

# Migrant Narratives

Storytelling as Agency, Belonging and  
Community

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## **6 “When you win, you are a German, when you lose, you are a foreigner”**

Claiming position beyond the meritocratic  
and discriminatory migration discourse

*Claudius Ströhle*

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## 6 “When you win, you are a German, when you lose, you are a foreigner”

Claiming position beyond the meritocratic and discriminatory migration discourse

*Claudius Ströhle*

### **Narrative – “Milked like a cow”: Labour migrants from Turkey in Central Europe**

Ferit and Şadiye are a retired couple from Turkey who have lived and worked in Germany. The two grew up in the village Dağyenice in the province of Uşak in Western Turkey before Ferit followed his father to Germany in 1973 through the bilateral agreement on labour recruitment. Two years later, they married, and Şadiye joined Ferit in Germany. In 2007, Şadiye was granted an early pension as a result of developing a serious neurological disease caused bodily and mentally by 30 years of work in Germany. Ferit retired in 2014. Since then, they have commuted among houses in Germany and in the city of Uşak and a newly built one in their home village of Dağyenice. Their house in the city of Uşak was built in 1987 and was the first investment the young couple made in Turkey after migrating to Germany. To begin with it stood empty, but then one floor was rented out. Even though it was the couple’s house, Ferit’s parents kept the rent.

*Ferit (F):* Dad and mum took the rent, but I didn’t see (.) anything [...]. For example, in the past, let’s say I gave my dad 1000 lira, gave him 1000 German marks, you don’t get that back. (.) It used to be a lot like that. Not with me, with almost everyone it was like that.

*Claudius (C):* Did you also help the people who stayed here a lot (.) family, your mum, or dad or?

*F:* For example, I have four brothers, eh, for example. Four brothers. One brother went abroad. The brother who works abroad, earns money, sends money to another brother here, always, for example. Now he did this, did that, did that. At some point he has a big family, got married, he got married, the four brothers got married, then they have children. You have (.) many years abroad (.) you have nothing, and the others have a lot. What do you think then? (...) It happened a lot like that, a lot, a lot. Unfortunately. (..) There’s a saying. A cow (..) do you understand me?

- C: Mhm (affirmative)
- F: I am a cow, always milk, chh, chh chh (makes a milking gesture with his hands). You saw that.
- Şadiye (Ş): Laughs
- C: Laughs
- F: What does the cow do later? (...) Yes that is a saying.
- C: A Turkish saying?
- F: They milked me like a cow
- C: Aha, yes, they sucked you dry
- F: That is (.) That is also a saying
- C: Was it true?
- F: True, true. They always use, use, use you and at some point, when you don't give anything anymore, pfft (makes a sweeping gesture with his hand) they dump you. Something like that. (.) Milked like a cow, milked (.) and then at some point pfft (gestures). (.) Do you understand? That's how it happened a lot. Not to me. It didn't happen like that for me, but it happened to a lot of people. I've heard it or seen it. A lot. And then at some point there was a fight, a fight. (...) Too bad. Too bad. Too bad. Someday, no matter if the whole world is yours, if your whole house is full of money, or gold, what is the good of this? (...) Someday you'll go to hell. That's why you have to be a good person, no matter what [...]. And if someone needs money, then you can help. You do this and that (...) and then it's good (...) then you have to stretch out your hand to them.
- The situation of the young couple in Germany was very much influenced by the beginning of their migration and how that was embedded in the familial plans. Herein, Ferit's father played a decisive role.*
- C: And when you left here as a young boy, what did you think, do you remember? Did you think about how long you would stay? Or what you would do later?
- F: Oh, when I left my dad said: "We'll stay for three or four years and then we'll come back. Maybe buy a tractor and then we'll come back." And yet that's what dad did, he bought a tractor, but he left me over there.
- C: He bought a tractor?
- F: He did
- C: And went back to the village?
- F: Yes, that's how he did it. But he didn't take me with him. Because I was married, 75 (...) and then he said, "this is" (...) – we had our first child – (.) "this is your child, this is your wife, this is the house (.) now, you stay here." (Knocks on the table every time). Then he came back in 76.
- Ş In 76 dad left-came, right?

