

Chapter 2

Marriage Migration from Turkey to Germany: Risks and Coping Strategies of Transnational Couples

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2.1 Introduction

This paper is about marriages concluded between Turkish immigrants¹ living in Germany and their spouses who at the beginning of the relationship were residing in Turkey. In recent years, the public debate in Germany about ongoing marriage migration from non-EU countries has been almost exclusively concerned with the legal regulations of marriage migration and the numbers of annual marriage migrants as documented in official statistics. Existing sociological studies about the topic have focused on questions related to the marriage behaviour of first- and second-generation immigrants living in Germany (Baykara-Krumme and Fuß 2009; Kalter and Schroedter 2010; Schroedter 2006).

With the aim of studying the dynamics of marriage migration from Turkey to Germany, in this paper we examine the perspectives of both the *migrating* partner in Turkey and the *receiving* partner in Germany while they are still living in two countries. In this time period the partner in Turkey is preparing for the move, including learning German in order to acquire a language certificate, one of the necessary

¹In this paper we use the term “Turkish immigrant” to denote a region of origin of the person and/or her/his parents. This region of origin refers to the territory within the current borders of the Republic of Turkey. We do not assume that all individuals originating from this territory necessarily share a specific ethno-lingual origin and/or religious affiliation.

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documents when applying for a family unification visa. The partner residing in Germany is also preoccupied with fulfilling the legal demands of family unification and is preparing the environment in which the couple is going to lead a married life. From the perspective of such transnational couples the visa requirements that are applied to Turkish citizens are often perceived as a risk for the stability of their relationship. This paper focuses on these risks and other stress factors of transnational relationships as they were reported by migrating and receiving partners, and discusses various coping mechanisms developed by them.

We start with a basic description of marriage migration from Turkey to Germany based on the available official statistics and a discussion of selected results from quantitative research about the patterns of spouse selection among Turkish immigrants living in Germany. Next we present the project methods, including our sampling procedure. That is followed by an analysis of how events and rituals are timed and organized in marriages between partners who live in two different countries. We then describe the perceived potential risks reported by the interviewees engaged in a transnational relationship and the strategies they followed in order to cope with these risks. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings.

2.2 Marriage Migration to Germany and Spouse Selection Among Turkish Immigrants

The conditions for immigrating with the aim of establishing a new family are regulated by the legislation of the destination country (cf. Kofman 2004; Kraler and Kofman 2009; Kraler 2010). In Germany the right to join a spouse who is a legal resident of the country could, in principle, be considered to be a basic right. This right is not only codified through international human rights conventions, but is also incorporated into the constitution, as according to article 6.1 of the German *Grundgesetz* marriage and the family enjoy the special protection of the state.

This rights-based perspective, however, has been contested by political initiatives taken since the beginning of the 1980s (Joppke 2001). Through regulations introduced in the subsequent three decades the possibilities for family migration have been increasingly restricted. In 2007 the German government introduced an important change in the conditions for spousal migration: New legislation requires most third country nationals (among them Turkish citizens) who want to join their partner in Germany to prove a basic knowledge of the German language prior to migration.²

²According to section 30.1 of the German Residence Act, a person would be exempted from the obligation to provide a proof of basic German language knowledge if she/he is not capable to do so on grounds of a physical or mental illness or handicap. Individuals who have a tertiary educational diploma and are therefore regarded to be able to adapt quicker to a life in Germany are also exempted. Furthermore the spouses of foreigners who have residence permits as highly skilled worker, researchers, business person, and are themselves recognized refugees or EU citizens or citizens of Australia, Israel, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, or the USA do not have to fulfill this condition.

