CHAPTER 12

Conceptualizing Remittance Affordances: Transformations of a Knife Across Borders

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At the Kitchen Table

The kitchen table is covered with plates, coffee cups, a birthday cake, bowls filled with fresh fruit, and a weekly pill organizer, listing the days of the week in German. As we are celebrating my birthday, Birnur[1] passes me the knife with which to cut the cake. Once again, she mentions proudly that she herself made this knife—in one of the small-scale iron factories in the Stubai Valley, a rural area in the West of Austria.

We are sitting in the apartment belonging to Birnur and her husband Eyüp, in the city of Uşak in Western Turkey. They built the four-floor apartment building in 1978, seven years after they left their home village Yaşamışlar in the province of Uşak to work and live in Austria. Now, the

[1] All names have been synonymized.

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couple spend their retirement commuting between the Stubai Valley and Uşak throughout the year. While they have always been tenants in Austria, in Uşak they are landlords: the basement is rented out to a local teacher couple. The top floors stand empty, except for occasional visits from their sons who live in Austria. In the summer of 2018, I lodged in the apartment on the fourth floor during my second ethnographic field trip to Uşak.

This scene illustrates the epistemological interest underlying my ethnographic research on remittances in the history of labor migration between the Stubai Valley and Uşak from the early 1970s until today. In the course of the data collection, knives and tools of the Stubai brand appeared in multiple settings of production, transmission, and usage. The iron devices materialize stories of migration, of the hardship of labor in the iron processing factories, and of everyday life in retirement. As remitted objects, they evoke memories and emotions, maintain cross-border social relations, and afford new ways of usage or even rejection.

Introduction

Research on remittances is in vogue: the number of journal articles on the topic increased tenfold from the late 1990s to 2012, maintaining a focus on the nexus of migration and development (Carling 2020). However, fueled by Peggy Levitt's enhancement of the social and cultural forms and effects of remittances (Levitt 1998), a growing body of scholarship has emphasized that remittances constitute much more than money, taking the form of "material or non-material objects of transactions" (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2016, p. 3). In the field of migration research, the importance of material objects to examining migrants' lives, identities, and cross-border connections has been firmly established (Pechurina 2020, p. 670). Mostly from the perspective of things brought from migrants' countries of origin to their new homes, the findings show how they function as "objects of connection" (Frykman 2019), scrutinize bi-national dichotomies (Suhr 2019), refer to a collective diasporic taste (Savaş 2014), and contribute to processes of transnational belonging and homemaking (Rosales 2010). Through a focus on biographical objects like photos, souvenirs, and gifts, everyday life objects remain underexplored, as Frykman stated. However, I disagree that the ways in which they "are used habitually are rather obvious" (Frykman 2019, 31–36). On the contrary, the aim of this chapter is to show how a relational analysis of the objects, humans, and everyday practices in transnational settings can contribute to a deeper

understanding of the transformative effects of remittances on the involved actors and the built environment. To do so, I here introduce affordance theory into qualitative remittance research. In a nutshell, affordances are the possibilities that objects offer for action (Hutchby 2001), like a chair, for example, which affords a human the possibility to take a seat. I enquired which ways of appropriation, usage, or rejection of remitted objects *afford* their recipients. What do we learn through the perspective of affordance theory about the power relations between senders and receivers? Which factors must exist for a remittance to be accepted and used in the intended way? And how can the objects *afford* social change in their new environment?

To answer these questions, the remitted objects must be tracked in their various ways of transmission, appropriation, and usage, which in turn extends affordance theory with a cross-border lens. Thus, the empirical data analyzed here follows a multi-sited ethnography (Falzon 2016; Marcus 1995, 2016) which was conducted in Austria and Turkey between 2016 and 2020. Whereas most transnational multi-sited research is based on qualitative interviews (Mazzucato 2016, pp. 215–216), the long stay in the research field allowed me to observe the usage of the Stubai knives in everyday life routines, like in the scene at the kitchen table sketched above.

The next section provides a historical perspective that follows the trajectories of knife production in the Stubai Valley and the transnational migration from the region of Usak initiated therein. Based on the historical backbone of the transnational exchange of knives, the subsequent section provides the theoretical and methodological framework. The last section analyzes the empirical data concerning the sending, receiving, and using of the objects by introducing the concept of remittance affordances.

