



Introduction: Theorizing Remittances — Social Positioning and the Making of Migrant Subjectivity

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Migration means change. In fact, the motivation to migrate in many cases is to achieve change on an individual and collective level. Migrants aim for a better life in their place of destination, they want to improve their financial situation, they seek more security, stability, and personal freedom, they hope for better education and healthcare, all for themselves, their families, and their communities. Collective remittances facilitate the extension of infrastructure like health centers and churches, support hometown associations, and strengthen the social ties between diaspora communities with their places of origin. For the desired improvements do not only affect migrants in their new places of residence, but also transform their homelands.

We claim in this volume that many aspects of these transformations are incited, encouraged, and implemented by remittances. With migrants?

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remittances, state programs, organizations, and individuals can transform infrastructure and the lives of non-migrants by channeling funds into education, healthcare, housing, agriculture, and technologies. Remittances are more than money: they encompass social capital, objects, ideas, values, and norms. They bring new attitudes toward learning, well-being and health-seeking behavior, gender roles, and political participation. Their transformative effects are mostly welcome and seen as improving the quality of life, but remittances can also bring irritation, discord, and controversy (Grabowska et al. 2017). As they stand for preferences of spending versus sending, of building a life or founding a business in the place of residence versus supporting family, villages, and the economy in the place of origin, the priorities are not without inner or outer conflict and reflect difficult decisions and painful choices. Remittances thus constitute a source of social conflict as well as of social cohesion. Both result from the fact that remittances are structured by asymmetrical relations arising from global inequalities and neocolonial power constellations (Weiss 2005). Remittances bridge these “divides of global inequality” (Carling 2014, p. 218) and, at the same time, they project this divide into intimate personal relationships.

The aim of this volume is to study the transformative effects of remittances with regard to relational asymmetries in different geographical and historical settings. To this end, we examine both the value and materiality of remittances (what is sent) as well as the changes the transfers elicit (the effects). Our hypothesis is that migration and social change go hand in hand and in many cases, they are hinged by remittances as the ignition and agents for social transformation. However, it is important to note that transformative effects do not equal development. In fact, it is one of our objectives to challenge the narrative of remittances as the key to development and modernization (de Haas 2020). In order to go beyond the migration-development nexus with the “remittance mantra” (Kapur 2005), that is the idea that remittances change poor countries for the better, we take a critical approach, analyzing remittances in their complexity, ambiguity, and ambivalence: How do remittances contribute to transnational social inequalities, foster structures of dependency, reproduce colonial power structures, and thus contribute to a neocolonial world order? In what way are they part of the “transnational social question” (Faist 2014; see also Ströhle & Meyer in this volume)? To answer these questions, we address four different approaches in this volume: first, and in order to pave the way for studying transformative effects, we look at

historical remittance transactions and examine their development over time. How have remittance practices changed over time and what were the effects on social relations and family dynamics (Bajić-Hajduković & Bernard in this volume)? What were the contributions of sending and receiving states, for example channeling programs (Miletic in this volume)? Second, we investigate the collectivity of remittance in their transformative effect: What new communities are brought to life by remitting and how do sending and receiving groups change? How does the nation state influence remittance practices? Third, we follow the perspective of material remittances and study the production of symbolic capital in relation to industrial objects and gifts. The fourth approach addresses the future of transnational society by examining the role of remittances in climate change, conflict, and academic economies. Neocolonial structures are made visible in these contributions.

In this introduction, I will offer a theoretical framework of remitting by combining it with theories of social positioning and subjectivity. To this end, I will first review the characteristics of transnationalism in order to provide the necessary context for remittance research. Second, I will pursue the concept of remittance scripts (Carling 2014) for a theory of remittances as a way of social positioning. I conceptualize remitting as ways of being and belonging (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) and add the perspective of becoming. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller, ways of being refer to “actual social relations and practices individuals engage in” like caring for family members or supporting communities. Ways of belonging constitute “a conscious connection to a particular group” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, p. 1010), an act of demonstrating membership like wearing a college tie or cooking a particular national or ethnic dish. The ways of belonging include both the practice and the awareness of its symbolic meaning. The notion of subjectivity adds ways of becoming to the expression of belonging and membership. Through ways of becoming, migrants internalize mechanisms of identity formation, adopt specific subject positions like the caretaker, the investor, or the modernizer, and constitute a transnational self. I argue that if we want to conceptualize a transnational (social field) perspective on society, we need to examine the ways in which historical constellations of colonialism, contemporary power structures like border regimes, immigration laws, and work permits as well as cultural hegemonies in places of residence contribute to negotiations of belonging and identity politics. My proposition is that remittance practices represent ways of being, belonging, *and* becoming and that by

examining ways of becoming as a process of subjectification, we can better understand the asymmetries and thereby the kernel of the remittance transaction.

