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First-generation circular migrants involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren: the case of Turkish immigrants in Germany

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Abstract

Following retirement, older immigrants increasingly tend to engage in circular migration. This back-and-forth movement introduces a variety of challenges affecting the nature of grandparenthood as well as grandparental involvement in the upbringing of grandchildren. For circular migrant grandparents, maintaining intergenerational relationships requires them to overcome not only geographic distances, but also linguistic and cultural differences. In families with circular migrant grandparents, intergenerational conflict often springs from disparate generational exposure to acculturation processes, producing divergent aspirations within the first and second generations regarding the upbringing of the third generation. This study explores how first-generation Turkish circular migrant grandparents attempt to raise grandchildren who reside in Germany by implementing ‘cultural and instrumental transfers’. This study undertakes a qualitative approach: semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of first-generation Turkish circular migrant grandparents (N = 40). The analysis finds that child-care assistance is characterised by intergenerational conflict – rather than solidarity or altruistic support – between the first and second generations. Moreover, through transnational arranged marriages, as a cultural transfer, and *inter vivos* gifts, as an instrumental transfer, grandparents encourage their grandchildren to return to Turkey permanently.

Keywords: child care; circular migration; Germany; grandparenting; intergenerational conflict; Turkey

Introduction

Upon immigrating, immigrant households face a multitude of challenges. Arguably, one of the greatest among these is raising children in a new and foreign country. In such an environment, younger generations tend to grow up with less of the traditional, cultural, practical and linguistic experiences that their elders have (Silverstein and Chen, 1999). Raising children in the host country becomes even more complex when circular migrant grandparents are involved in the

child-rearing, especially if one of their primary reasons for circular migration is to assist with raising their grandchildren (Rittersberger-Tılıç *et al.*, 2013).

The perceived and ascribed contemporary social roles of grandparents differ significantly from traditional ones, which were oriented towards 'pleasure without responsibility' (Backhouse and Graham, 2010: 5). Indeed, many grandparents today play a non-trivial role in their grandchildren's upbringing, often using this role to bridge generational gaps (Maijala *et al.*, 2013). This realignment of grandparental roles has been facilitated by demographic changes that have increased life expectancy. The older are healthier, better educated and are living longer, which increases their likelihood of experiencing grandparenthood (Hoff, 2007).

Increased life expectancy is not the only demographic shift that has occurred in recent decades. Circular migration, which reorganises and redefines kinship relationships, has become an increasingly common practice amongst retired immigrants. When intergenerational relationships cross geographic, linguistic and cultural barriers, this presents various challenges to maintaining them (Nesteruk and Marks, 2009). Given these challenges, the role of circular migrant grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren needs to be investigated further.

In this study, I examine the transnational grandparenting experiences of 40 first-generation Turkish circular migrants who had spent a substantial amount of time as guest workers prior to subsequently retiring in Germany. By regularly travelling between Germany and Turkey, these migrants have established lives in each country. Their circular movement is driven by a variety of motives, including the fear of losing the right to return back to the host country (Weil, 2002) as well as the desire to secure the continuity of their aggregate remittances (Grieco, 2004), maximise health-care benefits (Bilecen and Tezcan-Güntekin, 2014) or foster relational ties in both countries (Aydın, 2016). This study considers the desire to assist in the raising of grandchildren as another motivation for circular migration.

Despite the increase in research exploring transnational grandparenting, first-generation immigrant grandparents who circulate between home and host countries have not yet received sufficient attention. In the extant literature, grandparents who engage in transnational child-rearing are mostly 'zero-generation', in reference to the parents of first-generation immigrants who were left behind (Nedelcu, 2009). However, the provision of transnational child care by first-generation circular migrants may entail challenges unique to being both a first-generation immigrant and a circular migrant. In this sense, this study departs from previous ones on transnational grandparenting by focusing on first-generation immigrants.

A renewed interest in the structure of grandparental obligations has emerged as the number of older people who have immigrated at some point in their lives continues to rise. In the face of weakened family bonds, immigrant grandparents confront the possibility of being unable to fulfil what they view as their role as grandparents by transmitting their culture to successive generations (Coles, 2001; Becker *et al.*, 2003; Vullnetari and King, 2008). One potential reason for weakened grandparental roles is that acculturation¹ to the host country occurs at different paces across generations (Silverstein and Chen, 1999), complicating the cultural transmission process (Kwak, 2003) and resulting in the emergence of intergenerational conflict (Sluzki, 1979). As the acculturation gap between the first and second generations tends to be larger than the gap between the second and the third

generations (Diehl and Schnell, 2006), the child-rearing assistance provided by immigrant grandparents is more likely to be characterised by conflict with – rather than as support for – their adult children (Nesteruk and Marks, 2009). The framework of cultural and instrumental transfers may help to explain how grandparental involvement in care-giving assistance, despite the intergenerational conflict it generates, is enabled (Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2000). Grandparents generally perceive themselves as the bond between intergenerational relationships (Maijala *et al.*, 2013), and two frequently used means of maintaining this kin-keeping role emerge: grandparents frequently utilise cultural transfers to their grandchildren to manage cultural reproduction and identity (Lie, 2010), while employing instrumental transfers to provide material support (Hoff, 2007).

In Western Europe, immigrant populations encounter various challenges during the process of ageing. Indeed, given increasing levels of international mobility, family arrangements and care provisions in particular have emerged over the past two decades as urgent topics of scholarly inquiry. This study addresses these needs by providing a richer understanding of the lived experiences of first-generation Turkish circular migrants, focusing on the practices of care-giving for their grandchildren. It specifically seeks to answer two research questions:

- (1) How do circular migrant grandparents become involved in their grandchildren's upbringing despite the intergenerational conflicts with their adult children?
- (2) In what ways do grandparents utilise cultural and instrumental transfers to convince their grandchildren to permanently return to Turkey?

In this regard, the objective of this study is to examine the involvement of first-generation Turkish circular migrants in the upbringing of their grandchildren by using two frameworks: *intergenerational conflict* between grandparents and adult children (Silverstein and Chen, 1999) and *cultural and instrumental transfers* from grandparents to grandchildren (Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2000).

