is shown to be a moral guardian who kept his son away from the dangers and risks of youth and taught him crucial moral lessons about culture, sacrifice, and achievement. According to Lukas, his father was able to finance travel much earlier than other Assyrians and took his sons to the United States, Sweden, and Australia where they had relatives. He described these journeys as morally relevant:

He took us there to show us the world but also to show “This is how they live here,” so that you learn about it. This way you don’t forget your roots and how difficult it was for my father and mother when they came here. At that time, you didn’t even think of, say, a whirlpool or showers with steam function or something like that. Then the toilets were out on the corridor of your housing block, in some flats there wasn’t any water at all, well hot water, you had to fetch it yourself and heat it, there was no heating for instance. And my father always made that clear to us. He always taught us to respect life no matter what you have and not to envy others but to make the best of your own situation.<sup>37</sup>

In Lukas’ dutiful assumption of the role of a son ready to be instructed and morally guided by his father, the history of family migration was tied in with a transmission of moral standpoints. In many ways, both father and son positioned themselves in a collective history of hardship. While Lukas did not appeal to victimhood in Turkey, he drew moral lessons from migration as a difficult struggle for his parents’ generation. The hard work and sacrifice of the parent induced moral indebtedness in the child. Equally, father and son drew on narrative conventions that emphasized male kinship.<sup>38</sup> The stress on male genealogies, a shared stake in upward social mobility, and the self-emplacement in idioms of familial duty is also present in the following father-son dyad.

#### SHABO - TRAJECTORIES OF SUCCESS

Like the family discussed above, Shabo’s entire extended family trickled out of Tur Abdin in the 1970s and 1980s. While his parents, siblings, and a number of uncles and aunts settled in Vienna, another branch of the family moved to Sweden. Shabo’s business was successful and he pioneered moving his family out of the city to build a house in the greener suburbs, a trend that was recognized as a symbol of success and status in the community and keenly followed by others. Before the tape recorder was on, he talked about being harassed by Muslims in his childhood neighborhood in Turkey but also about the comfort of living with a large extended family before they all departed. He then continued his life story as a chronological account that revolved around family, education, and work.

At the age of 11, in 1974 I came to Austria; my father and mother were already here. I went to school here, one year primary school and then four years secondary school. Then I completed an apprenticeship in [trade]. After the apprenticeship I married and then the children came, in 1987. A few years later we bought a house and rebuilt it. During that time I made the master diploma in [trade], yes, and now I have been self-employed for a number of years, yes, and we are doing this [business] together with my son now [*smiles*].

When I asked him a little later in the conversation how he had decided to learn his trade, he replied:

Actually, I wanted to become a car mechanic really, and I had already found a place offering an apprenticeship. I still lived at my parents then, we bought a bigger flat because all my siblings had come [from Turkey] in the meantime and of course, we tried to improve the flat. I organized everything, then, at the age of twelve, thirteen, fourteen, at the time when you do your apprenticeship, at fourteen, fifteen years old, yes. And I went to buy the plumbing materials, building materials, and everything, and the boss of that company where we bought the materials asked me what I did. I said "Well, I want to become a mechanic. I am finishing school and then I'll do an apprenticeship." He said: "You have to work for me." He really wanted me. Because I was so mature already at that age, because I organized everything for my parents. Well, and this is how I came to do this apprenticeship.<sup>39</sup>

The chronological account emphasizes an "ordered" life, organized around education, work, the desire for upward mobility, marriage, and children. It involves an early growth in maturity and the ability to accept responsibility for the family as a teenager. This encoding of masculinity as the duty to marry, become a father, and shoulder the economic affairs of the family was much more widely present. Middle-aged men often used it to critique younger men for their alleged inability to accept responsibility as they embraced the ethical individualism that dominated Austrian society. Later in the conversation, he revealed that one of his sisters had married an Austrian which he had found difficult to accept. "It would be very hard

for me if my children did the same," he said. Shabo's oldest son, twenty-three-year-old Michael, was far from challenging his father and recounted his life story in a remarkably similar way:

#### MICHAEL

M: Where shall I start, well I did primary school four years, then I had four years secondary school, then I reached a point where I had to decide whether to start work or continue studying. I had registered for a technical college. It was a boarding school, the only college that specialized in [father's trade]. At that time my father wanted to buy the first shares in his old company, and the basic question for me was whether I wanted to come in on it or not. I had two months to think, I was there for two months in that company. I was about fourteen then. I checked it out and just began to apply some logical thinking, I thought well, how would college actually benefit me for this particular type of work? Of course, education is important in any case, no matter whether you need it or not, but not for this job as such I didn't really consider it important and then I just entered work. I made an apprenticeship in retail, when I finished it I was seventeen. I had excellent results and was awarded a diploma from the Viennese education council. When I was eighteen my father's business partner and my father too wanted me to become manager of the company, which I became.