Iron Manufacturing in the Stubai Valley: A History of Cross-Border Migration

Since the early fifteenth century, the Stubai region, a 35-kilometer-long Alpine valley in the Western part of Austria, has been known for its iron manufacturing. Even though only small amounts of ore were found, over the centuries, the iron processing industry came to characterize the region. High-quality iron and steel products like weapons, tools, and knives were exported and led to vivid forms of exchange (see Figs. 12.1 and 12.2). In the eighteenth century, traveling vendors could not master the growing

Fig. 12.1 Miniatures of iron tools, manufactured in the iron-processing industry in Fulpmes, Stubai Valley, in 1824. Tyrolian State Museum Ferdinandeum, Historical Collections, Technik/6/2

supply and so branch offices were opened all over the Alps. A contemporary witness cited in the chronicle of the village of Fulpmes in the Stubai Valley described the practice of remitting to Stubai: "The managers of the branch offices were people from Stubai who came back home at least once a year to give advice, buy houses, properties, restaurants, and smithies in order to care for their children and in order to prepare for their retirement in their beloved homeland" (Leutelt 1987, p. 255, my translation). This depiction of the eighteenth-century Stubai Valley reflects the broad understanding of remittances as applied in this article: as an exchange not only of money but also of ideas, norms, objects, and symbolic capital. Driven by familial obligations rooted in the past, the remitted money and advice from the branch managers can be also interpreted as social and economic preparations for the future.

Fig. 12.2 Iron laborers in Fulpmes, Stubai Valley, 1930s. Fulpmes Village Chronicle

The Guest Worker Regime from the Perspectives of Austria and Turkey

Iron manufacturing in Stubai Valley thrived throughout the nineteenth century, but came to an abrupt halt with the outbreak of World War One. As in many other Central European countries, the economy of the Stubai Valley began growing gradually again in the late 1950s, causing an extensive labor bottleneck in industry, tourism, and construction. After protracted political negotiations about the employment of foreigners in the Austrian labor market, the Raab-Olah Agreement was concluded in 1961 between the Austrian Trade Union Federation and the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (Bakondy 2017, p. 117). Based on this compromise, which stipulated annual contingents for the foreign workforce and a principle of rotation, the state signed agreements on labor recruitment with Spain (1961), Turkey (1964), and Yugoslavia (1966). Whereas Austria anticipated the migration regime to meet its actual demand for labor and

to keep the economy growing, the other signing states were in the opposite position. In Turkey, the mechanization of the agricultural sector had led to a massive rural-urban migration process and increasing unemployment. After the military under Colonel Alparslan Türkeş staged a coup d'état against the ruling government of Adnan Menderes, the new decision-makers banked on emigration as a key factor in reducing unemployment and offsetting the negative trade balance. Based on an analysis of historical sources of the key state institutions, Ahmet Akgündüz summarized Turkey's view that "unskilled and/or rural migrants would return from Europe with newly-acquired skills, an experience of modern life, self-confidence, and their remittances to Turkey. They therefore would make up for the skilled manpower shortages in the Turkish economy, particularly in the manufacturing industry and contribute considerably to hard currency revenues. As a result, the economic and social development processes of the country would accelerate" (Akgündüz 2016, p. 53). Both the Austrian and the Turkish states viewed the migrants as economic gaming pieces, whom they could move according to their own interests. However, the Turkish state vision was much more elaborate, linking the incoming remittances with social and cultural effects like a transfer of skills and lifestyles. Ultimately, many migrants opposed the restrictive migration regime and decided to stay in Austria. Today, approximately 270,000 migrants from Turkey and their descendants live in Austria.

In terms of remittances from the European diaspora to Turkey, the evaluations are ambivalent: researchers state the positive impacts on household welfare, even though the money was mostly used to satisfy basic consumption needs (Koç and Onan 2004, p. 108). The foreign currency mitigated the negative trade balance, but also due to the failure of the state's remittance channeling programs, the effects were lower than expected (Içduygu 2012, pp. 31–32). Abadan-Unat called attention to the often-neglected boomerang effect of remittance for receiving communities: for the Turkish state, remittance also led to inflationary pressure, increased imports, and skill needs (Abadan-Unat 1976, pp. 24–25).

Participating Simultaneously Here and There: The Cross-Border Space in the Stubai Valley and Uşak