Drawing upon 40 semi-structured interviews, this study suggests that grandparents attempt to raise their acculturated grandchildren according to the values of Turkish culture, despite the reluctance of the second generation. Thus, grandparents employ a variety of strategies to instil Turkish culture into their grandchildren without the full consent or co-operation of their parents. Grandparents also aim to convince their grandchildren to return to Turkey permanently, using a variety of strategies and promises to achieve this goal. This 'project' begins with grandparent–grandchildren reminiscing, whereby grandparents engage in a 'cultural transfer' to train and prepare their grandchildren to cut their ties with the host country and return to Turkey. The main strategy grandparents employ is to find a potential spouse in Turkey for their grandchildren. Transnational arranged marriages for third-generation Turkish grandchildren are a renewed form of arranged marriage. In this way, the grandchild would return to Turkey as a spouse, ensuring the permanent return of the third generation. Meanwhile, to encourage a grandchild's permanent return, grandparents may offer some material incentives as an 'instrumental transfer'. In many cases, grandparents promise to give *inter vivos* gifts, such as a house or a store, to their grandchildren if they commit to returning to Turkey permanently.

This article is organised as follows. First, it provides a contextual background in which circular migration in general and the circular migration behaviour of Turkish immigrants in particular are outlined. Second, it reviews relevant theoretical arguments and existing empirical research on grandparenthood in the context of immigration and grandparental aspirations. After presenting the data and methods, it introduces the study's findings. The final section offers a conclusion and discusses both limitations and directions for future research.

Contextual background

Circular migration refers to the repeated back-and-forth movements of migrants, involving the sharing of 'work, family, and other aspects of their lives between two or more locations' (Hugo, 2013: 2). It differs from return migration in that it requires the establishment of a dual life and more than one return, rather than a single emigration and return (Gerolimetto and Magrini, 2018). Circular migration is also distinguished from international visitation, which entails the maintenance of transnational kin relationships by visiting relatives or extended family members abroad for a short period of time (Mason, 2004), and is mostly associated with zero-generation grandparents who have no background of immigration (Nedelcu, 2009). Contemporary circular migration is also closely related to economic, technological and geopolitical changes (Solé *et al.*, 2016; Tran, 2016), as well as the growth of older immigrant populations in receiving countries. While migration studies have often focused on working-age immigrants (Böcker and Balkır, 2016), the age structure of the immigrants and their retirement have created renewed interest in the direction of circular movements of retired immigrants (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006).

When Turkish immigrants were recruited after the first bilateral labour force agreement between Germany and Turkey signed in 1961, their retirement in Germany was not anticipated (Abadan-Unat, 2011). As the recruitment system was based on one-year work permits with the possibility of an extension up to two years (González-Ferrer, 2007), their return was expected by both home and host countries, as well as by immigrants themselves who saved money to secure a life back in Turkey. However, they eventually preferred to stay, and invited their families to Germany instead. Even after 1973, when Germany officially ended recruitment, most Turks chose to stay in Germany (Mueller, 2007) and the Turkish population has grown continually, mainly due to family reunification (Aydın, 2016).

Once immigrants began to withdraw from the labour force and retire, the 'return' question re-emerged (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006). Even if they had questioned their existence in the host country since their arrival, after retirement they became focused on what they may gain or lose by staying or returning, as the necessity for work-related residence had disappeared. Given that the first generation of guest workers has reached retirement age in Germany over the last decade (Himmelreicher and Keck, 2016), questions have arisen regarding which country they will want to reside in for the remainder of their lives.

Fourteen waves (1984–1997) of data from the German Socio-economic Panel have shown that Turks are less circular/mobile compared to guest workers from other European Union member countries (Constant and Zimmermann, 2011). Yet, studies focusing on retired Turkish immigrants yield different results. For example,

Baykara-Krumme (2013) found that, amongst retired older Turkish immigrants (65 years and older), 54 per cent of them returned to Turkey permanently, 11 per cent stayed in Germany, and 35 per cent split their time between Germany and Turkey.

Various studies contribute to our understanding of the 'dual residency' of Turkish immigrants in Germany. Upon retirement, there is no work-related reason for them to remain in Germany. This brings to the fore socio-psychological factors, such as longstanding homesickness and the existence of social networks in Turkey (Kunuroglu *et al.*, 2018). In addition to these social networks, the Turkish lifestyle, along with Turkey's more preferable weather conditions, has been seen as a means to improve one's health (Durugönül, 2013). Studies also show that Turkish immigrants perceive the German health-care system to be 'superior' and 'well-organized' (Baykara-Krumme, 2013; Bilecen *et al.*, 2015), which leads them to return to Germany for medicine prescription and medical doctor visits (Bilecen and Tezcan-Güntekin, 2014).

Circular migration is also linked to Germany's restrictive migration policies. If an immigrant who holds only Turkish citizenship does not re-enter Germany within six months of leaving, he or she may lose resident status, which also precludes social benefits and rights related to health care (Fokkema *et al.*, 2016). Most also prefer to stay in Turkey during the spring and summer due to the more preferable climate (Kunuroglu *et al.*, 2015), as well as to participate in important events, such as weddings and circumcision ceremonies (Bilecen *et al.*, 2015), which generally take place during these months.

Another reason they are reluctant to return to Turkey permanently is that their children and grandchildren live in Germany (Ciobanu *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the reproduction of family ties in Germany is carried out through circular migration, as circular migrants perform important family functions such as caring for grandchildren and carrying out housekeeping duties (Rittersberger-Tılıç *et al.*, 2013).