Interviewer: At such a young age?

M: Yes, when I was eighteen, I turned eighteen and a few months later I became manager of the company. Yes, that lasted for about two years and then [*pause*] well it's not important but we left the company, there were a few complications [*pause*] we looked for a new place. I also said, "OK, I want to stay in the same type of business and I want to become self-employed," which I did, and then we founded a new company in the same type of business. This is the fast version of my whole life.<sup>40</sup>

In his story, Michael never referred to migration or assumed a specifically "ethnic" location of speaking. It was a very pronounced "I"-account, guided by a chronological plot and a speaking position

which suggested that he was in charge of his life. At the same time, in presenting the “fast version” Michael used similar points of reference to his father to structure his account. An educational and professional genealogy, a claim to male agency, and the self-emplacement in a system of authority, where merit derives from being recognized as capable by senior males. Like his father, Michael presented himself as someone who matured early and who maximized his own opportunities through rational deliberation and a focus on mobility and success. The work ethic that permeates these accounts was a motif underlying many Syriac migration tales and commonly associated with the Suryoye as an “industrious” people that always struggled hard if not harder than others to achieve.

#### ISA - UNFULFILLED AMBITIONS

In the last father-son dyad the image of continuity and seamless transmission of values is much more fractured. It revolves around Isa and his son Thomas. Isa came to Vienna in 1974 to join his brother who was already a guest worker in the textile industry. Soon after Isa’s arrival, his brother left for Germany and finally settled in Sweden where he was eventually joined by their other siblings and parents. As in the two cases above, Isa’s entire extended family left Turkey. Despite their relocation to Sweden, he and his wife decided to remain in Austria. At that time Isa had serious conflicts about his Assyrian leanings with his own father who, as he put it, “was married to the church” and would not tolerate an identity that was accused of being anti-church. As the son of a relatively affluent family of shopkeepers in his hometown, he had access to further education as a child. Education remained a major theme in his life story and is shown as a space of childhood discrimination.

I was born in Tur Abdin which is in southeastern Turkey, in a provincial town mainly populated by Assyrians. Tur Abdin is in Mesopotamia which we call Beth Nahrin in our language, the land between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. We have been living there since the time of the Assyrians. I went to school, primary school, secondary school, and high school. I can’t really remember what the lessons were about. The teachers could do what they wanted in any case. But we went to school every day. The parents were keen that we should learn Turkish. . . . Later I worked as a teacher in a Syriac village, and when I heard

someone speak Syriac in the school grounds, I told them off! This is how stupid I was! I had the same experience at school and then I did it myself. For instance, I had a teacher in my first year in secondary school, he was infamous, everybody knew him, later he was promoted to something quite big. We had a test in algebra. He returned the test sheets to us and called me: "Come here!" I went to him and he hit me in the face and sent me off. Every week he attacked the pupils. Especially us Christian children. Before my time no more than maybe fifty Christian pupils managed to do the university exams. You had to go to the city for that. Most parents couldn't send their children<sup>41</sup> because it was too expensive. Still, education was considered important. The children should become dentists, engineers, or doctors, so that no one knows they are Christians. The civil service was closed to you, anyway. If a judge knows that the lawyer is a Christian he is finished. . . . I was under pressure from the family and relatives to go to university and become a medical doctor. Unfortunately, I failed the necessary entry exams. So my brother went to Austria at a very young age. He was only sixteen, and then there was the idea that I should join my brother and he should help me to study medicine in Austria. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to do it. I started to work for [employer] and worked in the same place for thirty-five years, until I retired.<sup>42</sup>

As the story continued, Isa explained again that his ambition for higher education was curtailed when the brother left, and it had become too difficult to reconcile work and study. He emphasized how he nevertheless worked hard to achieve promotion, and finally moved into a more managerial position.

#### THOMAS

Thomas was twenty-six at the time of the interview and is Isa's youngest son. Far from the neatly controlled accounts which dominated the narratives above, his story revolved around a series of episodes which addressed conflict and his struggle to conform. He said he had had pressure from his parents to marry and insinuated that he had had girlfriends but was not ready to commit. Due to Thomas' discontinuous narrative style, my own collaboration in his story

through questions and comments was more pronounced than in the examples above:

T: My father was very old-fashioned, my mother was cooler, yet that is how it was [*pause*]. School. For my father it was only study, study, study, nothing else. There is nothing more important than studying. Yes, when you go to school, when, when we brought home good marks everything was fine.