TRANSNATIONALISM: A SOCIETY IN THE MAKING

Contemporary society is transnational and global at the same time: nation states, businesses, organizations, and people have multiple networks with nodes in a number of places and nation states. Whereas the perspective of globalization is directed onto the macro-level of interaction of businesses and trade, transnationalization describes “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1994, p. 6). Contrary to globalization, transnationalism works “from below” (Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Transnationalism thus describes the economic, political, cultural, and social ties between migrants and their homelands and refers to practices and commitments that constitute and reproduce those bonds.

In migration studies, the emergent transnational perspective has helped scholars over the past 30 years to overcome the early focus on migrants’ otherness, their alleged deficits, and the corresponding need to adapt and integrate. The transnational turn has challenged migration studies in questioning linear movements, push-and-pull models, and assimilation theories. This epistemological shift marks the turn away from two separate ways of life in the countries of origin and destination toward an understanding of migration as a network of people, their social relations, international organizations, and the authority of national states (Faist 2010). Remittances play a key role in establishing, maintaining, and fostering these networks. From the early works by Basch et al. (1994), Portes et al. (1999), Levitt (2001), Vertovec (1999), and others, we have learned that transnationalization is a social process that is driven by migrants and their cross-border activities and commitments, but that its effects are not limited to migrants but involve the entire society of both countries of origin and destination. The transnational perspective is therefore directed onto a given society as a whole and not onto ethnic or national groups within that society. It encompasses migrants and non-migrants and how they are affected by institutions, organizations, laws, and economies in more than one nation state. It also takes into account how locality interacts with transnational bonds (Nowicka 2020, pp. 3–4). Migration studies with a transnational perspective does not mean studying migration (anymore): it

means examining how society deals with migration; how mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are produced with regard to ethnicity and nationality; and how ways of being, belonging, and becoming are negotiated within power relations and cultural hegemony.

Furthermore, the transnational perspective has taught us to overcome “the receiving country bias” (Castles et al. 2014) and “methodological nationalism” which runs the risk of conflating society and the nation state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). A transnational research design does not focus on a group of migrants in (mainly northern) destination states but “follows the people” (Marcus 1995), taking into account the regional differences and local specifics of geography, politics, economy, and culture in the countries of origin. By doing so, we can also fulfill an important prerequisite of transnational research, which is to examine the changes in the lives and social positions of people resulting from migration (Nowicka and Šberedžija 2016b, pp. 10–13). In other words: What changes when people become migrants? Only with answers to this question can we achieve the goal of studying migration as a perspective on society and an agent of social change.

Living transnationally has become normal for most migrants and also for non-migrants as migration permeates all of society. On a larger scale, everybody could claim to lead a more or less transnational life in consumption, communication, work, and leisure. However, there are differences between migration, mobility, and tourism, and participating in a global popular culture is not the same as living a transnational life. Research on transnationalism has been criticized for using the concept so broadly that it loses its analytical value. Besides, not everything a migrant does or does not do is a transnational practice. In the next section, I will focus on four characteristics of transnationalism that manifest the concept’s analytical value, namely spatiality, temporality, capital, and connectivity/disruption.

First, regarding the spatial dimension of border regimes and attention to the nation state: what makes individual and collective transactions transnational is the fact that they cross state borders and thus map out a new transnational space. This space has a dynamic and liminal character which is constantly updated by economic and social exchanges between migrants and non-migrants, by work, communication, and travel. Although borders are overcome regularly from this perspective, they are still a constitutive element of transnationalism. Nation states have the power to regulate territorial border politics and decide who is granted access to immigration and who is not (Nieswand 2018). Beyond

immigration laws, national border regimes furthermore create constant challenges and problems for people on the move, for example through import and export laws on goods, citizenship regulations, and passport politics. Moreover, once migrants have encountered the nation state in crossing the border, they are further “confronted with and engaged in the nation building processes of two or more nation-states” (Basch et al. 1994, p. 22). Beyond the legislative, nation states act on the level of the symbolic and negotiate the rights and means not only to immigrate, but also to belong. Being granted permission to apply for and acquire citizenship, residence, and work, to buy property and obtain access to healthcare and education, are constant tasks of living transnationally. Locality is thus a place and a claim at the same time. Transnationalism is not a counter-narrative of nationalism. On the contrary, we need to keep in mind the narratives of nationalism in order to understand transnational identity. The transnational can serve as a stepping stone for national loyalty, as can be seen in the long arm of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the ultraconservative president of the Turkish Republic who has a strong influence on German and Austrian Turks and their politics of identity (Faist and Ulbricht 2013).