Literature review

Understanding grandparenthood in the context of immigration

Grandparenthood has a multifaceted nature which lacks clear perceived and ascribed roles, and may embody different meanings, expectations and experiences in distinct cultural settings (Szinovacz, 1998). That being said, grandparents have traditionally been seen as 'wardens of culture' (Gutmann, 1985) and 'family watchdogs' (Troll, 1983). When it comes to involvement in the upbringing of grandchildren, grandparental roles may also include altruistic and self-sacrificial performances (Kornhaber, 1996). In the literature, the altruistic acts and prescribed roles of grandparents have mainly been interpreted via the theoretical construct of intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991), which describes emotional multigenerational bonds (Dolbin-MacNab and Yancura, 2018) and interpersonal care (Keene and Batson, 2010). In other words, without invoking the cost-reward balance, altruistic motivations may guide family members to care for each other unconditionally. Another strand in the literature interprets intergenerational mutual assistance through the lens of exchange theory. According to this perspective, the exchange of commodities and resources – tangible or intangible – is the

core of social relationships, which are governed by norms of reciprocity (Dowd, 1975). That is, grandparents may provide support to adult children with the expectation of being repaid later in life in the event of a decline in health, financial status or in the instance of widowhood (Kim *et al.*, 2018).

While intergenerational relationships have been interpreted in terms of co-operation and solidarity (Bengtson and Roberts, 1991) based on altruism or exchange theory, intergenerational conflict has largely been neglected. Recently though, scholars have recognised that family members across generations have different goals and interests, making conflict between them a normative aspect of intergenerational relations (Parrott and Bengtson, 1999). Several studies provide examples of intergenerational conflict whereby parents serve as gatekeepers and mediate in the quality of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. For example, Settles (2014) remarks that the amount and quality of care provided by grandparents to their grandchildren is determined by the adult children's actions and behaviours, and shaped by the relationship between these two generations. Forghani and Neustaedter (2014: 1) explain that grandparents 'perceive that parents or children will be annoyed if they ask too many questions'. Nesteruk and Marks (2009), who investigated Eastern European immigrants, and Gu (2010), who focused on Taiwanese grandmothers in the United States of America, also note the conflict occurring between grandparents and adult children that stems from the grandparents' heavy involvement in their grandchildren's upbringing.

Additionally, socio-economic and cross-national variations exist. The physical distance between grandparents and their adult children can also influence the type and quality of care that grandchildren receive. In cases where grandparents reside in the home country and are unable to move where their children are living due to health problems or a lack of financial resources, families may prefer to send children away to be cared for by their grandparents. This typically occurs after family crises, with grandparents caring for their grandchildren in the home country (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006).

Does the type of care that grandchildren receive change if the grandparents circulate between two countries on a regular basis? The most substantial attempt to answer this question was made by Plaza (2000), who proposed the term 'international flying grannies' to describe grandmothers who move back and forth between home and host countries to provide child-care assistance to their children and to monitor the growth of their grandchildren. Other researchers have described this process as a primary strategy of transnational child care (Goulbourne and Chamberlain, 2001; Reynolds and Zontini, 2006; Nesteruk and Marks, 2009; Lie, 2010; Zontini, 2010). As Nedelcu (2017: 377) states, transnational grandparents 'contribute to the transnational socialization of their grandchildren, perpetuating cultural traditions, language abilities or culinary habits from their country of origin'. The relative affordability of air travel facilitates frequent visits across nations to provide practical child care and emotional support (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006). To be more involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren, grandparents will often change their holiday or even retirement plans, especially if they are needed by their adult children in the host country (Zontini, 2010).

In this 'transnational era', it has commonly been held that caring for grandchildren does not necessarily require geographical proximity (Schroeder-Butterfill and

Schonheinz, 2019). Indeed, a growing number of studies argue that information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable 'caring at distance', which liberates care practices from geographical boundaries. As physical presence is replaced by 'virtual co-presence' (Baldassar, 2008) under new polymedia regimes of communication, older immigrants have been described as 'technological migrants' with a high degree of motivation to acquire technological skills to stay connected with their loved ones abroad (Marchetti-Mercer, 2017: 84). Through ICTs, grandparenting has acquired new dimensions as transnational solidarities and family configurations are being redefined (Nedelcu, 2017). ICTs have become channels for managing feelings of longing and disconnection, manifesting experiences of reunion, return and co-presence (Baldassar, 2008), and making 'virtual families' possible (Falicov, 2007).

Grandparental aspirations realised through cultural and instrumental transfers

Grandparents have different future projections for their grandchildren than their own adult children. Their willingness to become involved in their grandchildren's upbringing is mediated by a sense of duty, a combination of grandparental filial obligations and national identity. *Reminiscing* appears to be a main channel through which grandparents seek to instil feelings of national belonging in their grandchildren, as well as to project future aspirations for them. These recollected memories enact 'emotional transnationalism', sustaining emotional connections between immigrants and their family members left at home (Wolf, 1997). In the context of circular migration, however, grandparents initiate emotional connections with their grandchildren, complemented by aspirations for them, through reminiscing (Goulbourne and Chamberlain, 2001). The aspirations of grandparents tend to consist of hopes rather than a set of expectations (Kemp, 2004). However, the traditional Turkish family structure, characterised by patriotism and respect for authority (Kagıtcıbası, 1970), leads grandparents to adopt a more expectation-oriented approach.

To explain the expectation-oriented approach of circular migrant Turkish grandparents, this study adopts Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç's (2000) concept of 'cultural and instrumental transfers'. Cultural transfers mainly consist of general advice, emotional support and caring. In particular, one component of cultural transfers is the 'selection of spouses for grandchildren' (Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç, 2000: 529). Instrumental transfers fulfil grandchildren's financial and material needs and are comprised of grandparents' savings and other assets. Grandparents utilise cultural transfers to ensure the intergenerational continuity of their beliefs and values (Plaza, 2000; Treas and Mazumdar, 2004; Lie, 2010; Tiaynen-Qadir, 2016). Grandparents who are financially better off than their children are particularly likely to use instrumental transfers to support their grandchildren through direct monetary grants (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006; Hoff, 2007; Yorgason *et al.*, 2011), *inter vivos* gifts (Uhlenberg and Cheuk, 2010; Coall and Hertwig, 2011) and/or bequests (Bernheim *et al.*, 1986).