Interviewer: Everything was fine.

T: But I wasn't a good pupil. I was always more [*pause*] of a rebel, let's put it that way. I was not like my brother.

Interviewer: You didn't like school?

T: No, I didn't. Absolutely not. I hated it.

Interviewer: Did you really?

T: Yes, absolutely hated it. I just about scraped through.

As someone who hated school, and eventually worked in different jobs in the catering industry, Thomas did not live up to the expectation and pressure for upward social mobility. Looking back at his younger self, he described someone who was "unruly," a teenager with a rebellious nature who had conflicts with parents and got in with a "bad crowd." The refusal to conform remained a strong theme in his account, interspersed with both a self-deprecating and self-aggrandizing rhetoric.

T: I went to catering school, completed it, had very good results. Then I worked as a barkeeper for quite a while. But then I got into a real bad crowd, in the catering industry it was terrible [*pause*] really terrible, lots of drugs [*pause*], lots of [*pause*], stupid things, let's put it that way. Then at some point I said, "I am

going to have my own pub." Together with a friend we did it, I was twenty-two then, we put our money together. We put our money together, he was the boss, I was the manager, it worked really well. I was really good at that job. I was good. And then we wanted... then I did my military service, and then everything collapsed. [Military service] was *really* [emphasis by speaker] terrible. . . . I was penalized so many times, so many penalties, so many restrictions, arrests, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Was that because you were a little rebellious?

T: Obviously. I have to say, I wasn't a bad soldier, I was the best really. I was the best-known soldier of the entire barracks. And well I was, you can be elected as a soldiers' representative, I didn't volunteer for it, but someone put up my name and they all just elected me. *Well* [emphasis by speaker] and then I became the soldiers' representative.

. . . But I was really bad, really. Really bad. Sometimes I didn't get to go home for two or three weeks because they arrested me [*laughs*] well arrested, I wasn't allowed to leave.

Interviewer: What did you do?

T: Well he was, don't know about thirty-two and a real military freak. They were really, don't know crazy, and he says something and I was just standing there, just like normal and he yells at me from the side, and I thought, "Idiot what's the matter with you? What are you yelling at?" I am cool, I am just standing there, not doing anything. I am just trying to do what I am supposed to. On the very first day they annoyed me. I couldn't accept it. He thought just because I had a bloody immigrant's name [*Tschuschn Ausländername*]<sup>43</sup> he thinks I am some kind of idiot? Well that is what he thought. Well he was wrong. At the end of the day I had a hard time, but he was worse off. After all is said and done, let's put it that way, he was worse off. The boss.<sup>44</sup>

While the lack of a fluid narrative articulated his troublesome journey through the key institutions of education, work, and the military, Thomas nevertheless emphasized masculine self-confidence about his ability to perform in the workplace and in rejecting the authoritarianism and racism of other men. In the same account he made several references to the Suryoye as a moral community in which “everybody badmouthed everybody else” and defended his current job in the low paid service sector by saying: “There is no shame in it for me.” Thus, while he was working through his deviations from fatherly expectations and communal norms of respectability, he nevertheless performed a narrative style that emphasized being in charge of his own destiny.

## CONCLUSION

Linking these biographies analytically reflects both the social connections along which I was able to build relations and conduct interviews, and the matrix of relations within which individuals recognized themselves as biographers. In selecting these pairings, I do not claim that they are representative of Suryoyo postmigration trajectories in general, but the gendered narrative embedding in morally charged webs of family and community was widely present. All narrators were members of extended families, which had performed a major historical change through terminating their lives in Turkey and relocating to Europe. As we have seen, they related their biographical narratives to this process by interlocking the idiosyncratic and personal with the culturally normative and valued. All fathers referred to migration as a personal act that coincided with their transitions into adulthood. The sons who were at stages in their lives at which further life course transitions (e.g., marriage, work) had just been performed or were on the horizon, defined themselves in terms of their fathers’ postmigration life projects. In fact, all three sons linked their own stories explicitly to those of their fathers. Daniel’s son Lukas read parental migration as a sacrificial act and cast himself into a position of moral indebtedness to his father whose example as culturally aware, family-oriented, and hardworking he was determined to follow. While Michael made no direct references to the migration story of his parents, he situated himself in the biography of his father Shabo and aligned their goals for professional attainment. Thomas also negotiated his own actions in light of his father’s educational ambitions, yet admitted failure and the struggle to perform.