- F: Mhm (affirmative) (...) Until 76, until 78, until 69-79 (to Şadiye): Didn't we send money to dad until 79?
- Ş: Until 81 we gave.
- F: Until 81 (...) what I earned, the little money I saved (...) no matter if you have 1000 German marks, or 2000 or whatever you can save. When you come during the holidays, you have to give this money to your dad (knocks on the table). That's what we did. Until 81 (knocks on the table). From 81 on I said: "I don't want to give any more money" (knocks on the table), "I want to work for myself now, for my family" (...) then I had the second, third child, then I saved a bit, then I bought this [the property], as I said (to Şadiye): Did we buy this in 84 or 85?
- Ş: In 85.
- F: In 85 I bought the property, as I said. Then we gave it to a company, 87 it was finished (knocks on table). That's how it was. For many people it has been the same as for me, as with my life. (..)  
*From the beginning of their migration, Şadiye and Ferit regularly visited Uşak during the summer months. Once, in 1978, they brought a television from Germany and connected it to a generator in their home village of Dağyenice. They invited many of the villagers to this event.*
- F: It was quite big (...) but at the bottom like this, not a narrow one like this, you know. Two people have to carry it, not one, you can't do it alone. Televisions used to be so heavy.
- C: (Laughs)
- F: God, God, God (...) Now Europe is big, big, big. They always say that, eh? (...) I lived in Neuss, I already told you, didn't I?
- C: Mhm (affirmative)
- F: Look (traces the outline of the flat with his fingers on the table) we had two rooms, brother, dad, and the two of us, and one child. That's where we lived (taps his fingers on the table). No bathroom (.) And one toilet.
- C: In Germany?
- F: In Germany, yes yes. And with the other tenants, Spanish people, we lived there. And no bathroom [...].
- Ş: Five families, one toilet. Five families.
- F: And now? In Germany we didn't have a proper street, in the past, in the village. Everything was so small and narrow (goes into a crouched position). And now everyone acts big. And now everyone has a big mouth, the whole of Europe.
- C: Yes, of course, it used to be poor too.
- F: Yes, that (..) you can say what you want. The Turks have helped Europe a lot, a lot, a lot (knocks on the table with each "a lot").
- C: Sure!
- F: Many guest workers (knocks on the table) did all the shit work, everything. What I, my job, for example, not everyone can do it. A German says "ugh, that stinks, ugh". We didn't have a single German painter. Only foreigners, for example. Where there's dirty shit work, only foreigners.

Most of them were Turks. Greeks, Italians, rarely, Spaniards, Portuguese, almost not at all (...). Only Turks did the shit work (...)

C: Yes, that's true for sure.

F: Then they don't even say thank you, not once. Only help the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party]. Nothing else at all. If you see the correct side (...) Europe is not our brother. Normally. Really, believe me (...) They forget everything quickly, good times (...) Use, use, use, use (...) if you, for example, I carry you, eh? Let's say about five hundred metres. I carried you, let's say about four hundred metres. And then I say (puffs) "oh, I'm tired. I can't go on." What do you do? (.) "Oh hell, pffff! Come on, next one!" No thank you. Like that. Europe did it like that. (...) That's how it is. I don't want to badmouth anything, but that's how it is. Because I, because I experienced it myself. I know that.

*Repetitively, Ferit talks about the hegemonic behaviour of the Europeans, which he also follows on German television. He has two satellite dishes, for Turkish and German TV channels. On this day, he switches through the German TV channels and then to Turkish ones. The breaking news is announced that Mesut Özil is resigning from the German national football team. We read together:*

F: If you win

C: You are German

F: Then you are German. If you lose, you are a foreigner.

C: That's what he said?

F: Yes Germany, many Germans have said that. Do you understand? (...)

C: Mhm (affirmative)

F: Was I right earlier, what I told you? As long as you carry, you are a good person. If you say, "Oh, I'm tired, friend, please, I need a five-minute break, then I can carry you again." – "No! Either you carry me, or I'll dump you!" (in a loud voice) Something like that. See, you've seen this case now. That's what I meant. (...) You have to be a good person, no matter what you are. Whether you're German, or Turkish, or, black, white, it doesn't matter. What you believe, doesn't matter. You have to be a good person. That's what I mean. You understand me now, don't you?