A cultural transfer becomes more effective at bringing about the grandparents' desired outcome(s) if the grandchildren are simultaneously motivated by an instrumental transfer as a conditional reward for some action. Instrumental transfers can thus be powerful tools for grandparents seeking to convince grandchildren to follow

their aspirations, and have been used strategically to 'influence the behavior of potential beneficiaries' (Bernheim *et al.*, 1986: 152). The discussion below further examines how cultural transfers are strengthened by the promise of instrumental transfers, whereby grandparents aim to influence their grandchildren's future spouse selection and type of union.

Historically, the practice of arranged marriages has been frequent and accepted as a norm in Turkey (White, 2003). Yet, commonly held assimilation perspectives would not expect Turkish immigrants to maintain these practices in the host country; transnational arranged marriages, therefore, emerged as an unexpected phenomenon (Lievens, 1998). In the literature, this issue has come up in discussions about 'imported partners', which refers to people who come from abroad to marry with or without their own consent (Lievens, 1999). Various reasons can be given for marrying a partner from Turkey instead of someone residing in Germany. First, it can be seen as a socio-economic strategy whereby immigrants wish to invest in kinship and strengthen their alliances in the country of origin by displaying loyalty and generosity (Beck-Gernsheim, 2007). Schmidt (2011) posited that transnational arranged marriages are a clear attempt to reduce the possibility of divorce. A transnational marriage may also be arranged because of the social pressure exerted by non-immigrants in the country of origin (Kaya, 2011). Furthermore, if the potential Turkish spouse, who was born and resided in Germany, seems unable to fulfil a traditional family role, importing a spouse from Turkey appears to be a strategic decision (Timmerman, 2006).

Nevertheless, transnational arranged marriages are not problem-free. For example, husbands brought from the home country are often unable, initially at least, to carry out the expected breadwinner role, due to lack of language proficiency and other required qualifications for employment in the new environment (Van Kerckem *et al.*, 2013). Wives from abroad are also typically unfamiliar with the host country, experience the social control exerted by the conservative Turkish community, and become a burden on their husbands and in-laws, which may lead to physical or psychological violence (Timmerman, 2006; Abadan-Unat, 2011). Given such problems, convincing grandchildren to return to Turkey instead of bringing a spouse to Germany may present itself as a better option for marriage decision-makers in order to preserve family unity.

If a grandchild does not adhere to these marriage arrangements, a likely consequence is ostracism from social networks, which may guarantee communal support (Kaya, 2011). Moreover, parents and grandparents might withdraw their social and economic privileges. As the third generation reaches the age of marriage, the heavy involvement of circular migrant grandparents in their upbringing and the cultural and instrumental transfers that are utilised may regulate their future marriage.

Method and data

This study draws on semi-structured interviews with 40 first-generation Turkish circular migrants between May and August 2017. Since circular migrants constitute a hard-to-reach group, they were found by first contacting their adult children. I examined two Facebook group pages² that more than 41,000 Turkish immigrants

living in Western European countries use to ask questions and exchange information. I contacted 452 immigrants who mentioned in posts or comments that their parents were engaged in circular migration.

The following three criteria were used in the selection of respondents. First, if married, at least one of the spouses must have been retired, and if unmarried, the respondent must have been retired. Second, the respondent or the spouse must have spent their working life and entered retirement in Germany. Third, they must have commuted between Turkey and Germany at least three times during their lifetime to ensure they have established dual residency. Adult children provided me with their parents' contact information. I interviewed respondents over the phone ($N = 15$) or via Skype ($N = 25$), depending on their preference. Because of the purposefully designed and strictly defined sample, only 47 eligible cases were detected, and 40 of them accepted my invitation, for a response rate of 85 per cent (for selected demographic characteristics of the sample, see Table 1).

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, and all of them were conducted in Turkish. Phone-interviewing was chosen for three reasons. First, this was due to cost and speed, as well as the fact that phone ownership is widespread amongst this sample. Second, ICTs are important tools enabling transnational families to remain connected, which also shaped the research design of this study. Third, the absence of direct contact in the phone-interview setting allows the researcher to communicate openly with opposite-sex respondents who belong to conservative communities. Although phone-interviewing in qualitative studies is not the preferred method of data collection, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) concluded that there is no significant difference in the quality of findings between face-to-face and phone-interviewing.

The sample includes 18 men and 22 women, with the latter generally being more responsive to being interviewed. The ages of the respondents ranged from 65 to 81, and five were widowed. All women were younger than their husbands, and they had migrated to Germany through transnational arranged marriages and gave birth to children in Germany. The respondents had an average of 3.35 adult children and 2.25 grandchildren. All respondents had low levels of formal education and were retired from blue-collar jobs but had savings, investments, other assets, and owned a house and/or land in both Turkey and Germany.

The interviews combined both semi-structured interviewing and life-history approaches. The latter elicits 'the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them' (Faraday and Plummer, 1979: 776). Utilising a life-history approach encouraged respondents to discuss issues they deemed of personal importance, such as continuity and change in family life and emotional connections between extended family members, in a retrospective way (Bertaux, 2003). Although there was no *a priori* list of questions, discussion topics were predetermined, which allowed numerous topics to emerge in the interview. During the interviews, I first asked the respondents about their demographics (including age, education, occupation and marital status) as well as information about their children and grandchildren. After that, the interviews continued with (a) the respondents' personal biography and migration history, including moving dates, destinations and living arrangements; (b) their employment history and retirement; (c) their financial situation (savings, investments

Table 1. Selected demographic characteristics of the sample of grandparents

	Women	Men	Total
N	22	18	40
Age group:			
65–69	11	5	16
70–74	6	6	12
75 or older	5	7	12
Years spent in Germany before circular migration:			
Fewer than 20	5	4	9
21–30	6	3	9
31–40	4	3	7
41 or more	7	8	15
Years spent as a circular migrant:			
3	10	6	16
4–6	9	7	16
7 or more	3	5	8
Number of properties (house, land):			
In Germany:			
1	10	8	18
2	8	7	15
3 or more	4	3	7
In Turkey:			
1	4	3	7
2	12	10	22
3 or more	6	5	11
Marital status:			
Married	19	16	35
Widowed/divorced	3	2	5
Number of adult children:			
1–2	9	5	14
3–4	9	10	19
5 or more	4	3	7
Number of grandchildren:			
1–2	10	10	20
3–4	9	8	17
5 or more	3	0	3