Nationalism is more than a political and organizational structure, it is a structure of feeling, of experiencing everyday life, and of shaping belonging. Transnationalism can also be used as a stepping stone to a new everyday “banal nationalism” (Billig 1995), as we can see when second- and third-generation Turkish migrants in Vienna cultivate a diasporic “Turkish taste” in popular culture and aesthetics (Savaş 2014) or in the national conflicts over the national identities of Turks and Kurds, fought out in diaspora media (Keles 2015). Media platforms can also offer a way of forming diaspora groups independent from national space (Karner in this volume).

The second dimension of transnationalism is temporal. Transnational lives are characterized by the scaling and simultaneity of acting in two different spheres: speaking two or more languages, buying property and building houses, starting businesses, participating in social life, and following political, cultural, and popular trends in more than one place (Erdal 2020). Social media and new communication technologies help with being in two places at the same time. People follow family events over Instagram and share important moments like birthdays, weddings, and religious ceremonies via video calls. Temporality in transnational lives can also mean a social rhythm of movement, like spending the holidays in one’s place of origin or temporary return migration after retirement.

Third, dealing with multi-locality and simultaneity is a skill. Nowicka has shown how migrants make use of their economic, social, and cultural capital in order to find their place in more than one society (Nowicka 2013, 2015). If we consider mobility a resource, that is, an experience from which people derive abilities and skills, then we can conceptualize these skills as transnational capital that allows social differentiation in multiple belongings (Erel 2010; Moret 2018). Remittance can be considered a valorization of transnational capital, a currency that senders and receivers use in the process of cross-border social positioning (Meyer 2019). As with other forms of capital, transnational capital can be converted into economic capital, that is financial remittances, and into social capital, that is the social status that comes with sending and receiving remittances. Patterns of capital conversion follow transnational social conventions and scripts. Thus, remitting “is not just about the economy” (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011), but it is about the forms, conversions, and currency of capital.

Trying to balance capital and debit, the fourth aspect is the reminder that the transnational perspective is directed at connectivity as well as at friction and tension (Waldinger 2015). Transnational space is characterized by connections but also by asymmetries and differences (Nowicka 2020). Waldinger and Nowicka reminded us further that connectivity should not be confused with collectivity: being in contact with relatives and friends abroad does not necessarily lead to a sense of solidarity. In order to avoid romanticizing the idea of community (Joseph 2002), we need to soberly examine the various forms, practices, and temporal durations of transnational social ties and their transformation. The focus must be on the moment, place, relation, or object in which two spheres come together and social norms, practices, and dispositions coincide, conflate, or collide. Tsing (2005) described these encounters as frictions, a metaphor that helps us examine the transformative effects of transnationality: in transnational space, both sides of the encounter change through contact, they rub off on each other and level out. A new condition emerges and produces a distinct liminal social position and quality of belonging, a “betwixt and between” (Turner 1964), engaging with the “there” and “here.” By directing our research perspective toward this transnational position, we can go beyond traditional migration research with its focus on adapting and assimilating. Instead, we look at the transformative effects that the transnational condition and disposition have on society: how it

changes individual practices, values, and ideas, and how it transforms collectives both in the place of origin and in the place of residence.

Remittances play a key role in these transformative processes. Our interest in this volume is how social ties are reflected and altered in remittance practices: how some of them become reinforced over time, how some of them fade, and how some change their form, meaning, and rhythm of exchange. For example, when remittances are sent no longer as financial aid, but as a part of Islamic charity, this changes not only the amount and frequency in the financial transfers, but also the relationship between sender and receiver, their self-image, and their position in society (Erdal in this volume, Erdal and Borchgrevink 2017). We propose studying transnational lives and the production of multiple belongings, practices, and dispositions by examining remittances. When we study the transformative effects of remittances, we study social change in transnational society.

WHAT ARE REMITTANCES?

Remittances are financial, material, social, knowledge-based, and symbolic means of support given by migrants to family, kin, friends, neighbors, and associations in their countries of origin. As such, they recognize, maintain, and affirm social relationships and connect people despite their physical distance. Changing remittance flows can strengthen or weaken social effects (Carling 2020). Moreover, remittances represent the purpose and goal of migration for senders and receivers, for the prospect of remitting can be the incentive for migration aspirations in the first place. To be able to care financially for family, to support the community, to invest in a house or a business in the community of origin are often the reasons for migrating (Carling 2008). The decision to become mobile is thus in most cases connected to the hope of financial advancement, access to work, prosperity, and security; a decision not made individually, but by families, neighborhoods, and villages. It is not only the mobile who profit from this advancement, but also those who stay behind, for the gains of mobility are shared between the place of destination and origin.