C: Yes, I understand you.

F: And now you have seen it correctly?

C: Yes

F: That's what I meant. Germany is like that. Do you understand? (...) Too bad. For Özil, or for Germany. That's what I think (Ferit switches to a German television channel, where the crime series *Tatort*<sup>1</sup> is on).<sup>2</sup>

### **Reflection – A narrative analysis of remittance practices in the context of the labour migration regime in Central Europe**

Globally, migrants' remittances have increased exorbitantly in the last decade. In 2019, migrants sent 719 billion dollars to their families in their places of

origin (World Bank Group 2021).<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, research on remittances has increased significantly since the 1990s, still mainly focusing on the impacts of the money transfers on the receiving countries (Carling 2020). In addition, studies have examined migrants' motivations in remitting (Mahmud 2020), the perceptions of the families who stayed in the places of origin (Nazridod *et al.* 2021), how remittances shape landscapes and transform architecture and space (Lopez 2015), and how remittances are inevitably accompanied by a transfer of social (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011) and political concepts (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2020). On the other hand, less attention has been paid to questions of the role of remittances in shaping the biographies and identities of migrant actors. For example, how far were remittances part of the migration plans? How are social relations, gender positions and generational hierarchies mirrored in remittance practices? How are decisions to migrate and to remit negotiated and performed within the family and across borders? Most notably, Carling (2014) identified remittances as embedded in a social script of sender and recipient, fulfilling purposes such as compensation, gift, allowance or even blackmail. Based on this, Meyer (2023) conceptualised remittances as social practices that effect cross-border social positioning and, subsequently, result in the formation of migrant subjectivity.

My ethnographic research<sup>4</sup> focuses on remittance practices within the migration nexus of Uşak in Turkey and the Stubai Valley in Austria. In the course of bilateral agreements on labour recruitment between Turkey and several European countries since the 1960s, more than 3,5 million moved to and stayed in Europe, and around 20 percent migrated from Western Turkey, to which the province of Uşak belongs (Akgündüz 2016, p. 135, İçduygu 2012, p. 12). The foreign workers were desperately needed to drive the economic recovery after World War II. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the host society – which is also still overrepresented in the hegemonic historiography – the foreign workers were “wanted but not welcome” (Rupnow 2017, Zolberg 1987) and were pejoratively referred to as “guest workers”. After the recruitment stopped in 1973, some returned, and some stayed. Through family reunification, the migration process continued, and a long and conflictual process of mutual incorporation took place. However, since the failed coup d'état in Turkey in 2016, the relations between the Turkish state and the European Union hit rockbottom, increasing the pressure on migrants with multiple belongings and leading to processes of re-nationalisation and social rupture (see among others Abadan-Unat 2011, Palmberger 2019). Remittance flows to Turkey increased after the beginning of emigration in the 1960s, reaching a peak of 5,4 billion dollars in 1998, and thereafter steadily decreasing to less than one billion dollars per year (Karamelikli and Bayar 2015, p. 33).

By following remittance actors and transfers in their everyday lives in different social and geographical settings (Marcus 1995), this ethnographic research comprises multi-layered and multi-placed data like field notes, photographs, archival sources and interview manuscripts. In this chapter, I aim to reflect on the impacts of remitting on the senders' biographies and

subject positions. Therefore, I embed the narrative interview with Ferit and Şadiye into the collected ethnographic data and cross-border migration discourses and analyse it with a detailed narrative analysis (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004).

*Exploring remittances by applying narrative analysis*

An interview is a communicative action in which the interviewer and interviewee create social reality. In my analysis, I explore the content as well as the structure of the narration (Mishler 1995), focusing on interactive, situational and performative aspects (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004). In the detailed analysis of key elements, I look at what is told and what is left out, how certain events are displayed and why they are displayed in this way. Since the selected interview was characterised by references to the discourse about so-called guest-worker migration, the analysis looks for culturally established narrative patterns and reveals the cross-border forms of positioning: Who or what drives the action in the narration? How does the narrator relate to hegemonic historiography or counter-narratives of both the places of destination and of origin (Bamberg and Andrews 2004)? In this context, I aim to explore the various forms of positioning as they are linking the individuals to social discourses and thus create and negotiate transnational belonging in social interactions (Carling 2014, Deppermann 2015, Meyer 2017). To do so, the interview situation and the decision to choose specific extracts for the analysis must be reflected.