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

	Women	Men	Total
Age group of grandchildren:			
1–5	4	3	7
6–10	14	17	31
11–15	12	15	27
16 or older	20	14	34

and assets in Germany and Turkey); (d) the reasons for their circular migration; (e) their relationships with their children and grandchildren; (f) their attitudes towards Germany, Germans, the Turkish population in Germany, assimilation, gender roles and religion; (g) their emotional connections to their adult children and grandchildren; (h) intergenerational support (*i.e.* money and other assistance given to their children and grandchildren) and conflict; (i) the intergenerational transmission of cultural values in an extended household; (j) reminiscing with their grandchildren; and (k) their future aspirations for their grandchildren. The interviews began with a rapport-building phase, in which the respondents often asked about my hometown in Turkey, my parents' occupations, my marital status and age, why I am interested in the topic of circular migration and whether I plan to return to Turkey. This self-disclosure allowed for the development of trust and guided the way towards further discussion (Hayman *et al.*, 2012).

Until the 25th interview, each one produced some changes in the structure of the interview topics and questions. As new patterns ceased to emerge after the 25th interview, I organised a second round of interviewing for the first 25 respondents to ask them questions I had not previously asked. In total, I conducted 65 interviews with 40 respondents.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the analysis stage, I adopted an inductive content analysis approach, which is a 'subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005: 1278). The inductive approach is recommended when prior knowledge on the phenomenon is limited or fragmented (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). The transcribed interviews were entered in NVivo 9.0 for coding and classification of the data. Coding was undertaken in three stages: (a) open coding to identify the categories; (b) axial coding to relate categories to sub-categories; and (c) selective coding to integrate and refine categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). To enhance the credibility and confirmability of the coding process and findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), two colleagues conducted independent, parallel coding, and differences were resolved in three meetings. The kappa values for intercoder reliability ranged from 0.84 to 0.92.

Findings

This section presents four core themes derived from the qualitative data. The first theme reveals how grandparents seek to instil Turkish cultural values in their

grandchildren, along with the tensions and conflicts they experience with adult children. The second theme displays the specific strategy of buying their grandchildren smartphones, which they have adopted to monitor family conflicts from abroad. The third theme focuses on grandparent–grandchildren reminiscing, by which grandparents aim to bond emotionally with their grandchildren and encourage them to internalise Turkish cultural values. The fourth theme analyses grandparents' future projections for their grandchildren, including transnational arranged marriages and a permanent return migration to Turkey, which are incentivised by promises of *inter vivos* gifts in Turkey.

Intergenerational conflict in raising grandchildren

The findings indicate that child-care assistance is not characterised by altruistic support provided by the first generation to the second generation, but rather by conflicts between them. Grandparents are generally aware that their children tend not to prefer them as the primary care-givers for the third generation. However, despite experiencing this feeling of undesirability, transnational grandparenting has emerged to fulfil a specific mission: grandparents aim to instil Turkish national identity and native language abilities in their grandchildren by making them visit Turkey on a regular basis. One example of this from an interview reads as follows:

When the school is in recess for the summer, I buy tickets so that my grandchildren can come over. When I tell my son to send them over, he complains, but when I buy the tickets, he has to send them over. I always tell my son not to keep them away from their homeland that much. Let them stay here. Let them get to know their relatives. You wouldn't believe it, but when they stay here for 15 days, the kids come here as Germans, but go back as Turks. (Grandfather of 10M*, 12F*, 15F*, age 72)³

During school holidays, grandchildren are essentially forced to visit Turkey. To ensure these visits occur, many grandparents (N = 34) pay for and send tickets to grandchildren without their parents' full approval or co-operation, a seemingly 'forced vacation'. These visits are organised without consulting adult children who, however, need to sign a declaration of consent in line with airlines regulations for unaccompanied minors. These grandparents view themselves as protecting their grandchildren from their parents, whom they see as failing to fulfil traditional familial and cultural responsibilities. The grandparents regularly accuse their children of contributing to the high level of acculturation of their grandchildren:

We look after our grandchild. Neither our daughter nor our son-in-law knows anything about this. If it weren't for us, the kid would forget Turkish. I tell my daughter how good the Turkish television channels [in Germany] are, and that she should put them on so the kid can watch the cartoons on them, but she insists on not putting them on and says that German is more important. She can learn German anywhere. She goes to a kindergarten and her friends are German. Where is this kid going to learn Turkish? When we go to Turkey for six months and come back, the kid starts speaking German with me. She acts as if she is German. You can't say anything to her parents. They immediately get offended. (Grandmother of 1M, 5F*, 15M, 19F, age 67)

Despite the geographical distance, grandparents wish to provide care to their grandchildren in accordance with traditional Turkish norms. However, even if they want the third generation to be exposed to Turkish cultural programming, the second generation may not facilitate this process. According to the grandparents, the second generation has different aspirations and goals for the third generation, correspondingly, different approaches to their socio-economic mobility. For example, while kindergarten is of great importance for the acquisition of German language proficiency and the main prerequisite for socio-economic mobility in Germany, some respondents preferred 'child-shifting'⁴ to provide better education to their grandchildren in Turkish schools. The wish for surrogate parenting is clear in this case:

My middle daughter's daughter will start kindergarten this year. Our children say that education is best in Germany. Now, schools in Turkey have improved. They provide tablets for every student and the books are free. Turkey, now, is not what it once used to be. Europe has come to an end anyway. I tell my children to come back. There is no difference between the schools in Turkey and Germany any more. If you are not going to come back, leave the kid with us. She can start school here and become a useful citizen for her country. But, it goes in one ear and out the other. I'm fed up with it. (Grandfather of 3M, 3F, 4F*, 12F, 18F, age 76)

Grandparents go beyond providing practical care for their grandchildren, playing an important role in instilling a sense of national identity within them (Lie, 2010). Nevertheless, as numerous grandparents (N = 22) confessed, they could not devote sufficient time to their children while they were working:

My grandchildren are more Turkish than my own daughter and son. We were spending time together as a family the other day, and out of nowhere I asked, 'Who wrote the national anthem?' One of them answered straightaway, 'Mehmet Akif'. His mum and dad stared at me. We couldn't teach our children in our own time. Actually, we are to be blamed. We didn't show much interest in our children. I was working 15 hours a day then and so was my wife. Our children absorbed German culture at schools. I will not make the same mistake with my grandchildren. They will be more Turkish than us. (Grandfather of 4M, 5F, 7M*, 8M, 8M, 12F, age 71)

Many second-generation Turks in Germany were raised by guest worker parents who were exposed to difficult working conditions and who were required to work long hours. In these cases, caring for their children was of secondary importance. Also, the lack of practical and emotional care and support provided by their own parents at that time contributed to cultural rupture. When the first generation was working in Germany, their parents were residing in Turkey and their opportunities to visit Germany to care for grandchildren were limited by financial and technological constraints. Today, thanks to the reduced costs of transportation and a retirement pension, the first generation wishes to provide the child care for their grandchildren which they were unable to provide for their own children.

Smartphones: gifts or spying tools?

A considerable number of grandparents (N = 32) bought their grandchildren smartphones in order to talk and have video calls with them. Grandparents also call to remind their grandchildren about them as well as Turkish culture. Grandparents aim to reinforce the ethnic identity of their grandchildren and maintain their cultural connections to the country of origin (Reynolds and Zontini, 2006). In addition, they seek to foster attachments by sending pictures of their hometowns, or scenery such as gardens, seas, rivers or mountains, as well as relatives or neighbours on a regular basis.

My grandson is still too young, but thank God, he can do all sorts of things on the phone. You should see it. When my wife and I are in Turkey, we can only chat to him on the phone, so we decided to get him a phone to call us whenever he wanted. He called me when I was at the teahouse the other day. I showed everybody there that that was my grandson and he talked to everybody politely, but my daughter-in-law got angry and didn't talk to us for a month. She asked what is a child at this age doing with a phone and talking to anybody when they were not present. If we don't call him, he will forget Turkish, but our daughter-in-law gets angry with us. (Grandfather of 5M*, 12F, age 69)

Grandparents are informed by their grandchildren about events that occur in the household, typically those that the second generation is reluctant to share. This 'virtual co-presence' (Baldassar, 2008) has evolved to a 'quasi-hidden virtual presence' between the first and third generations, which the second generation is aware of but has limited control over. Grandparents learn about important events, arguments or decisions made in the household from their grandchildren:

There is a saying 'children and fools tell the truth'. Our granddaughter told us that her mum cried every day. I called her mum and asked if she was okay. She said she was fine and didn't say anything. When I pushed her, she spilled it all out. Our son-in-law had exchanged all her bracelets for cash and become a partner in a business, but it went bankrupt. If it weren't for our grandchild, we would have known nothing about this. My daughter does not mention it to avoid any arguments and our son-in-law takes this for granted. We are not spare parts, why don't they turn to us? He had a go at our grandchild after this incident and banned them from using the phone. Behave yourself and the kid won't tell us that their mum cries every day. Of course, we'll ask for an explanation once we get to Germany. (Grandmother of 1M, 5F*, 14M, age 70)

When serious issues occur that can affect family unity, grandparents will often immediately fly to Germany to arbitrate the family dispute. In this respect, providing grandchildren with a personal smartphone is a strategy to track what unfolds in the household from abroad, as it ensures communication without the second generation's participation. However, this is another source of tension between the first and second generations, and the latter may feel as if they are under constant surveillance.

Grandparent–grandchildren reminiscing: mythical and gendered narratives

The interviews revealed that the primary mission of grandparents is to train and prepare the third generation to absorb Turkish culture. The most influential method for accomplishing this appears to be reminiscence. Yet, reminiscing between grandparents and grandchildren is complicated by the existence of a large generational gap, contrasting cultural orientations and geographical distance. In order to introduce some level of persuasiveness into the narratives, as well as to make a shared past comprehensible, grandparents provide a romanticised, even mythical, story about Turkey and Turkish culture:

Our country is just like heaven. Its weather, water and every inch of it is a treasure. What did we go to Germany for? We suffered because of Germans, but still were not accepted by them. They still call us filthy Turks, barbaric Turks. I try to plant in my grandchildren a love of the homeland at every possible opportunity so that they rely less on Germans and Germany. The other day, I told the story behind our flag to my grandchildren and they instantly saluted me like a soldier. They told the same story to their parents later. Soldiers' blood was collecting in a pit after a battle and the crescent and the stars were reflected in it. See, my hair stands on end even when I talk about it now. (Grandfather of 5M*, 7F*, 9F*, 19M, 23M, age 77)

When I asked the grandparents about the content of the last story they shared with grandchildren, an interesting pattern emerged: while grandsons were mostly exposed to positive images of the homeland, such as the weather, the pastoral beauty and serenity of the landscapes, and idealised and even exaggerated descriptions of Turkey, Turkish culture and history, granddaughters were predominantly given negative messages related to Germany, their painful experiences in the labour market, the discriminatory behaviours they suffered in Germany and stories of divorce. Broadly speaking, cultural transfers through such narratives lead grandsons to familiarise themselves with Turkey and Turkish culture, and granddaughters to become estranged from Germany and German culture. The advice inherent in these didactical narratives reinforces gender roles by providing different priorities and prospects for grandsons and granddaughters. I inquired, 'What would be the worst thing your grandchildren could do?' Although the nature of qualitative research and the limited sample size do not permit generalisations, grandparents responding to this question frequently said that their granddaughter's marriage with a German would be the most frightening thing, and the narratives grandparents shared were shaped by this anxiety.