The share of transnational marriages among all marriages concluded by individuals originating from Turkey and living in Germany is not accurately known. In a first attempt to determine that share, Straßburger (2000, 2004) analysed official marriage statistics of German and Turkish authorities for the year 1996 and found that approximately half of the registered marriages of Turkish citizens were concluded with a person living in Turkey. By contrast, Schroedter's in-depth study (2006) based on the German census data indicates that only a quarter of the marriages of Turkish nationals in Germany are transnational ones, although the author herself says her method of analysis probably leads to a strong underestimation of this type of marriages. Nevertheless, the results she presents are very interesting: She finds that among females of Turkish nationality the share of transnational marriages is higher for second-generation immigrants than for first-generation immigrants, increasing to 24.8 % from 11.5 %. For males, however, Schroedter observes a decrease from 29.9 to 25.8 % between the first and second generations (Schroedter 2006, p. 428). A similar observation is made in a follow-up study by Kalter and Schroedter (2010) based on the same data. In that study the previous observation is further specified by indicating that for Turkish females living in Germany the propensity to conclude a transnational marriage increases over the marriage cohorts, though growing in a non-linear, manner. The authors assume that these periodic effects are related to legal regulations concerning visa and naturalization affairs (Kalter and Schroedter 2010, pp. 22, 30–31). Other authors have also found that the tendency to marry someone living in the country of origin does not increase for second generation Turkish males, but does for females (Baykara-Krumme and Fuß 2009, pp. 149–150).

Information on current developments concerning spousal migration provided by German visa statistics indicate that, within just a few years, from 2002 to 2006, the number of visas issued to spouses joining a person residing in Germany decreased from 19,430 to 10,208 (Kreienbrink and Rühl 2007, Tables 3, 7). A more recent report published by the German federal government illustrates that this trend continues, with the total number of spousal unification visas granted to Turkish citizens dropping to only 6,905 in 2009 (Deutscher Bundestag 2010, p. 33, Table 12; see also SVR 2011, p. 100).

As some of the observations reported above already illustrate, reliable and comprehensive data is still missing, and the overall picture concerning dynamics of marriage migration from Turkey to Germany remains blurry and requires more investigation.

2.3 Research Design, Sampling and Research Questions

Next to the above mentioned quantitative research that generally aims to measure the impact of a given set of predictors on the decision in favour of a specific type of spouse, there is also a need for in-depth qualitative studies that are based on the narratives of the individuals who are involved in transnational relationships.

Such studies may follow the goal of exploring and understanding different dimensions of the marriage decision and the contexts in which those decisions are taken (cf. Straßburger 2003).

The German government's legislation obliging spouses who wanted to join their partners in Germany to obtain a German language certificate created the opportunity to conduct a study by contacting potential marriage migrants already in language courses in the country of origin – in our case Turkey. These 'migrating partners' were sampled from among students who had registered for a German language course offered by a language institute in Ankara.³ Ankara seemed to be a good location to conduct this research, as most of the family reunification visas in Turkey are issued by the German Embassy in Ankara (Deutscher Bundestag 2011, p. 17). In terms of access to data, it was advantageous to be able to limit our search for people engaging in transnational marriage to these courses, rather than have to look within general population.

Initially 26 individuals in Turkey who were already married or engaged to a partner living in Germany participated in the study. The selection into the sample was based on two simple theoretical assumptions: First, that the migration and family formation processes will be experienced in a highly gender-specific manner. And second, that the level of education will affect how individuals approach an array of issues, including language acquisition. Based on these considerations the initial sample contained an equal representation of females and males, and similar shares of low and highly educated migrating spouses. As indicated above, the obligation to provide a language certificate applies only to spouses who do *not* have a tertiary educational degree. Consequently, the highest educational background in the sample refers to university dropouts and the lowest education to individuals who visited elementary school.

In terms of age, most of the interviewees attending the language courses were quite young (most of them in their 20s). If they were already married, they had married a relatively short time ago ($\leq 1\frac{1}{2}$ years). There were a few exceptions: Cases in which, for instance, the couple had been married a much longer time, perhaps as long as 5 years, and had initially started their family life in Turkey. For such 'outliers' the advice of Miles and Huberman (1996, pp. 269–270) was followed and the information obtained through these cases was considered valuable in order to discuss and evaluate competing explanations or to reexamine ideas that had been developed on a more general level.