The transformative effects of these transfers for the countries of origin are undisputed: successfully established remittance transfers improve living conditions, provide food, clothing, housing, and transport, and facilitate access to education and health services. They enhance agriculture and further technologies for improving crops and water supplies. Technological

advancements contribute to the fight against climate change where it is needed the most (Musah-Surugu & Anuga and Van Praag in this volume). The financial flows can free unbanked households from credit constraints and enable the accumulation of capital. Social remittances broaden the horizon of non-migrant communities by promoting peacebuilding processes, political participation, democratic rights, and gender equality. Collective remittances allow the building of infrastructure like community centers and churches, support hometown associations, and connect communities between the diaspora and the homeland (Odermatt and Bayala in this volume). On a macro-level, remittances boost a country's economy, attract investments, and promote economic growth. Access to foreign currencies also stabilizes the national economy.

The other side of the remittance coin encompasses financial and social dependencies between migrants and their communities of origin. When the money stream runs dry, the possibilities for social change toward a better life become sparse. Remittances also have the bad reputation of lowering labor force participation because recipients may be discouraged from seeking employment and work (the “moral hazard effect”). Beyond the household level, remittance flows substitute state financing and lead to privatizing processes, for example in the health and education sector, and thus have a neoliberalizing effect on social infrastructure. This is because, as the sum of private transfers from abroad rises, state investors see less incentive to promote public hospitals, schools, and other educational institutions (Orozco 2013, Ströhle & Meyer in this volume). Furthermore, remittances sometimes come under scrutiny, for example, being suspected of financing crime and terrorism (Horst et al. 2014).

Remittance money is thus special money and is valued differently from other monies (Singh et al. 2012; Thai 2014). At their core, remittance transactions are manifestations of social relations: they are expressions of solidarity, loyalty, and guilt, they represent measures of support and control, and they are accompanied by conflict and cognitive dissonance over the question of where and how to spend money. For the senders, remittance practices represent nostalgic bonds, generosity, and a willingness to help, as well as a means of influence and control. Simultaneously, expectations that migrants will share their ostensibly better life with those they left behind are high and result in social pressure (Lindley 2010). From the point of view of the beneficiaries, the money is earmarked with attributions of subsistence aid, gratitude, but also interference from outside, even

blackmail in cases where the transfers arrive with explicit instructions on how the money is to be spent.

Moreover, opinions on remittances frequently surpass the communities involved: where money is sent abroad and not invested locally, migrants are accused of freeloading in their place of residence. In the place of origin, consumption enabled by money sent from abroad represents, on the one hand, freedom of choice and the possibility of expressing individuality, while on the other hand, enhanced consumption leads to criticisms of materialism and superficiality. Eckstein showed how in Cuba remittance money used to carry attributions of conspicuous consumption and of political ideologies and would thus be rejected: “we did not fight a revolution for Colgate toothpaste,” she quoted an interview partner who remembered how he loathed the packages sent from the USA (Eckstein 2006, p. 147). Rejecting remittances can be an expression of agency and resistance and can hinder or redirect social change (Grabowska et al. 2017, pp. 125–168). Sometimes, remittances are rejected for practical, emotional, or aesthetic reasons. Occasionally, migrants as well as non-migrants fight change in the community of origin in order to preserve traditions and forms of cultural autonomy, what Peggy Levitt called an ossification effect (Levitt 2009, p. 1237), and they do so by refusing remittances.

It is evident that remittances are far more than a sum of money. In her seminal work on remitting, Levitt coined the phrase “social remittances” in order to capture these multi-dimensional workings. Social remittances are “the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-county communities” (Levitt 1998, p. 926). Beyond money, remittances encompass objects, foodstuffs, clothing, home furnishings, furniture, carpets, and tools, but also notions of gender roles, of family and childhood, of climate protection and recycling, health and care, democracy and freedom, but also nationalism and fundamentalism, imitation of materialism and consumption in Western regions, and many other issues. Remitting thus goes hand in hand with the transfer of values, norms, narratives, practices, identities, and social relationships (Boccagni and Decimo 2013; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2016a; Vari-Lavoisier 2020).

This broadening of the concept of remittances from financial transfers to social exchange has opened up a multitude of aspects in the transnational fields. The focus on symbolic representations and social relations between migrants and non-migrants has contributed to the study of remittances as social practice and opened up the dimension of transformation in

the sending and receiving societies. Foregrounding the social in remitting allows for embedding exchange in local contexts as well as in historical and geopolitical dynamics. Lacroix suggested juxtaposing the circulation of people and money with the circulation of objects and practices in order to better understand “how objects and subjects, structures and agents, although ontologically distinct, maintain a reciprocal relation of co-production” (Lacroix 2014, p. 658), or more precisely: the coproduction of a transnational field.