The other day I saw on my granddaughter's Facebook account that she is in a relationship. I checked to see who it was, and it was a German guy. I commented on it and said 'congratulations'. She commented back, 'thank you grandma' to me. I was shocked. She doesn't understand that I'm angry with her and she says thanks to me. Well, we're in Turkey now. Her parents are there with her. How on earth can they let her do something like that? This is not acceptable for our culture. If they marry, this will end in divorce. We know many examples like this. I talked to her for hours. I send spending money to her every month, but I won't any more until she breaks up with that boy. That'll help her come to her senses. (Grandmother of 10F, 14M, 22F*, age 69)

Grandparents not only give advice, but also use a carrot-and-stick approach. As punishment-oriented control is the most common method of control in the traditional Turkish family (Sen *et al.*, 2014), 'deviant' granddaughters may be temporarily deprived of financial and other resources, and are more likely to be punished from a distance. Although most grandparents (N = 38) expressly did not approve of their granddaughters marrying native Germans, they neither stated the same concern for the grandsons nor punished them for dating a German. Overall, different standards and strategies are applied to granddaughters and grandsons through reminiscing.

A route to permanent return migration: transnational arranged marriages and bequests

The most common concern for grandparents (N = 35) appeared to be the 'undesirable' marriage choices of their grandchildren in the near future. This undesirability stems from the possibility of them marrying a native German, the lack of Turkish spousal candidates in Germany and problems associated with bringing a spouse from Turkey to Germany. Finding their grandchild a spouse from Turkey and getting married there is the most desirable outcome, as it fulfils two aspirations. First, their grandchildren's marriage would adhere to traditional Turkish cultural values, and second, they would be encouraged to return to Turkey. Yet, grandchildren do not appear to want this arrangement, with many of them dating people in Germany, as the respondents reported. Here is how one grandparent reacted to this:

What's wrong with Turkish guys? We're not very conservative people. They will, of course, date each other but there are many Turkish guys there. My granddaughters should date those ones. What's wrong with that? Okay, let's say that we've accepted the boy. What about the boy's parents? Would they accept her? Of course not. They will always remind her about being Turkish at even the slightest opportunity. A Turk living in Germany should know that they are Turkish, otherwise, they would get hurt. We can easily find someone in Turkey. You can come here and have your family here. (Grandmother of 17F*, 19F*, 20M, age 74)

During the interviews, I noticed that the grandparents of females do not even consider German-born Turkish males to be acceptable marriage candidates. Third-generation Turkish males in Germany were described as uneducated, ignorant, disrespectful and assimilated. This led grandparents to focus on Turkish-born males living in Turkey as the most acceptable marriage partners. Grandparents of males also took a quite similar approach. Many behaviours that are uncharacteristic of Turkish culture, such as the German style of dress, a luxurious lifestyle and smoking, were identified with third-generation Turkish females, who have seemingly developed a social similarity to Germans. Even some grandparents pejoratively and sarcastically mentioned that 'German females would be better spouses than Turkish ones in Germany':

Europe has come to an end now. Europe was Europe in our period. There was wealth then. Now, my son and daughter-in-law can only afford to come to

Turkey every three years. We help them. When our grandchildren start to work, it will be more difficult. Maybe they will be unemployed, penniless and on the dole ... I'm sick and tired of repeating the same thing to my son but I would marry my grandsons off in Turkey. There are pretty girls here. All very well-mannered. (Grandmother of 8F, 14M*, 17M*, age 67)

At this point, I asked her what she thought about young Turkish women in Germany:

They are like Germans now. It makes no difference whether one marries a German girl or Turkish girl living in Germany. I married into this family in Germany. I had too many difficulties. I didn't know the language or the man I married. I didn't have any friends for years. We shouldn't let this happen to other girls. Our grandsons should come here and get married here. (Grandmother of 8F, 14M*, 17M*, age 67)

Almost all grandmothers experienced challenges, such as language barriers and discrimination, when they moved to Germany through an arranged marriage. They developed an empathetic stance towards other potential brides from abroad. In their experiences, the least desirable outcome is for a bride to be forced to move to Germany.

Transnational arranged marriages amongst the third generation have now appeared in a renewed form, whereby grandchildren are 'imported' to Turkey to marry someone, thus ensuring their permanent return and potentially making them available to take care of their ageing grandparents in the future as well:

It is difficult to be married to a German. Isn't there anybody who married a German in our family? Of course, some have, but what happens next? You either get divorced or become very unhappy. And the kid? Is the kid going to be brought up a Muslim or a Christian? How is it going to work out? My daughter was in love with a German guy many years ago. They insisted on getting married. I am a softy you know. I talked to her many times and of course when things got serious, her father found out about it and I swear to God, he got her on to a flight for Turkey on the same day and sent her to Turkey. Then, we found a husband there and married her off. Don't get me wrong, we're not hostile to Germans. It's only the marriage business that doesn't work for us. I could not let my daughter be unhappy in front of my eyes. She has a wonderful family now. We have three grandchildren [in Germany] and hopefully we'll marry them off in Turkey. If they do, their houses are ready ... We don't have much time left, we're old ... We would like to spend some time with them. (Grandmother of 13F*, 16M*, 18M*, age 65)

This response reveals the second strategy of encouraging grandchildren to permanently return to Turkey: promising assets as *inter vivos* gifts (N = 31), such as a house or store in Turkey, prior to their death. Bequeathable wealth is held for the purpose of making intergenerational transfers in order to convince grandchildren to seemingly make their own decisions, but which are squarely in line with their grandparents' will. Grandchildren are central to future elder-care plans, even if only a few of

the respondents (N = 11) mentioned this. Grandparents are living in apartments they own, which are usually three- or four-storey buildings, and one of these floors will be given to the grandchildren. Grandchildren function as a kind of security blanket for their grandparents, to whom they may be expected to provide care and services in case their health or mobility declines.

Discussion and conclusion

In recent years, interest in the intersection of ageing and immigration due to ageing-related demographic shifts has grown considerably. The increase in life expectancy has led to an increase in interactions between three generations of a family, which have enhanced the role of grandparents as a child-care provider. The present study contributes to this area of research by exploring how first-generation Turkish circular migrant grandparents attempt to raise grandchildren in line with Turkish cultural values when traditional family-based care is disrupted by international mobility. By doing so, this study highlights the reflection of social and demographic changes in immigrant households in Germany in intergenerational relationships through child-care assistance provided by grandparents in the grandchildren's upbringing.