In the Stubai Valley, the first migrants of the labor recruitment agreement arrived in the late 1960s and came from Yugoslavia. However, in the early 1970s, a net migration from the region of Uşak in Western Turkey set in,

which was to characterize the region throughout the next decades. Today, approximately 800 of the 4000 inhabitants of Fulpmes have family ties to Turkey, ninety percent of them to the region of Uşak. Since the 1970s, migrants have worked in iron manufacturing, hotels, ski lifts, and construction sites, advancing the expansion of industry and winter tourism. In interviews, the research partners stressed the hardship of labor and criticized the disgracefully poor housing conditions. This corresponds with the research outcomes in other areas in Austria (Hahn and Stöger 2014), yet the case of the Stubai Valley illustrates the specific conditions of migration in rural areas: whereas cities are used to accommodating large numbers of newcomers, the remote Stubai Valley lacked rental apartments and plenty of locals made money by housing migrants in empty stables and sheds. On the other hand, the short distances and numerous face-to-face interactions within the rural community facilitated settling processes. Moreover, the pioneering migrants shaped their new environment, by introducing new products like tomatoes, olives, and melons to the Alpine valley and by teaching their neighbors and colleagues how to plant them. In 1978, a first Muslim prayer room was established, followed by the religious and cultural hometown association in Fulpmes in 1982. Alongside these collective investments, the migrants established shops, supermarkets, cafés, and hairdressers, thus becoming a crucial part of the village's material and social environment.

Aside from these multifaceted networks and practices in the Stubai Valley, the migrants and their descendants maintained and fostered ties with their relatives and friends in the region of Uşak. The bulk of our research partners purchased land and built houses and apartments in both the city of Uşak and the adjacent villages of origin. Some opened shops and restaurants or established transnational companies, for example an EU-Turkey cattle dealer. The summer turns out to be the crucial time for remitting, as most of the migrants visit their places of origin then: in this intensive phase, gifts are exchanged, apartments renovated, and further investments discussed and arranged. The presence of the cross-border families at weddings, celebrations, graveyard visits, and trips bolsters economic and emotional relations and simultaneously paves the way for a potential return. Additionally, official visits by municipal delegations strengthen the transnational ties between the two regions. Thereby, the connections are reciprocated through an exchange of gifts, most notably with regional products like hand-woven carpets from Uşak and knives from the Stubai Valley.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework: Following Affordances in Remittance Landscapes

The historically developed and migrant-driven processes of cross-border remittance practices opened up a transnational space between Uşak and the Stubai Valley, in which both migrants and non-migrants think, act, and participate. Sarah Lynn Lopez stressed in her research on transnational migration between Mexico and the USA how spatial and material implications of remittances shape everyday life environments. She argued that remitted and incorporated materials form a remittance landscape, meaning "distinct elements of the built environment constructed and altered with migrant dollars" and expanded upon this as an "amalgam of migrants' life stories and the macro political, social, economic, and historical forces that shape migration" (Lopez 2015, 1; 8). By focusing on migrants' construction practices and narratives, Lopez revealed how the transferred desires, dreams, and fears drive both personal and social change. However, it is not just the built environment but also remitted objects that matter. Qualitative research on material culture has shown how objects can be read as a concentration of social circumstances when their material, function, and meaning are analyzed within the specific contexts and situations in which they are used, exchanged, ignored, or appropriated (Hahn 2015; Miller 1998). International migration scholars have described the crucial role of biographical objects in the cross-border processes of homemaking and self-positioning (Frykman 2019, p. 31). Remitted objects do comprise multi-placed memories, reflect social relationships, and represent cross-border lifestyles. Moreover, they yield new forms of appropriation and usage. In order to grasp the specific relations between objects, actors, and practices from a transnational point of view, I want to introduce affordance theory approaches into qualitative remittance research.

Donald Norman provided a vivid access to the concept: "The term affordance refers to the relationship between a physical object and a person […]. An affordance is a relationship between the properties of an object and the capabilities of the agent that determine just how the object could possibly be used. A chair affords ('is for') support and, therefore, affords sitting" (Norman 2013, p. 11). Webb Keane highlighted the issue of potentiality, as a chair invites, but does not determine sitting. One could also use a chair as a stepladder or as a desk—or simply ignore it. Also, affordances create meaning through constituting an in-group who respond to the particular affordances in a particular way: a chair does not invite a

person to sit who is most comfortable squatting on the floor. In other words, objects enable or constrain certain practices for certain groups. Keane elaborated: "if the characteristics of the 'we' summons up the affordance, their interaction may transform the 'we' in turn—a world of chairs, let's say, produces chair-sitters" (Keane 2018, p. 31). This makes the concept particularly applicable to cross-border, practice-oriented ethnographic research and contours a new approach to remittance research: material remittances are "mutable mobiles," namely "objects that transform while being transferred" (Nowicka and Šerbedžija 2016, p. 14). Simultaneously, they transform the individuals exchanging, using, or rejecting the objects and therefore constitute certain cross-border social groups. In order to gain a deeper understanding of remittance objects by focusing on the various contexts they are used in, a multi-sited ethnography needs to be applied.