Remittances have a material dimension and, as such, they work as bridges in transnational aesthetics: they frame objects as souvenirs, as place-holders for relationships, and as symbols of otherness, as Gökhan Mura and Claudius Ströhle show in their analyses of mutable mobiles (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2016b, pp. 13–16) and the industrial other. These concepts describe objects that transform while being transferred. Mura reveals how an everyday object like soap changes into an industrial exotic, holding and reproducing the promises of migration as an improvement of life, when remitted from Germany to Turkey in the 1960s. Taking their materiality as a starting point of his analysis, Ströhle looks into the potential of affordance theory in remittance research. Remitted objects have a history which is inscribed in the material but also in the ways they are handled and are therefore embodied in migrant and non-migrant users. The transformative effect of remittances is particularly obvious in their materiality: housing landscapes expand in size and style (Boccagni and Erdal 2020; Erdal 2012; Lopez 2015; see also the visual examples offered by Bürkle in this volume), households modernize, transport becomes possible, technologies like solar energy allow for new leisure pastimes and electronic entertainment, but also for new ways of access to education (Bailey in this volume).

However, we need to be careful that the focus on the social and the material in remittances does not overlay the fundamental economic inequality in which they are embedded and from which they gain their symbolic significance (otherwise we will slip into the developmental approach to remitting). What makes remittances “more than money” is the “embodied symbolism and its meaning for the community of users” (Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017, p. 4), embedded in global asymmetries. These asymmetries constitute the essence of remittances and distinguish gift-giving or financial transactions from remittance transactions. Moreover, the social and the economic in remitting practices cannot be regarded separately because it is the simultaneity of economic, social,

symbolic, and relational effects that lies at the core of remittance transfers. The starting point, however, is the situation of global economic inequalities, their history, and their consequences in reproducing neocolonial power relations (Rupnow and Ströhle & Meyer in this volume). Remittances bridge the “divides of global inequality” (Carling 2014, p. 218) and project this divide onto intimate personal relationships. Looking at remittance flows today, it soon becomes obvious that they usually follow the historic formation of a powerful European center with a periphery of poverty. In other words: remittances affirm and perpetuate colonial structures between the “West and the Rest” (Hall 1992). Focusing on development contexts and the idea of empowering developing regions through remittances contributes to and reinforces neocolonial structures and dependencies. However, remittance directions are not given and here, the historical perspective is illuminating. Steidl (in this volume) demonstrates the impact of remittances from America on the economy of the Habsburg Empire. It is therefore a seminal task in remittance research to uncover how remittances are interwoven into historic power constellations and contribute to reaffirming and reproducing neocolonial relations and global inequality. Bönisch-Brednich (in this volume) shows how academic economies, with their Eurocentrism in knowledge production, with English as their *lingua franca*, and with publishing houses located mainly in Europe and North America, echo remittance trajectories.

The relationship between the economic, the social, and the political in the transnational field can be grasped by taking into account the forms of capital remittances generate. Economic capital interacts with cultural and symbolic capital in the social field and generates transnational capital. Financial transactions convey material outcomes as well as symbolic and emotional significance. Ilka Vari-Lavoisier (2016) shows how economic power increases the influence of Senegalese diaspora communities in France and the USA. The presidential election in Senegal in 2012 was decided in Paris and New York rather than in Dakar. Political scientists have explored the same line of research and shown how financial transfers influence political agendas. With economic support from abroad, for example, clientelism becomes costly because, through remittances, voters are more independent from corruption and clientelistic arrangements (Pfütze 2014, p. 306; Pfütze 2012). This can also influence their voting behavior and decrease interest in political participation (Tertychnaya et al. 2018).

Remitting is aligned with global economics, national politics, and social discourse. As such, it is “a social practice, not just an individual’s choice” (Page and Mercer 2012, p. 4; Mahmud 2021). Carling described the complexities of remittance transfers as diverse and compound transactions with material, emotional, and relational elements (Carling 2014, p. 219). A social theory of remittances is needed in order to achieve a relational interpretation that combines individual priorities with social norms and collective expectations in the fundamentally asymmetrical transnational field: it is not just geographical distance, but the distance between an assumed center and periphery that needs to be compensated in transnational mother-, father-, and childhood, when physical absence is balanced with financial and material presence. The temporal dimension is not just the time spent away from family, but also the time and efforts spent on adapting to another environment and culture. The remittance decay hypothesis assumes that migrants remit less the longer they stay abroad, but it is not only the time but also the quality of social inclusion that influences the amount of money sent to the place that migrants used to call home. Remittance decline and growth are multilayered (Meyer 2020). The nation state and its immigration policy influence this quality of social inclusion, as Hasan Mahmud (in this volume) shows in his comparison of Bangladeshis’ remittance practices in Japan and the USA. The possibility to settle permanently and reunify with one’s family lowers remittances considerably.