The individuals drew on cultural idioms of family and masculinity to tell their stories and simultaneously negotiated their moral agency. While Daniel foregrounded the Suryoyo plight and suppressed his own identity as a husband and father, he drew on a gendered narrative style more widely shared among older men. He stressed masculine agency and his own filial virtue, which informed his resolve to move to Austria at a very young age, to earn a living for the family and secure their future. Both Shabo and his son Michael reiterated this pattern: accepting responsibility for the wellbeing of the family at a young age. Lukas cast himself into the role of the dutiful son and culture-conscious Assyrian. Thomas' pained account of having to perform under parental pressure and communal codes of respectability was not uncommon in other conversations with the former guest worker children. His revelations about his struggles were nevertheless interspersed with claims to male confidence. As he strove to frame his actions in idioms of success while actually reporting the failure and/or refusal to conform, his story suggested more powerfully than any of the others that narratives of educational and professional attainment were not simply personal choices but dominant conventions within which men were expected to recognize themselves. As such, they were legitimized by moral norms of gender, family, and community as much as by the repercussions of historical loss, collective dispersal, and the opportunities for social mobility in an immigrant society.

The transgenerational reading of these accounts, thus, has not simply generated a story about "migrant generations" as discrete groupings with diverging values. In these stories, migration appears as a long-term historical process with many interrelated participants, who situate this process and are situated by it in different ways. The fathers who had performed a physical relocation were still affected by the historical troubles that had preceded it, and which remained significant for their sense of belonging. Daniel and Isa drew on narrative scripts of Assyrianism, pivoting on Christian oppression in Turkey, claims to an ancient Middle Eastern homeland, and enforced migration. The sons' stories did not bring the lost homeland but the economy of labor migration to the fore. They suggested that it was not Assyrianism or the Christian faith they contended with, but norms of filial piety that aligned their own actions and ambitions with those of their fathers and families. They were expected to put their efforts into their families' transitions into middle class positions, while reaffirming their identities as dutiful children and "responsible" young men. Looking at narratives from different members of the same family made apparent

that Syriac migration was not just a project of history and identity, but one of social mobility, and as such not simply accomplished by those who moved but involving the lives and labors of their children. What was striking in these men's rhetoric was the absence of the contribution of women to this process.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers as well as Fiona McCallum Guiney for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> I use Syriac Christians interchangeably with *Suryoye* (pl.) / *Suryoyo* (sg.), the self-ascriptive term in Syriac, where *Suroyo* or *Suryoyo* also means the Syriac language. As I explain in this article, self-ascriptive terms have become a matter of dispute in diaspora communities. However, I have not met anyone who objected to *Suroye* / *Suryoye*. My usage of these terms is not meant to express a political stance.

<sup>3</sup> Demographic figures are estimates and often vary between sources. According to Güsten, European Syriacs with Tur Abdinian origins are currently distributed as follows: Germany (95,000 to 120,000), Sweden (80,000), the Netherlands (20,000), Switzerland (8,000), Belgium (8,000), and Austria (3,500). Susanne Güsten, *The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin* (Istanbul, TR: Istanbul Policy Center, Sabancı University, Stiftung Mercator Initiative, 2015), 4.

<sup>4</sup> For key works, see David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mark Levene "Creating a Modern 'Zone of Genocide': The Impact of Nation- and State- Formation on Eastern Anatolia, 1878-1923," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12, no. 3 (1998): 393–433; Sebastián de Courtois, *The Forgotten Genocide: Eastern Christians, the Last Aramaeans* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> There are no conclusive statistical figures about the Syriac population size in Eastern Anatolia before the massacres of World War I. The historian David Gaunt estimated figures of 133,000 West Syriacs (Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, and Protestants) for the eastern province of Diyarbakir, and 190,000 East Syriacs (Chaldeans, Nestorians) for the Turkish-Persian border region in the period before 1915. Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors*, 21–28.

<sup>6</sup> Güsten, *The Syriac Property Issue in Tur Abdin*. For the ongoing Turkish-Kurdish conflict that affects the region, see Nikos Christofis "The State of the

Kurds in Erdoğan's 'New' Turkey," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 3 (2019): 251–59.

<sup>7</sup> I also met Syriac women who pioneered their family's emigration, particularly in circumstances where labor recruitment directly targeted females. In some cases, marriages were arranged quickly so that the wife could be sent on her own.