Within the context of child care, the majority of studies have focused on the 'zero-generation' grandparents, who have no immigration background but may subsequently follow their adult children in immigration or engage in circular migration for care-giving. They are particularly vulnerable, however, due to their lack of language skills, financial and housing dependencies, absence of social networks, and legal and administrative restrictions (Nedelcu, 2017). In short, while zero-generation immigrants represent active members in transnational networks to mobilise the kin (Baldassar, 2007), they 'usually become highly dependent on their children in the host society' (King *et al.*, 2014: 737). On the contrary, first-generation circular migrant grandparents are financially independent due to their savings, investments and retirement pensions, allowing them to travel frequently between two countries without imposing financial burdens on their children. Indeed, in response to economic or family crises, they are even able to support their adult children financially (Becker *et al.*, 2003). In this way, their parental authority over their adult children in regards to raising grandchildren becomes more decisive.

Family unity across generations is vital for family survival (Nesteruk and Marks, 2009). This study showed that family unity is mainly constructed and maintained through the efforts and resources of the grandparents. Grandparents actively engage in child-care assistance for their grandchildren from a distance and in the country where their adult children reside when they travel there, but this entails several challenges unique to circular migrant grandparents. The most significant challenge seems to be the acculturation gap and geographical separation between generations. When considering intergenerational and geographical distances, grandparents intervene in the grandchildren's upbringing, despite the wishes of the second generation. Grandparents feel that if no precautions are taken, the third generation will be completely assimilated into mainstream German culture. Therefore, child-care assistance is characterised by intergenerational conflict between the first and second generations, rather than by solidarity or altruistic support.

While 'intergenerational conflict is almost universal' (Skinner, 1961: 55), it is even more salient within the transnational family context (Zayas and Palleja, 1988). If the relationship between the first and second generations is characterised by conflict, how are they able to maintain their protected ties? Parrott and Bengtson (1999: 97) responded to this question by emphasising the unique role of providing assistance to grandchildren: 'conflict between parents and adult children does not appear to interfere with exchanges of supportive assistance between the generations'. While the first generation maintains practical continuity through the second generation, it aims to achieve intergenerational cultural continuity via the third generation. In this respect, grandchildren are the main actors to be invested in.

Drawing upon semi-structured interviews with a purposefully selected sample of 40 first-generation Turkish circular migrant grandparents, the findings presented here indicate that grandparents have a specific mission in mind regarding their grandchildren. Grandparents aim to eliminate their grandchildren's affinities for German language and culture by developing their sense of Turkish national identity and language proficiency. Moreover, grandchildren are seemingly forced to visit Turkey on a regular basis without their own parents' full approval. Grandparents also track important events that take place in the household by purchasing smartphones for their grandchildren, who are willing to share this information with them even when the adult children do not want to. If anything has the potential to threaten the unity of the family, such as in-house disputes which could end in separation or divorce, grandparents fly to Germany immediately to arbitrate the family dispute.

Grandparent-grandchildren reminiscing serves as an important channel for training and preparing the third generation for immersion in Turkish culture. However, grandparents implement different tones, contents and aims in their reminiscing. While grandsons are exposed to positive images of Turkey and Turkish culture, granddaughters are estranged from Germany and German culture. Moreover, while granddaughters are punished for 'deviance' even from a distance, grandsons are exempt from disciplinary action. Through reminiscing, 'cultural and instrumental transfers' are carried out. Transnational arranged marriage, as cultural transfer, is encouraged for grandchildren, whom grandparents expect to marry someone from Turkey. In this way, the grandchildren's permanent return to Turkey is thought to be secured. Promising an *inter vivos* gift in Turkey, as an instrumental transfer, is another strategy for convincing grandchildren to return.

To conclude, the findings of this study indicate that circular migrant grandparents are involved in their grandchildren's upbringing through intergenerational conflict, which is heightened by the different socialisation contexts of older immigrants and their adult children. Grandparents attempt to raise their acculturated grandchildren by utilising 'cultural and instrumental transfers', which are expected to convince them to return to Turkey permanently. Transnational arranged marriage and *inter vivos* gifts in Turkey appear as the main strategies for fulfilling the grandparents' aspirations. In this respect, *intergenerational conflict* and *cultural and instrumental transfers* hold promise in understanding the complex dynamics of circular migrant grandparents' involvement in their grandchildren's upbringing.

Although this study provides insights into grandparents' roles as child-care providers, several caveats should be noted. First, most studies focusing on circular migration have limited generalisability, including this one. Nevertheless, a

qualitative approach was necessary due to the nature of patterns that this study aimed to investigate, the lack of existing data and the difficulty in reaching the population of interest. Second, this study examined the perceptions of grandparents. It is unclear how adult children perceive the involvement of their own parents in their children's lives and to what extent they develop counter-strategies. How members of the third generation, most of whom are still minors, evaluate their grandparents' involvement, as well as how their grandparents' strategies will affect their decisions regarding marriage and migration, remain open questions. Future research agendas should address whether Turkish circular migrant grandparents' involvement and incentives influence their grandchildren's return movement and marriage preferences. Currently, most of the first-generation Turkish guest workers are young-old (65–74), so future research might also further explore this issue when the majority enters the old-old (75+) age group, as more questions on the intersection of child care and elder care emerge in the near future.

Note

1 Acculturation refers to the process of the adoption of general mainstream values, and the absorption of behaviour patterns of the host society (Gordon, 1964).

2 See <https://www.facebook.com/GurbettenAvrupaDanTurkiyeYeKesinDonus/> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/alamanci/>.

3 The number–letter combinations show the age and gender of the grandchildren (M indicates male and F indicates female). Grandchildren mentioned in the quotations are indicated with an asterisk.

4 'Child-shifting' has been defined as 'informal adoption of children that may be permanent or temporary' (Russell-Brown *et al.*, 1997: 224).

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