Examining the characteristics of remittance exchange, we need to ask: What makes a social and economic transaction a remittance transaction? For an answer, we must not reduce remittance relations to their context of migration but rather examine the structural impact in the context of migration. The difference between a gift from abroad and material remittances, between financial support between families and remittance money, and between caregiving in the family and as a remittance practice (Krzyżowski and Mucha 2014) lies in global inequalities and how they effect and entangle personal, discursive, and structural relations. In short: how they determine the social scripts and positions of remitting.

FROM WAYS OF BEING AND BELONGING TO BECOMING:
REMITTANCE SCRIPTS AND MIGRANT SUBJECTIVITY

Remittances negotiate, adjust, and compensate for inequality and difference. At the same time, they cannot equalize disparities, and they negotiate different values: economic stability, health, education, consumption, absence, loneliness, pressure, and care are all parts of the composite transaction that is asymmetrical in its very nature. What does it take to negotiate these asymmetries in social relations?

*Ways of Being and Belonging: Remittance Scripts
and Social Positioning*

Remittances represent “unceasing relational work” revealing efforts of “establishing, transforming, and sometimes terminating interpersonal relations” (Zelizer 2014, p. 4). In order to accomplish this task, they need to take a form that holds a winning prospect in the struggle for recognition (Honneth 1995) for senders and receivers as well as the respective communities. Jørgen Carling introduced the concept of remittance scripts to describe the types of negotiation that take place in remittance contexts. Scripts are “structures of expectations for specific types of situations, which facilitate social interaction” and thus provide patterns of motivation, expectation, and communication (Carling 2014, pp. 220–221).

As such, they produce social positions, that is, the role we play in society and the social status derived from this role. Social positioning is shaped through economic, social, and transnational capital (Bourdieu 2006) and practiced in remittance transactions (Carling 2014, pp. 246–247; Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017, p. 5). Especially asymmetrical relations benefit from scripted practices and communication because they can reconcile reverse social positions and promise recognition and acceptance in a potentially strained and intricate situation. Looking at the motivations and meanings of remittances, their asymmetrical natures again show that motives like help, support, allowance, donation, control, and compensation all imply an unequal status between the actors of the remittance transaction. While it is undisputed that remittances indicate multiple belongings, it is also clear that these practices of transnational participation come with very different portents and variant meanings. Supporting a religious community is an expression of membership and a way of belonging, whereas

sending money home to buy food and medicine for parents and siblings is a way of being.

Carling described remittance scripts which help to facilitate and communicate economic transactions as social transactions and to produce a social position distinct from the transnational social field. Financial payments can be sent and received for providing care for migrants' children or elderly relatives, looking after property and businesses, or overseeing building projects. In theory, as Carling spelled out, this could be a balanced exchange: work for money. In the transnational relationship, however, this money is not just a salary payment, it is compensation for physical absence, and it produces the position of the migrant employer and the non-migrant employee. The authorization script generates the role of a middleman when remittances are sent to a person who does not keep the money but is responsible for distributing it and overseeing its purpose. His function as a broker is a key position in the migration context. The allowance script is based on the role of the usually male breadwinner in transnational families. Obligation and entitlement produce the positions of the deserving ones (those being taken care of) whereas when remittances fail to materialize, disappointed non-migrants feel like they do not or no longer deserve this kind of transnational care. Carling gave an example in which a disappointed man lists all his relatives abroad but then complains: "But none of them help, man! They never sent anything" (Carling 2008, p. 1462). The script of sacrifice also holds a distinctly transnational moral subtext by implying that migrants have to endure all kinds of forgoing and sacrifice in order to take the position of the giver and caretaker. The pressure involved in such transnational relations is described in the script of help. The logic of help remittances assigns a moral virtue to the sender as benefactor while the recipient is subjected to a passive role, although empowered with money. The script of investment provides the social position of a generous benefactor or greedy businessman.