Multi-Sited Ethnography as a Spatial and Temporal Research Strategy

Remittance practices are entangled in various localities and temporalities. Thus, current research draws on George E. Marcus's "multi-sited ethnography," following the remittance actors, narratives, and objects by taking "unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity" (Marcus 1995, p. 96). There have been numerous justifiable critiques of Marcus's postulated adjustment of ethnographic methodology focusing on an increasingly glocalized, dispersed, and fluid lifeworld: Hage stated that a focus on mobility and movement suggests that people and things were always on the move and therefore ignores that not every crossing of a border constitutes a significant experience for people (Hage 2005, p. 469). Others have claimed that the core of ethnography—namely to reach a deep understanding—is threatened by this approach as ethnographers move from one site to another and thereby trade thick descriptions and deep vertical understandings for horizontal ones, leading to thin, diluted depictions (Falzon 2016, p. 7).

In order to tackle the main blind spots, the current research strategy is based on a long-term presence in the research field, embedding the empirical data in its spatial and temporal contexts and co-constructing the research sites collaboratively with the research partners (Marcus 2016). Thereby, my position in the field as a white scholar from Austria reflects global inequality. During the research process I discussed and

challenged these hierarchies recurrently with my interlocutors (Alonso Bejarano et al 2019). The participant observation (2016-2020) included countless visits to the Stubai Valley and nearby towns and villages and three long-term field trips to the region of Uşak. The ethnographic data comprise field notes documented in settings like homes, cafes, mosques, post offices, duty-free shops, jewelers' shops, and cultural associations, at events like weddings, breaking the fast, birthdays, and Kermes Festivals or during work, travel, and vacations. Accompanying actors in different and unexpected settings generates trust and mutual recognition, which is indispensable for ethnographic research, especially in cross-border spaces. Additionally, I recorded ten semi-structured narrative interviews with pioneer migrants and their descendants, transnational entrepreneurs, local authorities, and returnees. Tracking remittance objects like the Stubai knives in unexpected places and situations over time produced satiated data on their transmission, usage, meanings, and narrative frames. The juxtaposition of multi-placed and -timed material, practices, archival sources, and photographs seek to gain a deep understanding of remitting as transformative, connective, and disruptive practices of positioning in cross-border spaces (see Meyer in this volume), forming the built landscape and constituting transnational society and belonging.

Stubai Knives and Tools as Remitted Objects

The region of Uşak has been shaped by the various materializations of the Schillings, Deutschmarks, Francs, and Euros sent back by migrants since the mid-1960s. In the city's districts Elmalıdere and Sarayaltı, which are on the way to becoming the villages most affected by emigration, one can find streets containing houses of the diaspora, with parked cars displaying European number plates (see also Bürkle 2016). Many of the adjacent villages experienced a huge emigration both to Turkish cities like Uşak, Izmir, and Istanbul and to West European countries. Whereas in the first years of emigration, remittances spurred investments in agricultural machines and housing renovations, the villages are today characterized by desolation and a rupture of earlier transnational connectedness.[2]

In the region of Uşak, the remittance landscape is not just formed by the migrant-financed houses, shops, streets, and water depots, but also by

[2] Remittance inflows to Turkey decreased exorbitantly from a peak of USD5.4 billion in 1998 to USD0.8 billion in 2019 (Karamelikli and Bayar 2015; World Bank 2020).

the countless objects that shape everyday life. During my ethnographic fieldwork, I observed knives and other tools of the Stubai brand in almost every migrant household, but also in the homes of their relatives, neighbors, and friends. The high-quality iron products, imprinted with the distinctive logo of the Serles (Fulpmes's backyard mountain), are produced in the iron manufactories in Fulpmes. The iron products found their way to Uşak not via commercial flows of commodities in terms of globalization, but through the hands and in the luggage of the migrants and their transnational networks. Thus, the objects occurred in two different settings: first as everyday objects of the returnees, and second as remitted to relatives, neighbors, and friends.

Knives and Tools in the Everyday Life of Returnees

Stubai knives and tools are crucial and meaningful objects for returnees in Uşak. The following extract from my field notes brings us back to the kitchen table, to the retired migrant couple Birnur and Eyüp in the city of Uşak:

> After a long day of fruit and herb picking in the hills, I returned home with my landlords. It was already late, but we decided to wash and cut the fresh herbs, which would later be dried on the terrace for a couple of days. Eyüp and I sat at the kitchen table, which was covered in delicious-smelling thyme. Birnur handed us knives: "I made them," she proudly said. She picked one up herself and, while cutting the thyme, both Birnur and Eyüp told me about their experiences in the iron manufactories in Fulpmes, about the details of making a good knife, about their early living conditions in Fulpmes, and the difficulties of life abroad. Even though Birnur hardly speaks German, she all of a sudden used very specific German terms like "Stemmeisen" (crowbar), a tool she used to produce in her factory. She had incorporated this term during her work in Fulpmes and never forgot it over the years. After some time, Birnur left, and Eyüp and I kept sitting face to face at the small kitchen table; the smell of the fresh thyme, the mechanical work with the materials, hardly any eye contact and the use of the Stubai knife as a trigger created a specific atmosphere in which Eyüp told me his life story. He told me about a man who returned to his village after a year in Fulpmes, telling about the abundance of work there; he told me about the adventure of migration, his experience working as a dishwasher and smith, his first experiences skiing, the house-building process in Uşak, and his present retirement in two different places.
> Field notes, Uşak, June 29, 2018

In this scene, the knife functioned as meaningful trigger of memories and emotions, evoked through the interaction between things and people. Analyzed from an affordance-theoretical approach, the properties of the object and the capabilities of the agents determine its usage: here, this meant chopping the herbs into small pieces. As transferred objects with a historical dimension, the knives afforded an additional practice, namely narrating specific stories of migration and work. As the European ethnologist Christoph Bareither applies affordance theory, the relations between material, medium, and everyday practice need to be carved out (Bareither 2020). In our context, the high-quality knives brought back successfully fulfilled their duty; simultaneously, the work in the iron manufactories and the migration project, in general, were recounted as success stories by both Birnur and Eyüp. The sharp knives cut through and worked well; the result was obvious. Thus, the presence of the former factory workers and a researcher from Austria in the four-floor apartment in Uşak, satisfyingly using these everyday objects, mediated multi-placed memories and revealed the achievement of upward social mobility.

The embodiment of memories can also be tracked by looking at the situational code-switching performed by Birnur. Her use of an iron tool while recollecting the time she worked in the manufactories of the Stubai Valley evoked the term "Stemmeisen." Moreover, the depicted scene brings the surplus value of multi-sited, material-focused, and practice-based ethnographic fieldwork to light: in a setting spatially and temporally distanced from Austria and its pejorative integration discourse, differentiating perspectives emerged, such as migration as success, cross-border belonging, and learned skills. Meanwhile, the mechanical manual activity of cutting alleviated a steady eye contact and created an atmosphere of trust and levity, which classic interview situations often lack.

As observed in multiple other settings, a great number of the returnees trust their knives brought along from the Stubai Valley. Similarly, I documented toolboxes filled with tools of the Stubai brand in most of the households I entered. They are frequently used in the endless handicraft activities carried out in and around the house, like repairing kitchenware or furniture, restoring the apartment, refining the façade of the house, or gardening. When Ferit, a return migrant in his sixties, invited me to his newly built family house in the village of Dağyenice, I helped him to repair the garden hose. I was impressed by the dexterity with which Ferit used various tools to solve the problem. It was an immediate physical connection of tool and human, which together built a functional action unit, a

"handiness," as Fél and Hofer described it in their ethnological research in the Hungarian village Átány (Fél and Hofer 1974, p. 291). I observed this handiness in many sites during my ethnographic research, which consistently led back to the iron manufactories in Fulpmes, where the young laborers produced the tools and knives they now use for their own purposes. They manufactured the iron products, which now conversely provide multiple ways of usage that characterize the migrants' retirement lifestyles, namely performing construction and gardening projects. Following Keane (2018), the specific ways in which the returnees respond to the Stubai tools summon up the cross-border affordances, which in turn transform them into a group: a group of prosperously retired laborers. This also points to a transformation of class: whereas the bulk of the migrants grew up in peasant families, they now use the tools in their garden and fieldwork not to assure their livelihoods, but for leisure.

Tools also contain distinctive elements. As Fél and Hofer stated: "The uniformity of the stock of tools is not just an expression of one and the same technological standard, but at the same time an expression (and on the other hand also a source) of social and cultural unity in a rural village" (Fél and Hofer 1974, p. 47, my translation). As the Stubai knives and tools were brought via transnational networks, they mark a distinctive line within the population in Uşak. The following example shows how these mechanisms are performed and negotiated: when I left the apartment one morning, I found Eyüp with a craftsman working on the automatic garage door, which was obviously broken. "Alles Pfusch" (everything botched), "türkisches Patent" (a Turkish patent), Eyüp shouted furiously in German. By complaining about the local building standards, he referred to the hegemonic discourse that Western products are of a higher quality than the ones of other countries. By doing so in German, he additionally marked a line between the two of us and the Turkish-speaking craftsman. The situation gained momentum when the three of us desperately tried to fix the halting garage door. Eyüp dismissed the handyman's tools as Chinese junk. When the handyman objected that they were "yerli" (local), Eyüp murmured that this would not make it any better. He left and shortly afterward returned with his neatly sorted Stubai toolbox. Having first declared that he would rather work with his own tools, the handyman eventually grabbed one of Eyüp's hammers. Afterward, when Eyüp and I drank a cup of coffee in the kitchen, he said: "Nothing works without good material!"