For this study we chose a longitudinal design (see Fig. 2.1), as our interest was explicitly in the course of events. One important aim was to obtain information on the accumulated experiences of individuals, including turning points and transitions in their life courses. Hence, the subject of interest was not only migration, but also the spouse selection process and the timing of marriage-related events and rituals. A longitudinal design was for these purposes very advantageous for reliably gathering information

³We primarily went through the Goethe Institute in Ankara, one of the main providers of these preparatory language courses and – more important – the main organization providing the necessary language certificate.

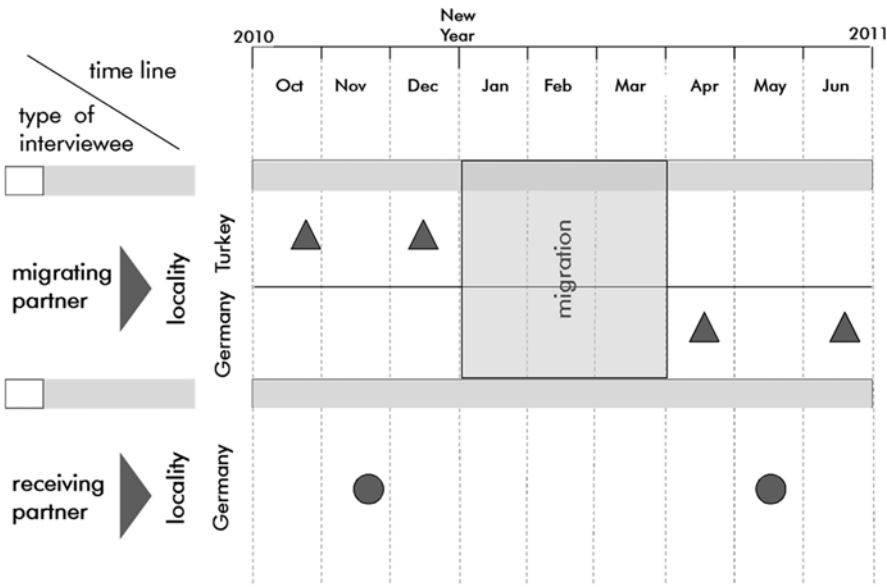


Fig. 2.1 Research design (Source: own illustration)

about ongoing processes and real-time perceptions (Neale and Flowerdew 2003; Lewis 2007; Corden and Millar 2007; Thomson and Holland 2003).

Keeping in mind the potentially sensitive nature of studying intimate partnerships, the female interviewees were interviewed by female members of the research team and the males by a male interviewer. The interviewing method combined a narrative and semi-structured style: Each interview began with biographical narrations and probings, and then, once the narration had ended, addressed a set of predetermined themes (cf. Rosenthal 2004). Migrating partners each participated in a total of four interviews, which had the following thematic foci:

- 1st Interview: life story leading to a transnational relationship and a marriage decision
- 2nd Interview: language course environment and upcoming examination
- 3rd Interview: life as a couple: establishing a common life and integrating into a new family; first impressions and experiences once they arrived in Germany
- 4th Interview: integrating into the new social environment and participating in a course provided for new immigrants by the government

The corresponding content of the two interviews with the receiving partner living in Germany basically followed the scheme for the first and third interviews described above, but from the opposite angle.

The intervals between the interviews conducted with the migrating partners were, compared to some other longitudinal studies, rather short – sometimes just four to five weeks. However, such an intensive tracking was meaningful, as the

individuals we interviewed went through a dense biographical period. Furthermore, this dense interviewing schedule possibly also enhanced the ability to sustain contacts with the interviewees and encourage a readiness for further participation in the study. Although a number of individuals for various reasons dropped out of the study, the data collection resulted in a total of 70 interviews with the marriage migrants and their partners.