After I met Ferit and Şadiye in the summer of 2017 during my ethnographic research in Uşak, I visited them regularly. We hung out in their house in Dağyenice and did garden work, walked through the market in the city of Uşak, or met at weddings in the region of Stubai Valley (Austria), where Şadiye's family lives. The interview took place in the summer of 2018 in their four-storey house in the city of Uşak. I was interested in the couple's migration biographies and how they are linked to remittance practices – namely sending money, presents and ideas to their relatives back home. The interview, which was conducted in German and Turkish and later translated into English, started on the balcony on the third floor with an open-ended question about their migration stories. The fact that the interview took place while switching between the different floors and with repeated narratives about the meaning of the building made it evident how the couple's remittance practices materialise in the very house in which the interview was conducted. After about fifteen minutes, Ferit suggested to show me the apartment on the fourth floor, which stands empty except for some rare visits by their daughter. Afterwards, we returned to the third floor, where he showed me photos, souvenirs and interior decoration reflecting their cross-border biographies, for example food and furniture from Germany and a photo album with pictures from Austria, Germany, Istanbul, Uşak, and so forth. Parallel to this mobile form of the interview, the couple was also several times talking via phone or video calls with their

relatives in Stubai Valley and Germany. Moreover, on this very evening, Ferit and Şadiye were invited to the wedding of Ferit's niece. However, Ferit and his brother have been in a fight for a long time, as Şadiye told me, and eventually they decided not to go. This conflict within the family is also present in the narration of the interview.

During the analysis of the transcribed interview, the selected sequence I used in this chapter turned out to be a key narration as it comprises thick episodic descriptions and significant biographical experiences displayed in a condensed form; we can recognise this by the high degree of narrative resolution, increasing scrutiny and pointed mode of presentation (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004, p. 135). In this extract, Ferit re-enacted dialogues with his father and former bosses, used expressive metaphors (milker, carrier), and actively involved me in the conversation. Undoubtedly, the extent to which cross-border migrants are constrained by dual expectations and loyalties has already been comprehensively demonstrated (Waldinger 2015), as well as in the context of the meritocratic guest-worker regime (Alpogu 2019, Rupnow 2017). In the following, I aim to analyse *how* these experiences are narrated by focusing especially on the practices of remitting. Thereby, my chapter provides a methodological contribution to remittances research, which remains dominated by global macro analyses.

### **Analysis – Migration and remittance narratives as ways of sense-making in the face of diverging cross-border expectations**

When speaking about the remittances he sent to his family in Uşak, Ferit uses the metaphor of a milked cow. He depicts his family in Turkey as milkers, that “always use, use, use you and at some point, when you don't give anything anymore [...] they dump you.” In the same mode of diction, Ferit describes how Europe neglected the crucial part the labour migrants have played in the economic upswing after World War II: “They forget everything quickly, good times (..) Use, use, use, use” and if a foreign worker was not needed anymore, they say “Come on, next one!”, Ferit recapitulates. In the following, I aim to identify the techniques of narrating this cross-border dilemma, its embeddedness in the public migration discourse and the functions the storytelling fulfils in the transnational positioning. To this end, I want to show not only how remittances mirror and control transnational social relationships (Carling 2014), but rather how in interweaving them, remittance and migration narratives function as practices of sense-making that put aside outline an exit from diverging cross-border expectations.