However, *good* tools are the tools someone is used to work with and therefore trusts in. The depicted scene at the automatic garage door revealed not only that Eyüp and the local craftsman appropriated different equipment in their life trajectories, but also how this led to specific practices of distinction. Eyüp, who had grown up in one of the adjacent villages and migrated to the Stubai Valley as a young man, appraised the garage door and tools of the craftsman as Turkish, and thus of low quality. In doing so, he expressed what Özlem Savaş called "taste diaspora," a form of belonging to Austria as someone from Turkey, "which is achieved through a collective taste shaped within specific processes and paths of displacement and dwelling of both people and objects" (Savaş 2014, p. 203). Savaş detected a collective reference to a specific transnational belonging in the migrants' objects. On the contrary, the example above shows that taste can rather function as a differentiation from a certain kind of belonging to Turkey in the (re)migration context. When Eyüp offered the craftsman his own tools, he positioned himself as superior and at the same time marked a division between the non-migrant Uşakers and the (seasonal) returnees. Thus, the social space of a city, shaped to a remarkable degree by remittances, exhibits its layers of power and distinction regarding the interactions of people and objects maintaining the built landscape.

Between Connection and Disruption: Remitted Knives as Ambivalent Cross-Border "Tie-Signs"

The knives and tools brought along from the Stubai Valley evoke multiplaced memories and emotions, afford construction projects in and around the house, mediate social upward mobility, and display distinctive aspects of possessing and using certain objects in cross-border contexts. Another dimension is added when the objects are remitted to kin, friends, or neighbors.

Actually, knives and tools are awkward remittances: they are sharp and dangerous objects. Yet the steel form has a soft core: they are personal objects, as the makers invested hard work and sweat to produce them. As expensive, high-quality products from abroad, they increase the symbolic capital of the donor. With the Stubai logo imprinted on the blade, they are meaningful souvenirs from abroad. That is why the knives and tools are popular gifts for friends, kin, and neighbors in both the home villages and the city of Uşak. They form part of an extensive exchange of material remittances, in large part performed during the summer months. Although

the bulk of my field partners claimed that everything is now available in Turkey, and that there is thus no need to bring back any goods, in practice, they still do so in abundance. This narrative positioning, which conflicts with the practice, contains a political message: Turkey used to be a poor country in the 1960s, but now it is economically strong and no longer in need of support from Europe (nor of its products). This narrative gained further momentum in the context of the political dispute between the Turkish government and the EU countries in the aftermath of the failed coup d'état in July 2016.

However, the practice of transmitting material remittances still occurs and sustains social ties. Approached from a perspective of gift exchange, remittances can be read as "tie-signs" (Adloff and Mau 2005, p. 13), which are based on trust and subsequently foster social relations. Lisa Cliggett demonstrated in her research on remittances in Zambia that migrants sent rather small amounts of money, but all the more presents, goods, and food. She called these practices of exchange "gift-remitting": "In particular, 'gift-remitting' can express affection and remembrance of families and communities 'at home', and thus establish a process of mutual recognition between migrants and their relatives and friends. This mutual recognition, created over time through a combination of social and material investments, can translate into options for migrants to return to sending communities sometime in the future" (Cliggett 2005, p. 37). Whether material or intangible, remittances are a remarkably sticky form sociocultural glue. However, when we look closely at the act of transmission, the "transactors' relations" (Åkesson 2011, p. 327), and the "afterlife of migrants' gifts" (see Mura in this volume), we also find disruptive tendencies and practices of embracement as well as rejection. This aspect is central in the last ethnographic vignette that I wish to present here:

> I was sitting on the balcony in Uşak in the district Elmalıdere with one of the third-generation youngsters. He had just spent a couple of weeks in Turkey on vacation visiting his grandparents, who had returned to Uşak. The young man works in a small-scale iron factory in Fulpmes, which is part of the Stubai Cooperation. They produce knives. He told me that he frequently brings these to his uncles Halil and Kemal as gifts. Both of his uncles are butchers. When their fathers got in a fight, they went their separate ways, and each tried his own luck. The two shops are a stone's throw away from each other, in the center of Uşak. The young man on the balcony continued to elaborate on the production of a good knife and the importance of its

maintenance. In doing so, he got upset. In his view, his uncles don't know how to grind the knives properly. Therefore, they become dull very fast and he receives complaints.
Field notes, Uşak, July 24, 2018