<sup>8</sup> See also Heidi Armbruster, *Keeping the Faith: Syriac Christian Diasporas* (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> The conflict was particularly acute in Sweden. For more detail, see Naures Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses Among the Assyrians/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora* (Leiden, NL: Leiden University Press, 2011). For Assyrianism, see also Aryo Makko, "The Historical Roots of Contemporary Controversies: National Revival and the Assyrian 'Concept of Unity,'" *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 1–29; Sargon G. Donabed and Shamiran Mako, "Ethno-Cultural and Religious Identity of Syrian Orthodox Christians," *Chronos* 19 (2019): 71–113, <https://doi.org/10.31377/chr.v19i0.457>; Önver Cetrez et al., eds., *The Assyrian Heritage: Threads of Continuity and Influence* (Uppsala, SE: Uppsala Universitet, 2012). For the Dutch context, see Sarah Bakker Kellogg, "Perforating Kinship: Syriac Christianity, Ethnicity, and Secular Legibility," *Current Anthropology* 60, no. 4 (2019): 475–98.

<sup>10</sup> See Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*.

<sup>11</sup> Atto, *Hostages in the Homeland*, 337–39; for the historic use of 'Aramaean' and 'Assyrian' by different stakeholders, including the church, also Donabed and Mako, "Ethno-Cultural and Religious Identity."

<sup>12</sup> See also Andreas Schmoller, "Of Save Havens and Sinking Ships: The Church in Oral Histories of Middle Eastern Christians in Austria," in *Middle Eastern Christians and Europe: Historical Legacies and Present Challenges*, edited by Schmoller (Vienna, AT: LIT Verlag, 2018), 147–98.

<sup>13</sup> Vienna is a city as well as one of Austria's nine federal states. Viennese government elections take place every five years.

<sup>14</sup> The FPÖ achieved unprecedented success in the 2010 elections, gaining 25% of the vote which climbed to 30% in 2015. See "Wiener Gemeinderats- und Bezirksvertretungswahlen," Stadt Wien, accessed 15 June 2020, <https://www.wien.gv.at/politik/wahlen/grbv/>.

<sup>15</sup> FPÖ Party chairman Heinz Christian Strache brandished a Serbian Orthodox rosary bracelet on election posters in 2010 to express his pro-Serbian attitude. Observers saw this as a (successful) stunt to win votes among the large Serbian-Austrian community, and a symbolic message highlighting the party's anti-Muslim position. See Aleksandar Roknic, "'Deal with the Devil': Austrian Serbs Embrace Anti-Migrant Right," *Resonant Voices Initiative*, 26 September 2019, <https://resonantvoices.info/deal-with-the-devil-austrian-serbs-embrace-anti-migrant-right/>.

<sup>16</sup> In 2010–2011 there were two Syriac Orthodox Churches in Vienna, and a third was in the process of formation, largely reflecting community conflicts and divisions.

<sup>17</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 52–55.

<sup>18</sup> Austria and Turkey signed a guest worker agreement in 1964. The system flourished when needs for unskilled labor were high and individuals already working in Austrian companies were encouraged to invite relatives and friends to work for the same employer. A recruitment stop was introduced in 1973 but people continued to immigrate as workers and under family reunion rules. Guest workers turned into immigrants. See Rainer Bauböck, “‘Nach Rasse und Sprache verschieden’: Migrationspolitik in Österreich von der Monarchie bis heute” (Political Science Series Working Paper 31, Institut für Höhere Studien, Vienna, AT, March 1996), 13–15, [https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/899/1/pw\\_31.pdf](https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/899/1/pw_31.pdf). From the 1980s the Suryoye also immigrated as asylum seekers.

<sup>19</sup> See Patrizia Gapp, “Konflikte Zwischen den Generationen? Familiäre Beziehungen in Migrantenfamilien,” in *Leben in Zwei Welten: Zur Sozialen Integration Ausländischer Jugendlicher*, edited by Weiss (Wiesbaden, DE: VS Verlag fuer Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), 132–34. Also, Wilhelm Heitmeyer et al., *Verlockender Fundamentalismus: Türkische Jugendliche in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, DE: Suhrkamp, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> See Anne Juhasz and Eva Mey, *Die zweite Generation: Etablierte oder Außenseiter? Biographien von Jugendlichen ausländischer Herkunft* (Wiesbaden, DE: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Heidi Armbruster, “Linked Biographies in Changing Times: Syriac Christians in Vienna,” *Ethnologie Francaise* 44, no. 3 (2014): 471–480.