The special value of remittances is derived from the context of migration. At first glance, remittances scripted with investment seem to reverse the one-sided direction of global economics: migrants can make it abroad. Examined more closely, transnational transfers only reaffirm the divide between immigrant and emigrant countries. Remittance scripts are fundamentally structured by asymmetries (e.g., compensation, authorization, donation, allowance, investment, obligation, and entitlement). This is what makes the money special: it carries the notion of sacrifice, risk, bravery, endurance, success, hope, solidarity, gratitude, and humility. On top

of financial support, as an expression of being connected to the transnational community, it produces the social position of the loyal provider, the ostentatious spender, the revolutionary, the dreamer, and the loser (Thai 2014), the caretaker and those being taken care of, the modernizer and the traditionalist, the globalist and the local expert, the broker and middleman, the healer and the patient, the absent parent/child and the responsible, caring parent/child, the altruist and the hedonist, the landlord and the tenant, the boss and the worker, the compatriots and those who left without looking back. Remittances are mostly success stories generating the role of heroes and victims, but also fools and villains. And there are other stories worth listening to when remittance practices break with conventional social systems and challenge hierarchies, for example in gender roles, when women become the head of the household and keepers of monies sent (e.g., Taylor et al. 2006), or when young people support parents and grandparents from abroad and decree their elders' actions (Richman 2005). Remittance hierarchies can instigate change by challenging the social order, but they can also bring conflict when the remittance-induced social positions clash with intrinsic ones.

*Becoming: Remittances and the Production
of Migrant Subjectivity*

Remittance scripts help us understand the ways of being and belonging in the communicative acts of giving and receiving. They show patterns of meaning in actual practices as well as in claims of memberships and social positioning. In order to understand the inner needs and constraints characterizing migrant identity in the context of remittances, we can examine remittance scripts and social positioning through an analysis of identity formation as migrant subjectivity. To begin with, a remittance script often involves the discursive subject of the “ideal migrant” as an industrious, diligent, and loyal individual living and working in the Global North but keeping up meaningful relations to his or her community of origin in the Global South. He or she is part of a diaspora which differs from the migrant population in the financial and emotional commitment to the homeland embedded in a context of development (Page and Mercer 2012, p. 2). At the receiving end, family and household members are expected to be grateful and, with the money, accept the earmarking of development and aid, meaning they are supposed to spend the money on modest daily provisions, education, and health, and not to consume

conspicuously. They are also expected to join efforts of development, build “better” houses, pursue an education, and accommodate the transnational vision of home expressed by the migrants.

Although the empirical reality of migrants often differs, subjectivity in the context of migration is governed by the positionality of free and successful agents making the best of their human capital, by exploited workers and passive victims (Deshingkar 2019), and by their either grateful or worried family and kin. These roles are distributed by regimes of mobility that recognize that mobility is stratified by status and rights, by the intersection of gender, class, and race, and by an imaginary of the destination parading migration as a promise for a better life (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Van Hear 2014).

Remittances offer a way of negotiating the migration regime by producing a specific subject position. For example, many migrants have to take work in fields other than what they were qualified or trained for, like domestic, factory, or construction work, and they balance their experience of selling short their training by economic and social remittances. Supporting schools and education facilities at home often compensates the downward mobility of migrants, who can reestablish their position as educated and intellectual individuals by remitting toward educational causes (Isaakyan and Triandafyllidou 2017, p. 14; Parreñas 2015). The pressure of success is immense in migrant biographies: migrants feel an inner need to make up for the loss of social status and experiences of exclusion and discrimination in their host society; they feel the pressure of supporting their home and diaspora communities as well as perhaps a newly discovered solidarity and sense of patriotism triggered by conflict, war, or economic crises in their place of origin (see Alluri in this volume). By remitting, they can regain their lost status as skilled professionals, restore their social status in their communities, and make up for their absence in times of need.

Against this background, we can read remitting as a social practice in which migrant subjectivity is negotiated between normative expectations and individual needs. The making of the migrant follows a path of individual will, agency, and skills, collective expectations and moral obligations, legislative constraints in the host society, organizational structures, and discursive patterns, in short: “the interplay of migrant regimes and migrant subjectivities” (Collins 2021, p. 3). Awumbila et al. (2019) demonstrated how Ghanaian future migrants are molded into subservient domestic workers even before they leave their village: they are taught to

dress appropriately, to say “please” and “thank you,” and to use terms of respect like calling their employers Mummy and Daddy. Females from Indonesia receive a “resilience training” before their departure that is supposed to foster a strong mind, professional attitudes, and self-esteem, and to shape the future migrant workers into “supermaids” (Chee 2020). Cabalquinto and Wood-Bradley (2020) further referred to the role of media technologies and their affective impact on users. Migrant subjectivity is also constructed by devices, strategies, and digital practices of connectivity services, enabling migrants to remit and keep in touch with their families and places of origin.