A twofold approach was followed for the analysis of the collected data material: The first approach consisted of developing a coding scheme that reflected the topics addressed through the research questions. Then, based on the coded data, thematic matrices were created to allow us to compare data across individuals and, by following themes over time, to analyse patterns of change in issues of particular interest. The second approach consisted of biographical case studies for which the data was not segmented – as it was in the first approach – but rather was analysed in a more holistic manner (cf. Rosenthal 2004).

Having sketched out the methods employed in our research project, we now turn to the main questions addressed in this paper:

- How are events and rituals concerning marriages altered in the context of transnational marriages?
- What are the perceived risks and the coping strategies adopted by transnational couples?

2.4 Alterations of Rituals Concerning Marriages in the Transnational Context

The events that lead up to a marriage in the Turkish context are “highly choreographed” (Tekçe 2004, p. 180) and typically follow a specific sequential order and timing.⁴ Roughly speaking (see Fig. 2.2), the mentioned events include: *kız isteme* [marriage proposal in the familial context], *söz kesme* [positive response of the female’s family and a small celebration], *nişan* [engagement ceremony], *kına gecesi* [‘henna night’, celebration at the house of the bride prior to the wedding], *resmî nikâh* [official marriage at the registry office], *dinî nikâh* [marriage concluded in the presence of an imam], *düğün* [wedding celebration], and *balayı* [honeymoon]. Some of these events, such as *nişan*, are optional; others, such as *balayı*, depend on the financial resources and Western orientation of the couple. It should be pointed out that before celebrating events, such as the *kına gecesi*, *nikâh*, and *düğün*, many organizational preparations are necessary. This may include shopping for clothes and jewelry; buying furniture, appliances, and decoration for a new household;

⁴For an in-depth analysis of the structure of events of marriages in Istanbul and the various meanings that might be attributed to the events by the spouses themselves, as well as for insights into different ways in which desires and actions of individuals and families fit together, see Tekçe 2004.

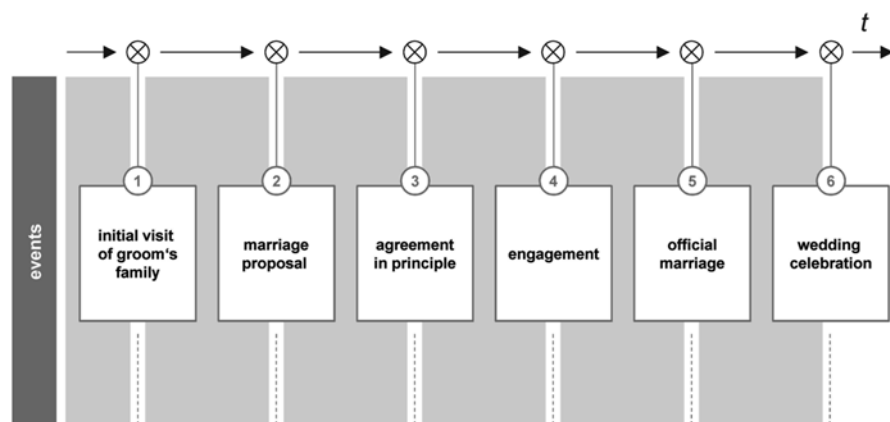


Fig. 2.2 Timing of events and rituals in the context of local marriages (Source: own illustration)

booking a wedding hall; printing wedding invitations; buying sweets for the *nikâh*, among many other things.

Although there is always some variation in this ideal-typical sequence of events and in the associated tasks (cf. Tekçe 2004), the deviations occurring in a *transnational* context seem to be of a specific nature. To start with, if we assume that in most cases the focus of activities in the pre-migration period lies in Turkey, the timing of the events depends strongly on the opportunities of the receiving spouse and his/her family to be in Turkey. In order to accomplish certain things the migrating partner has to wait for his/her partner to be present. If the wedding is planned to take place in Turkey, a date has to be found that would fit the vacation schedule of the majority of family members living abroad. Many of the arrangements can be communicated via phone or internet, but others demand ideally the presence of both spouses. In all our cases, after certain rituals are performed during the receiving spouse's visit to Turkey, he/she returns to Germany. This separation of the couple typically begins after a series of events, e.g. the proposal, engagement ceremony, takes place in a condensed manner. The couple comes again together when the official marriage should be concluded.