#### ***Techniques of migration and remittance narratives: Collectivity and reassurance***

Through certain strategies and modalities of narrating such as re-enacting dialogues, using metaphors and involving the listener, Ferit makes his experiences vivid. Also, it seems to remain difficult for him to talk about



experiences as his own; that's my interpretation of why he repeatedly embeds them in a collective. Right at the beginning, Ferit depicts how he gave money to his father (by using first person), but didn't get it back (by using second person). He relativises the depiction by using "For example", "let's say" and through the consequent sentence: "It used to be a lot like that. Not with me, with almost everyone it was like that." After my question about whether Ferit supported his family, he again uses the example of a hypothetical and classic migrant family, of which one member goes abroad and sends money to Turkey and, in the end, the ones who migrated "have nothing, and the others [who stayed in Turkey] have a lot". After that, he switches again to a collective level, underlining that such conflicts happened a lot and to a lot of people, but not to him. In this context, Ferit's "small stories" of being abroad and being forced to provide for the well-being of the family at home undergird the "big story" of the first generation of labour migrants from Turkey in Europe (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008). By displaying the story as an example of a hypothetical family, underlining the omnipresence of these stories on a generational level, Ferit can talk about his own experiences and make them bearable. Moreover, he thus illustrates the double temporal dimension of experiencing, remembering and narrating migration experiences: By differentiating between the narrated self and the narrative self (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004, p. 24), he locates these experiences in the past while simultaneously uncoupling himself from being a so-called guest worker.

During the interview, Ferit constantly involved me in his narration, especially through practices of reassurance. The high amount of reassurances in Ferit's narration ("do you understand me?", "believe me", "eh", "Was I right earlier, what I told you?") indicates that my interview partner was particularly unsure whether I would understand him correctly and that he attaches great importance to my approval (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004, p. 260). The linguistic reassurances were accompanied and reinforced by para-linguistic ones. When Ferit told me about an accident he had in the barracks in which he stayed in the beginning of his migration with his father, he showed me the scar on his arm. Moreover, when he showed me around in his flat, Ferit constantly knocked on the walls, railings and furniture in order to prove their stability and quality. I construe these linguistic and para-linguistic acts of reassurance as expressions of the hierarchical socio-cultural divide between the interviewer and interviewee that is here embedded in the global power relations of the guest worker regime. Ferit challenges the master narrative of Europe's hegemony and upholding of human rights through his counter narratives on the exploitation of foreign workers in the 1970s. His acts of reassurance show that speaking against dominant discourses assigns him the position of the marginalised who has to bring evidence; in contrast, I am assigned the unmarked position of the member of the majority society, an inspector who judges. Our relationship underlies powerful dichotomies of majority/minority, Turkey/Europe and researcher/researched, but also of contemporary witness/next generation. The fact that the interview took place in Turkey, and at least

partly in the first language of Ferit, namely Turkish, cannot resolve this imbalance. Especially when researching migrant narratives, one must keep in mind that the social disparity between interviewer and interviewee inevitably defines the research relationship. It is rather about understanding the censorship that causes certain things not to be said and the motivations for emphasising others (Bourdieu 1999). By reassuring him that I got him right, Ferit reminds me of the imbalances that constitute our relationship while, at the same time, he strives for a mutual understanding.

*Re-enacting dialogues and the metaphor of the carrying migrant worker*

The interactive construction of social reality performed in this interview becomes evident in the episodic narrations of Ferit. Through his use of techniques of re-enacting dialogues and metaphors, these episodes function as dramatic presentations of experiences, making the listener a witness to and accomplice of the told (Lucius-Hoene 2010). Most notably, dialogue renditions have the function of characterising and grading persons. They are powerful tools of narrative self-positioning (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004, p. 234). After I asked Ferit about his initial migration vision, he outlined his movements, goals and planned duration as determined by his father. After his father returned to Turkey in 1976, he made Ferit and Şadiye stay in Germany, which Ferit narrates by rendering the words of his father. Therein, he makes his voice louder and uses a harsh intonation, reinforced through knocking on the table. The father's decision seemed to be related to the fact that Ferit and Şadiye now had to remit him part of their earnings from Germany. Ferit enters the dialogue rendition with his father in 1981 by stating, "I don't want to give any more money", which he also reinforces by knocking on the table. By narrating this sequence in the form of a dialogue between him and his father, he can tilt the experienced situation in his favour. In doing so, Ferit makes his narration discursively connectable. Thus, the re-enacted dialogue expresses how Ferit accomplished a liberation of the family (in Turkey), and the very house in which the interview took place is the materialisation of this liberation. It was the first big investment the couple made for themselves and, from there on, they could spend their yearly summer visits in their own house in the city of Uşak and no longer in the house of Ferit's father in the village of Dağyenice. Notably, the couple's collective remittances (Şadiye: "Until 81 we gave") and the collective investment in the house is depicted by Ferit as his own ("what I earned, the little money I saved"). This correlates with the overall findings of my ethnographic research, where the hardship and success of the migrant experiences was dominantly told as a male agenda (Ströhle 2023). However, 1981 was a turning point in both Ferit and Şadiye biographies, which is also demonstrated by the interim conclusion Ferit makes after narrating this episode, "That's how it was", followed by again framing his story as characteristic for the generation of labour migrants from Turkey. Still, these stories are sparse in remittances research, which mostly focuses on the motivations for sending money or the impacts these transfers have on the regions of origin.