* * *

In Kemal's butcher shop, I didn't see any Stubai knives. Therefore, I brought the topic up in the evening when I was invited for dinner. Both the senior partner and the son told me that they have Stubai knives, but don't use them. The knives were too hard and stiff, they explained to me. They prefer the local knives, which are more flexible and bend more easily. Apparently, the knife they received from their Austrian nephew isn't flexible enough for their cutting technique. It is an unused gift, which the donor most likely doesn't know.
Field notes, Uşak, August 1, 2018

* * *

I entered Halil's butcher shop. He and his employee were just chopping liver. After some chatting and without me mentioning knives, he proudly showed me the Stubai knife he had just used and pulled various other examples out of the drawer. While his employee continued working, he lit a cigarette and struck up a conversation: "I was born in Fulpmes," he started excitedly. His father, a shepherd back then, migrated to Fulpmes after his military service, wishing to spend a year there before returning with enough money to build a farm in the village where he was born. The one intended year became four and, in the meantime, he was joined by his wife. One year after the birth of their son, they returned with money and transformed dreams. A butcher shop in the city, rather than a farm in the village, that was the new plan. A couple of years ago, the senior partner retired, and Halil expanded the shop to a modern butchery right on the main street. Since he left the Stubai Valley as a baby, he hasn't returned. But he will do so right after retiring, he told me with sparkling eyes. After that, Halil again joined his employee. With the Stubai knives in their hands, they posed for a picture.

* * *

Right afterwards, his father turned up in the shop. Halil immediately took a portrait off the wall. It showed his father just before the adventure to Stubai Valley. I took another photo.
Field notes, Uşak, August 2, 2018 (see Figs. 12.3 and 12.4)

Fig. 12.3 Fulpmes-born Halil with his employee posing with Stubai knives in his butcher shop in the city of Uşak, summer 2018. Picture taken by the author

Fig. 12.4 The senior partner of the butcher shop with a portrait of himself in his hand, depicting him before his migration to Fulpmes as a young man, summer 2018. Picture taken by the author

The act of remitting knives from a third-generation man to his uncles reveals the double relation of the exchange. As a young man in his early twenties, the nephew would not have been in a position to gift. However, the fact that he worked at the very factory that produced the knives earmarked the gift with a personal story and also as a bargain because he did not have to pay full price for them. Now and then, he brings knives to his uncles and can thereby partake while physically being absent. Maurice Godelier called attention to the dual relation that gifts create between the transactors, namely proximity and distance: "A relation of solidarity, as the one who gives shares what he has, even what he is, with the one to whom he gives; and a relation of superiority, as the one who receives the gift and accepts it is indebted to the one who has given it to him" (Godelier 1999, p. 22, my translation). In the example above, the transaction of the remitted object points toward both vectors: horizontally, the knives frequently brought along sustain the social relationship between the nephew and his uncles. However, the vertical vector of social positioning also becomes evident on both sides: whereas the nephew claimed that neither of his uncles knows how to properly grind the knives, his uncle Kemal eventually rejected its usage altogether. The remitted knives derive from the same factory and are identical in form, yet they afford opposite ways of appropriation. Halil embraced the knives and appreciated them as part of the transnational migration project his father initiated and advanced throughout his life. Himself born in the village where the knives are made, it is also the historical and personal context that frames the interaction of individual and object. Thus, it affords usage, recounting family stories, and posing for a picture on the one hand and ending up in the drawer on the other. Following Keane, who proposed that "the characteristics of the 'we' summons up the affordance" (Keane 2018, p. 31), the example of Halil shows how the in-group can transgress borders of nation states and open up new contexts. His butcher shop forms a remittance landscape in the heart of Uşak and is a central meeting point for the local townspeople as well as for the Austrian diaspora.

Another approach which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the depicted context is Bourdieu's concept of capital conversion (Bourdieu 1983). Halil inherited the economic capital his father earned during his labor migration to Fulpmes and by establishing the butcher shop after his return. What is more, he inherited the transnationally based social capital (Eckstein 2010) that made him a receiver of the personally and materially meaningful knives and provided him with regular diasporic customers.

Halil converted the cross-border economic and social capital into symbolic capital. This is what Silke Meyer called "transnational capital," that is, an established cross-border form of capital "which enables individuals to draw on their (family's) past mobility and to weigh in transnational experiences and knowledge to their benefit" (Meyer 2020, p. 276). This is visualized in the pictures above: the knife held firmly in Halil's clutch refers to the devotion with which he expedites the family business. The picture of his father right before he left for the Stubai Valley hangs on the wall behind him. He later passes the picture over to his father, thereby setting the narrative frame for the second picture: the act of migration marking the beginning of the family's success story mirrored in the gentle and pleased gaze of the senior partner with his portrait in hand.