The production of migrant subjectivity is thus multifaceted: it is shaped by recruiters and employers, NGOs and state agencies, media platforms, and marketplaces. Migration regimes in the destination countries, that is, the national immigration programs, remittance conditions, the legal status of immigrants, and political and societal discourses on migration, all contribute to turning people into migrants. Their appeals (*Anrufung*) and requirements blend with migrants’ senses of duty and inner needs of solidarity and loyalty and thus produce the obliging, disciplinary, and regulatory techniques of migrant governance. Because transnational governance is not connected to one nation state, its history, laws, and constitution (Nowicka 2019, pp. 28–31), it operates by internalizing demands of flexibility, self-responsibility, and self-initiative. This process of neoliberalization can be scaled from the level of migrant subjectivity to development organizations and state governance.

Migrant subjectivity is moreover gendered, classed, age-specific, and ethnicized and/or racialized, and therefore requires an intersectional approach. Nowicka showed how the ethos of hard work and diligence became a Polish quality in the context of Polish migration to the UK (2020, p. 9), whereas the aptitude of female caregivers became linked to their ethnic (often Asian) background as well as their gender (e.g., Miyawaki 2015). Remittances produce a gendered neoliberal governmentality in the hierarchy of the productive and highly valorized male migrant and the less valued non-migrant woman (Kunz 2011). Among the most desired qualities in the discursive position of “the good migrant” are productivity, a willingness to work, diligence, and loyalty. All these qualities can be produced and demonstrated through remittances, and vice versa: remittance practices produce and demonstrate a work ethos, the subject position of the migrant hero with a successful life abroad, and loyalty toward the community at home.

CONCLUSION

Remittance practices are a key element of migrant subjectivity because they are a manifestation of “having made it abroad”: from the decision whether to send money, how much, how often, and to whom, to communicating a purpose—all these acts contribute to a social positioning and subjectivity of migrants (regardless of their actual success or failure in the place of residence). On the other end of the transaction, remittances also produce the position of virtuous and deserving non-migrants, who accept checks, reciprocate with gratitude, and thus maintain the connectivity of transnational networks. Interpreted in this light, remittances become a governmental technique that creates subjectivity by finding and attuning the migrant within the transnational social field.

All of this is not to say that actual people only “do stuff” in order to become somebody, just as scripts are not a social contract and do not entail instructions regulating behaviors and outcomes (Carling 2014, p. 222). Recipients may refuse to express gratitude in order to level out the asymmetry of the social relationship and prefer social distance in order to avoid shame (Carling 2014, p. 247). They may prove to be moral *hazarders*, accepting the money and support but not fulfilling their end of the bargain, instead ignoring the obligation to reciprocate through appreciation and humbleness. They may dodge developmental projects and stick to traditional ways of dwelling. The effects of remittance practices on migrant subjects are manifold, diverse, and sometimes unexpectedly irritating. For a concise analysis of the subjectivity of remittance sender and receiver, we return to the key question of what changes when people become migrants. Obviously, one finds care relations, gift-giving, and financial support in non-transnational families: What are the social hierarchies there? People give money to relatives, pay for healthcare for parents and children, finance education, and support livelihoods outside the migration context. This is why the transnational perspective is so important: it helps us not to reduce people to their migrant positionalities, but explain what is particular about being a migrant in specific local and transnational conditions. What turns gifts, help, allowances, and donations into remittances? Again, we are pointed toward the asymmetries in remittance relationships. Remittances are a way of attuning oneself to the structural inequality of the global world, of overcoming injustice, and, at the same time, of reproducing the very same dependency between center and periphery, Global North and Global South, migrant and non-migrant. Still, by becoming a caregiver, an investor, or something similar, remitting is a way of dealing with inequality, with absence, with nostalgia, and with

homesickness. It is a position of agency in an environment where many migrants have few means of changing anything.

In their analysis of ways of being and belonging, Levitt and Glick Schiller conceptualized the appeals and expectations of the transnational social field as a kind of citizenship (2004, pp. 1024–1026). We can understand the process of becoming in its legal, cultural, social, and moral dimensions as an acquisition of transnational citizenship with rights and duties specific to migrants. Remittances are an expression of participating and engaging with rights (to work, to buy property, etc.) and duties (to take responsibility, to care for family in places of origin and residence). They allow individuals to turn their ways of being and belonging into transnationally meaningful ways of becoming. In transnational society, they can be seen as allocating social positions, and governing the migrant self through economics, laws, and politics of belonging. When we study migration as part of society, we need to identify the specific practices of identity formation in the context of migration. Remittances as social practices are certainly one of these.

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