The detailed analysis of Ferit and Şadiye's story not only gives insights into the inter-familial pressure (Haagsman and Mazzucato 2020) and the hardships of remitting, but also into how far remittance decay (Meyer 2020) is negotiated within the family across borders and remembered as a significant act of emancipation from cross-border obligations, opening up new possibilities of investments and lifestyles.

The second rendered dialogue in this extract is linked to the second exploitative system Ferit and Şadiye were confronted with, namely the migration and labour regime in the Germany of the 1970s. Herein, it is crucial to follow the narration and its changes of the subject. After talking about the first television Şadiye and Ferit brought from Germany to their home village of Dağyenice, Ferit suddenly stops. After three seconds of pause, he switches topic by attributing to the Europeans a hegemonic and arrogant behaviour. This shift from at-the-time-modern electronic device to criticising global power relations can only be understood when relating this extract to the broader findings of my research. It was a significant finding of this ethnographic study that many return migrants said that today they do not bring gifts or consumer goods from Europe to Turkey anymore, as there is no need to. From the 1960s to the end of the 1980s, gifts like technical devices, furniture and chocolate from Europe were inevitable, due to the lack of these products in Turkey (see also Mura 2016).

Against this backdrop, Ferit's change of subject can be interpreted as scrutiny of the dominant narrative of the developed Europe and the underdeveloped Turkey, which is also mirrored through a one-sided transfer of remittances, namely money, know-how and consumer goods like televisions. This is reflected later on in the narration, when Şadiye and Ferit depict the lousy housing conditions in the cramped accommodations in Neuss, Germany. Then, he moves on to describing the unwanted work that was apportioned to the foreign workers, most notably to the ones from Turkey. Criticising this exploitative and discriminatory labour regime, Ferit presents a notional dialogue between me and him, mirroring the relations between a labour migrant from Turkey and the guest worker regime in Europe: "if you, for example, I carry you, eh? Let's say about five hundred metres. I carried you, let's say about four hundred metres. And then I say (puffs) 'oh, I'm tired. I can't go on.' What do you do? (.) 'Oh hell, pffff! Come on, next one!'" Ferit subsequently elaborates on this metaphor, depicting the positions of the docile migrant worker and the powerful (supra)nation that finds a use of the former only as long he carries the latter; but not vice versa. The metaphor of the carrying worker contains an obsequious element. Moreover, the German *tragen* (to carry) is close to the verb *ertragen* (to bear), which also accurately describes how Ferit narrated his experiences as a painter in Neuss. Finally, the image of carrying also points to a burden that someone can carry for the other, for example, to get them over a certain threshold. By using culturally established narrative patterns like metaphors and verbal images, Ferit increases the credibility and meaning of his narration. By choosing this metaphor, he thus makes an offer of interpretation, in which the linguistic form and the content merge

(Meyer 2017, p. 107). Focusing on the usage of metaphors is, in my view, a key to understanding migrant narratives as polyphone voices embedded in the power relations of transnational societies.