From a female perspective this condensation of rituals is often criticized. Many interviewees perceive the fast sequence of events to be overhasty, not giving opportunity to enjoy the preparation for an important life event.

Six, seven months later they [i.e. the (receiving) husband's family] came and quickly the official marriage was done. Again within a week. They had little vacation. Within a week, within a day even – instantly we concluded the marriage. Within a day we managed to complete the procedures. We changed our identification cards straightaway. After one week – not even one week he had to be in Germany. On Monday we officially married. On Friday we sent him off to Germany. Everything was done and finished within a week. Everything was accelerated. (Source: Sanem_JS1_65:65)

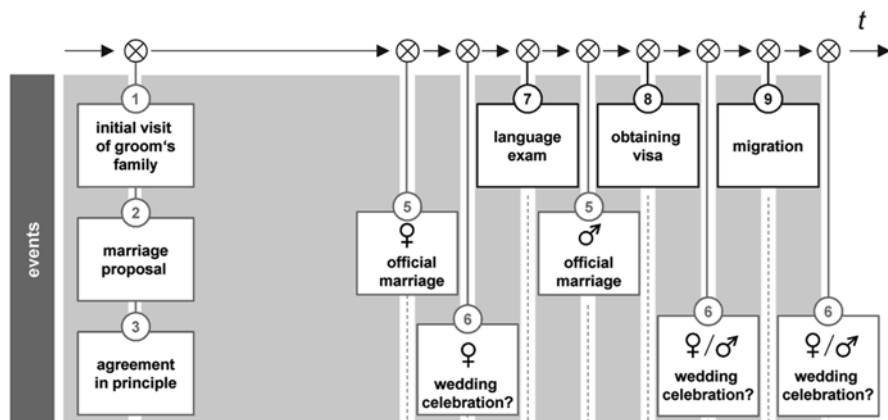


Fig. 2.3 Gender-specific timing of events and rituals concerning marriages in a transnational context* (Source: own illustration)

*The symbols used in the events numbered 5 and 6 refer to the sex of the migrating spouse

Sanem⁵ was married in 2009 and at the time of the interview (2010) was still trying to pass the language exam after failing three times. She complained about the acceleration of the events related to her transnational marriage and the fact that despite the high speed of the marriage events she was not allowed to join her husband in Germany but had to remain in Turkey.

Figure 2.3 shows an ideal-typical timing of events and rituals concerning marriages in a transnational context. Some rituals (1–3) take place within some weeks when the family of the receiving partner comes to Turkey during their annual vacation. Those events that are necessary for leading a family life in Germany (7–9) take additional time and may be taken as a prolonged period of waiting before establishing a common household. The timing of the official marriage and wedding celebration shows some gender-specific variations as will be explained below.

An important difference of transnational marriage processes in comparison to local marriages was pointed out by several of our interviewees when they said that they had contracted the official marriage well ahead of the wedding celebrations in order to settle the formalities concerning the visa application process in the intervening months. One might argue as well that an official marriage gives a guarantee that the burdens both sides shoulder are not in vain. Our sample, even though not representative, in this context points at an important difference between migrating males and females: Whereas all of the females we interviewed during their attendance of the language course were already officially married, only a few of the males were. In two cases the males we interviewed had been married a long time and had previously lived with their wives in Turkey.

Traditionally the bride moves to the household of her husband on the day of the wedding celebration; indeed, only after the wedding celebration has taken place is the marriage considered to be completed. A transition from the parental home to the

⁵ All names are pseudonyms.

new home is, however, impossible in a transnational setting unless the wedding is postponed to a day when migration is possible. Many of our interviewees chose this option and clearly separated the time of the marriage at a registry office (*nikâh*) from the time of the celebration of the wedding (*düğün*). While legal marriage was the precondition to get a visa for migration, the wedding became, among other things, also a symbol of having mastered the legal problems of family migration.