The cross-border conversion of cultural capital, however, has reached its limit: the grinding techniques used by the uncles in Uşak no longer appear appropriate for the remitted object, nor does the functionality of the knife meet the cutting techniques used by the butcher Kemal and the retired senior partner. The local knives they still prefer are the ones they grew up with; they are used to these objects, which flexibly bend in their hands. Fél and Hofer described such elementary everyday objects as objects that "give their users signs," like a good spade, which stops when touching a hard item, and neither bends nor breaks; that solely indicates that it has fallen into a wrong place. (Fél and Hofer 1974, p. 295). People are unlikely to exchange tools that they are used to and trust in. Fél and Hofer showed in their research that even if the villagers of Átány returned with new tools that promised a technological surplus value after working in Budapest or the USA, they were often not used. The authors explained this ambivalent practice by emphasizing the cultural and social meaning of tools and their usages for constituting community (Fél and Hofer 1974, p. 45). However, in the case of the remitted Stubai knives, it becomes evident how the relations between objects, humans, and practices need to be analyzed more thoroughly and expanded with a cross-border perspective: in Halil's case, the knives enable acceptance and lead to connection, while in Kemal's case, they constrain usage and lead to disruption. The relational and habitual aspects of affordances (Hutchby 2001) lead to different forms of usage of the remitted objects. It is the finely woven, historically accumulated, and hierarchically constituted frame of the transactors' relations, the material and biography of the transmitted object, and the bodily incorporated practices of usage that mark what remittances either enable or constrain. This I call remittance affordances.

Conclusion: Conceptualizing Remittance Affordances

Drawing on a multi-sited ethnography in the Stubai Valley (Austria) and Uşak (Turkey), this chapter followed the spatial and temporal trajectories of a crucial type of material remittances in the encountered research field, namely knives and tools of the Stubai brand, in order to examine their acts of production, transmission, and embodiment. By introducing affordance theory into remittance research, the analysis revealed the multifaceted forms of transformation that the exchanged objects and practices exerted on the remittance actors as well as on the built landscape.

The chronicle of the Stubai Valley provided a historical research site, demonstrating how the iron processing industry was an economic as well as cultural driver in the valley, leading to vivid forms of exchange and transnational networks. In this context, young villagers from rural Uşak migrated to the Stubai Valley in the 1970s and 1980s, working in small-scale iron factories producing knives and tools for the Stubai cooperation. Thereafter, the iron devices were remitted to Uşak, where they constituted a crucial part of the built landscape and the everyday life of the returnees as well non-migrant family members. In everyday life in retirement, when processing food, renovating the house, or gardening, the objects evoked cross-border memories, emotions, and the recollection of migrant narratives that form homemaking on the other side of migration. The handiness with which the returnees used the iron devices moreover demonstrates how the objects transform the group of users into a group of prosperously retired laborers. Thereby, the remittance objects' affordances comprise accumulated and objectified history, incorporated into the bodies as a form of transnational habitus (Schmidt 2012, p. 66). This also reveals a transformation of class: whereas the bulk of the migrants grew up in peasant families, they now use the tools in their fieldwork not to assure their livelihoods, but for leisure.

As remitted objects, the Stubai knives and tools evoke multi-placed memories and emotions, afford construction projects in and around the house, and mediate social upward mobility. Thereby, they mark a distinctive boundary within the population in rural and urban Uşak. Remittances are agents of social change, however with the potential to polarize the social structure in the place of origin.

Seen from gift-theoretical approaches, the objects remitted to family and neighbors appear as "tie-signs" (Adloff and Mau 2005, p. 13), thus

sustaining, fostering, and controlling social relations in order to maintain a place while being physically absent. As high-quality products, the gifted Stubai knives and tools increased the symbolic capital of the donors. The factory-made iron devices are also personal objects, as the migrants once worked in the company that produced them. However, as the analysis of ethnographic material above revealed, the remitted knives enabled acceptance and led to connection in some cases, while constraining usage and leading to disruption in others. Even if the remitted object is accepted by the recipient, this does not say anything about its further appropriation and usage. This corresponds to the relational and habitual affordances that remittances comprise: the material and biography of the object, the bodily incorporated practices of usage, and the personal as well as macro-transnational hierarchical relations between sender and receiver. Thus, by focusing on the practices of using transmitted objects, the concept of remittance affordances can make a rewarding contribution to analyzing the transformative effects of transnational migration on the involved actors as well as on the built landscape.

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