***Being “a good person” as a way of sense-making in the context of cross-border dilemmas***

In the last sequence, Ferit and I follow live on television how Mesut Özil resigns from the German National Football Team. When the breaking news appears, Ferit translates Özil’s official statement, linguistically for me, but also biographically for himself. He modifies “I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose” by using a more general, collective level rather than a personal one (“you” instead of “I”). Moreover, he translates the Turkish word *göçmen* (immigrant) with, in German, the more pejorative word *Ausländer* (foreigner). While sitting in Ferit and Şadiye’s house in Turkey, we witness another significant act of censure in the German integration discourse, which was already characterised by cultural-religious racism and xenophobic movements like *Pegida*,<sup>5</sup> and tendencies of re-nationalisation since the failed coup d’état in Turkey in 2016. Özil, the former role model, who won the Germany-widely renowned Bambi award for integration,<sup>6</sup> postulates that his social recognition did not extend to the economic logic of success and failure: as soon as he couldn’t “carry” anymore, as Ferit described it for himself earlier in the interview, or for the first generation of labour migrants from Turkey, he was portrayed as the immigrant, who is not wanted anymore. At this very moment, in the city of Uşak, Ferit’s biographical key narration is conflated with the public discourse on labour migration between Germany and Turkey.

In this public discourse, migrants are often perceived in terms of an economic yardstick, when actors from both Turkey and Germany demand economic as well as emotional loyalty. Ferit outlines a way out of this cross-border dilemma, namely by being a “good person” regardless of national, ethnic, and religious affiliations. Money and wealth do not count at doomsday, but actions do, Ferit continues his narration. In this way, he defined a “good action” in a religious sense comprehension of sacrificially helping others, no matter what they need from you. This shows that Ferit and Şadiye’s remittances to the family members in Turkey have to be obtained not only through familial obligations, but also through religious ones: “if someone needs money, then you can help”, is a remittance narrative that provides a polyphonic answer to the question of why migrants send money to their families at home. These voices need more emphasis in the remittance discourse that is based on developmental outcomes, rather than on the multifaceted and conflating characteristics these inter-familiar private money transfers are based on (Carling 2014, Erdal and Borchgrevink 2017). Moreover, in this way, Ferit narratively finds a way to articulate his experiences of being used by a patriarchal father. It is a way of sense-making, certifying that all his devotion was not useless. Cross-border transactions between migrants and the families in the places of origin can

therefore span not just the boundaries of nation states, but also the ones of this world and the hereafter: in the narration, sending remittances is interpreted as a decisive act for Ferit's fate. Being a "good person" thus functions as a practice of sense-making within the divergent cross-border expectations of being an immigrant as well as being an emigrant. Even more, when Ferit switches at the very end of the interview from Mesut Özil's statement to the popular German crime series *Tatort*, he demonstrates how mundanely and self-evidently cross-border belonging can be performed in every-day life, illustrating a vision for a similarly self-evident transnational position beyond a meritocratic and discriminatory migration discourse.

## Notes

- 1 *Tatort* is the most famous German crime series. Among other things, the series deals with current and relevant socio-political issues, such as: human trafficking, urban poverty and social conflicts. It runs every Sunday at 8:15 p.m. and as it is followed and debated by many at the same time, *Tatort* can be considered as an important phenomenon of the national identity construction.
- 2 In the transcript, underlining indicates a special vocal emphasis, dots within round brackets a pause (..) and square brackets mark omissions [...].
- 3 Defying predictions, remittance flows have proved to be resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, remittance flows decreased by only 2.4 percent compared to the numbers of 2019. However, it was the first time since the financial crisis in 2007–2008 that the annual growth was temporarily halted. For more information, see World Bank Group 2021.
- 4 My dissertation is embedded in the research project "Follow the Money. Remittances as Social Practices" (funded by the Austrian Science Funds, P 28929), which examines the effects, functions, and meanings of remittances in the context of labour migration between Turkey and Austria from the 1960s until today.
- 5 *Pegida* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) is an anti-Islam, far-right political movement, which argues that Germany is being increasingly Islamised.
- 6 The *Bambi* is an annual media and television prize awarded in Germany by Hubert Burda Media. In 2010, Mesut Özil won the award in the "Integration" category.

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