The above-described period leading up to the wedding celebration is also a time when the partners have to deal with risks. In the following we discuss the risks that confronted the migrating and receiving partners and the strategies they adopted to cope with those risks.

2.5 Risks Perceived and Coping Strategies Followed by Transnational Couples

The individuals we interviewed did not deliberately seek out a transnational marriage. The migrating partners did not look for a partner in Germany, nor did the receiving partners seek someone in Turkey. Quite to the contrary, the necessity to migrate due to marriage led to discussions among all couples.

The decision whether Germany or Turkey was going to be the common place to live was related to various risks that were perceived to be part of the marriage migration process. In the following we focus on risks that were considered in the context of a move to Germany, as the couples we interviewed decided to lead a life together there. Had they decided to live together in Turkey, the expected risks and adopted coping strategies would presumably have been different.

Based on the data we collected during interviews conducted prior to migration, we present the gender- and migration-specific risks that we identified, and discuss the strategies that our interviewees pursued in order to minimize or avoid those risks.

Figure 2.4 distinguishes between female and male on the one hand and between individuals living in Turkey (migrating partners) and living in Germany (receiving partners) on the other. The figure shows which risks of transnational marriages were typically perceived by the respective group of our interviewees.

2.5.1 Increased Risks of Virilocality Due to Transnational Migration

Not only transnational couples, but couples in general are faced with deciding where to set up a common household. Marriages concluded in Turkey generally follow the norm of virilocality, in which the bride moves to the *community*⁶ where the groom lives. The migrating female spouses we interviewed basically followed this pattern,

⁶The virilocality norm is different from patrilocality as it does not require necessarily the bride to move into the household of the groom's parents, but to the community where the groom resides in a broader sense (cf. Barnard and Spencer 2010, p. 790).

	migrating partners in Turkey	receiving partners in Germany
females	• risks due to spatial distance to own family and friends • risk of limitation and control through in-law family • risk of being left by partner due to failed language examination	• risk of divorce or of obligatory move to Turkey if partner fails in language exam • risk of greater need for assisting and accompanying the partner after migration
males	• risk of financial and/or social dependency & loss of social status • risks due to being an 'içgüvey'	• risk of dissolution of partnership during the language course • risk of greater need for assisting and accompanying the partner after migration

Fig. 2.4 Risks of transnational marriages as perceived by migrating and receiving partners (Source: own illustration)

but many of them also explained that taking this decision had not been easy. They were concerned about being so far away from their natal family and their friends, and they imagined how difficult it would be to adapt to the conditions in a foreign country and to learn a new language.⁷ Confronted with a number of disadvantages and insecurities, many of the women questioned the virilocal residence norm and tried to convince their partner to set up the common household in Turkey where they had been living. At the same time, the migrating female spouses had an understanding for their husbands' concerns about finding an adequate working opportunity in Turkey. They therefore agreed to move to the place where their partner was living in Germany.

Some of the women felt some relief when their partners said they could imagine returning to Turkey together once their employment career was over or if their wife had great difficulties in adapting to the life in Germany. Still, during the pre-migration period – and probably much beyond that – it remained open whether such plans and promises would eventually be realized. For the female marriage migrants the question of where the new life as a couple would take place had been clarified before the marriage was concluded, but the decision to move to

⁷At this point it seems worthwhile to comment on the implications of the rigid visa requirements that are applied to Turkish citizens who intend to travel to Germany. These legal restrictions actually prevent women (and actually also men) and their family members from traveling to Germany to check for themselves the living circumstances of the prospective husband before they agree to a marriage. Instead the women have to rely on what the men and their families tell them, including how they present the prospective husband's socio-economic situation. This creates a rather risky situation for the migrating female partners in transnational marriages.