<sup>22</sup> In stories about life in Tur Abdin, the term “Muslims” was largely used in a generic sense.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g., Michael R. Donaldson et al., eds., *Migrant Men: Critical Studies of Masculinities and the Migration Experience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009); Xiadong Lin, *Gender, Modernity and Male Migrant Workers in China: Becoming a ‘Modern’ Man* (Abingdon, UK; Routledge, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Cornwall, “Introduction: Masculinities under Neoliberalism,” in *Masculinities under Neoliberalism*, edited by Cornwall et al. (London, UK: Zed Books, 2016), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Bakker Kellogg, “Perforating Kinship,” 481.

<sup>26</sup> This could be the case even if someone already was a Christian. Marrying a Muslim is generally considered taboo.

<sup>27</sup> For an insightful reflection on the relationship between gendered ideologies of “honour and shame” on the one hand, and their everyday ambiguities and contestations on the other, see Nancy Lindisfarne, “Variant

Masculinities, Variant Virginites: Rethinking ‘Honour and Shame,’” in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, edited by Cornwall and Lindisfarne (London, UK; Routledge 1994), 82–96.

<sup>28</sup> Inspiration has been drawn from literature by sociologists and social historians who use intergenerational life stories to reconstruct historical experience or illuminate the transmission of historical trauma within intimate narrative worlds. See e.g., Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson, eds., *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories* (London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2005); Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, and Anna Rotkirch, eds., *On Living Through Soviet Russia* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004); Gabriele Rosenthal, *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime* (London, UK: Cassell, 1998); Viola Stephan, “The Effect of the Very Distant Past on Migrants: Armenian Families in Germany,” in *Ethnicity, Belonging and Biography*, edited by Rosenthal and Bogner (Berlin, DE: LIT Verlag, 2009), 305–24. I have also been inspired by anthropological research on the significance of narrative practice for coming to terms with expulsion and flight. See e.g., Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity* (Copenhagen, DK: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002); and, on how “family narratives” aid in producing coherence among dispersed kin, see Mary Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile and Return* (London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2005); Karen Fog Olwig, *Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> See also Armbruster, “Linked Biographies.”

<sup>30</sup> See e.g., Anna de Fina, “Group Identity, Narrative and Self-Representations,” in *Discourse and Identity*, edited by de Fina et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 351–75; Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, “Narrating the Self,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25 (1996): 19–43.

<sup>31</sup> Ochs and Capps, “Narrating the Self,” 21.

<sup>32</sup> Jerome Bruner, “Life As a Narrative,” *Social Research* 54 (1987): 11–32; Ochs and Capps, “Narrating the Self,” 26–31; also, Mary Chamberlain and Selma Leydesdorff, “Transnational Families: Memories and Narratives,” *Global Networks* 4, no. 3 (2004): 230–31.

<sup>33</sup> I would like to thank the research participants for sharing their experiences with me. All personal names are pseudonyms. Daniel’s story has been translated from Aramaic, all others from German. For a more extended discussion of the first father-son case see Armbruster, *Keeping the Faith*, 211.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel, interview with author, Vienna, 25 August 2010.

<sup>35</sup> These fusions between personal and collective testimony resonate with Michael Jackson’s insights on the existential role of storytelling in the context of historical trauma and suffering. Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, 62–64.

<sup>36</sup> Elliot Mishler, "Narrative and Identity: The Double Arrow of Time," in *Discourse and Identity*, edited by de Fina et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38–39.

<sup>37</sup> Lukas, interview with author, Vienna, 10 November 2010.

<sup>38</sup> This aligns with traditional Suryoyo views of the primacy of male kinship. Brothers are considered strongly genetically related and their children are not supposed to marry. Marriages between maternal cousins, however, were traditionally encouraged, and are still practiced. A mother might also have sought to strengthen her role in the family by securing a bride for her son from among her kin.

<sup>39</sup> Shabo, interview with author, Vienna, 13 January 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Michael, interview with author, Vienna, 13 January 2011.

<sup>41</sup> As Isa explains later, this refers to male children only. Girls' further education was deemed both unnecessary and unsafe at the time. His stance about professional careers is informed by his town experience where education was more readily accessible.

<sup>42</sup> Isa, interview with author, Vienna, 1 September 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Translatable as "a bloody foreigner's foreign name." *Tschusch* is derogatory in Austrian German for "immigrant" or "foreigner."

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, interview with author, Vienna, 13 October 2010.