Germany had not been easy. A strategy to minimize the risks in case of experiencing difficulties was to reach an agreement with their partner that this arrangement would also be reversible.

In addition to the question of where the common household will be, the composition of the household is also significant for a newly married couple. Although the nuclear family has been the most common form of household in Turkey, for a long time (Timur 1972; Kıray 1990, p. 72; Koç et al. 2010, p. 249), patrilocal residence of newlywed couples is also traditionally observed. Although various definitions of the term patrilocality exist (Fortunato 2011, p. 108), here the term is defined as residence with or near husband's patrilinear kin (Murdock 1967). According to demographic surveys of Turkey, the percentage of households of a patriarchal extended family type⁸ among all households has declined from 19 % in 1968 to 7.4 % in 2008 (Timur 1979, p. 121; Koç et al. 2010, p. 249).

In our sample, female migrating spouses often expressed their unwillingness to live with their families-in-law. For example, Umay explained that her decision to accept a transnational marriage was based on the promise of her husband to have a separate household:

Up to now, all the people who came to ask for my hand said that we are going to stay with the family-in-law only for two years...Only two years! Why am I going to stay with my mother-in-law for two years?... They [the family of her husband] directly said at the beginning, they are going to separate the house and buy the furniture for our apartment... When I talked with him [her husband] about our marriage, I asked him about his opinion, and he promised that we will have a separate house. (Source: Umay_JS1_121:121)

The few female migrating spouses who agreed to share a household with their husband's family emphasized that they accepted this arrangement only as a temporary period in the initial phase of their relationship. By emphasizing the temporary character of this living arrangement the female migrating spouses also introduce a measure to limit the risk of a lengthy co-residence with the family-in-law.

2.5.2 *Labor and Social Status – Chances and Risks*

The discussion about where to live, in comparison to other constellations, was more intense for couples in which the migrating spouse from Turkey was male. This is to a great extent related to gender role differences. From the perspective of the migrating men, fulfilling the breadwinner role was very important. Most migrating women, on the other hand, either did not yet have working experience or were no longer working. Therefore they accepted the traditional gender roles and expected their husband to provide the family income, and envisaged that they themselves would play the role of homemaker.

⁸The patriarchal extended family type refers to a co-residence of the newlywed couple with the husband's parents and his married brothers and their families.

Some of the males, whose living conditions and income level were already good or very good for Turkish standards, worried that a move to Germany would be accompanied by social and economic downward mobility. Therefore they were – probably realistically – concerned that they would not be able to preserve their professional status and would have to accept cuts in their relative income level.

Other males, in contrast, were not worried so much about losing their job but rather were unsatisfied with their economic situation anyway. The possibility of migrating to Germany created the potential of a more prosperous life for them and their future families, although it remained open whether they would really be more successful. In cases of overall limited human and economic capital, the risk of experiencing difficulties on the labor market is quite high while the chances of limiting the loss through a re-migration to Turkey are in these cases rather low.

The case of Cihan represents an exception as it deviates from both of the above-described groups: Cihan was already very satisfied with his working conditions in Ankara and he also had quite secure prospects for the time after his arrival in Germany. From the beginning it was clear for him that he would work in one of the flourishing businesses of his father-in-law once he arrived in Frankfurt/Main. His wife Ceren had been working in the family corporation for a long time. Cihan, in this sense, was not expected to play the typical role of a breadwinner, but through marriage he was integrated into a family business environment.

Another issue addressed by the male marriage migrants during our interviews was the housing conditions they would find in Germany. The males residing in Turkey had agreed, in difference to the virilocal residence norm, to move to the community of the bride. The term used for describing such constellations is to refer to the groom as an *içgüvey* (or *içgüveysi*). In a narrow sense this term refers to a groom who lives in the household of the bride's parents. A wider interpretation could also entail a meaning that the groom is in a situation where he is socially and economically dependent on his wife's family (Stirling 1965, p. 43). Such a dependency often occurs for joining spouses in the context of marriage migration (cf. Strasser et al. 2009).

Many of the migrating males displayed a critical attitude toward a life in the extended family of their wife in Germany. Some of them also followed an active strategy to avoid that: They were planning to take a sufficient amount of money with them to be able to secure their economic independence and pay the rent for an apartment where they would live with their wife in the initial period after their arrival.

2.5.3 Biographical Experiences Promoting the Readiness to Migrate

Having considered various risks that migrating partners connect with their marriage migration experience, we now examine some of the factors that promote a readiness to migrate. The data from our research project do not cover the full range of factors that may be relevant, but our findings still provide certain insights based on a gender specific comparison of biographical experiences.

Among our interviewees, more of the migrating males than females reported on immigration experiences in their families. Altan, for instance, has relatives who live in Germany. He visited them repeatedly for longer periods. Batu did not make any personal experiences in Germany, but his mother grew up there and returned to Turkey when she married. Harun was the owner of several internet cafés and had been to Germany for business reasons. One of his brothers married a woman who lives in the Ruhr region and joined her there. Another brother married the daughter of a family who is from Harun's hometown; she had migrated to Australia and Harun's brother joined her there after marriage. And Ilgaz, who is from a town in the Blacksea region in Turkey, reports about the many relatives he has in Germany. His grandfather, for instance, went to Germany as a young man and worked in a car factory for a long period. The male interviewees thus provided rather detailed accounts about the migration experiences in their families and their contacts to their relatives who live in Germany. This may indicate a greater feeling of security in terms of coping with the challenges of a migration and, if necessary, relying on the assistance of relatives.

Another relevant characteristic of the male migrating partners was that several interviewees reported that they had work experiences in business sectors such as the hotel business, gastronomy, or tourism. Working in these branches they had encountered foreigners, especially German tourists, on a regular basis. Such experiences can be regarded as bringing knowledge that may lower the perceived level of risk that a marriage migration creates. One can assume that somebody who has made the experience that a couple of words of German are sufficient for communication, who has had positive personal encounters with Germans, and who has had the chance to collect information about life and opportunities on the labor market in Germany may have fewer concerns about taking a decision to emigrate.

In contrast to this, the biographical narrations of female migrating spouses contain different arguments that may have contributed to the decision of taking the risk of a marriage migration. Some women had had negative experiences in previous relationships and expressed the hope that they would not encounter such problems with a partner who grew up in Germany. Even though one should not conclude that negative experiences in prior relationships led to a deliberate search by these women for a partner who lives in Germany, such experiences might have contributed to a greater readiness to engage in a transnational marriage and hence an acceptance to emigrate. Our analysis of the biographical data contained in the interviews with female migrating spouses leads to the hypothesis that for some women it might be advantageous to look beyond the local marriage market and include members of the Turkish migrant community abroad. Since in Turkey marriage is universal – only four per cent of women in their late thirties have never been married (Ergöçmen et al. 2009, p. 107) – and divorce is rare, the outlook for older and divorced women in the local marriage market is potentially rather dim.⁹ An example is Ruhsar, a 47-year-old migrating spouse who had not previously been married; her chances of finding a partner in the local marriage market can be realistically considered to be quite low.

⁹In Turkey the median age at first marriage for females is 20.8 despite some variations by region and by certain background characteristics (Ergöçmen et al. 2009, p. 109).

2.5.4 *Risks of Failed Examinations*

In comparing the information gathered about the civic status of course participants in Ankara, a puzzling first observation was, as mentioned above, that all female respondents were already married, whereas the majority of the males were still bachelors. This led to the question of why female migrating spouses formalized their marriage before they enrolled in a language course while most male migrating partners were supposed to get married afterwards. In both cases, it seemed, females – migrating as well as receiving ones – implemented a kind of gender-specific risk avoidance strategy.

Apparently the female receiving partners had an interest in ensuring that they could lead their married life in Germany. Therefore they or their families insisted that the potential groom demonstrate that he is able to fulfill the conditions for family unification. Marriage was only an option if he passed the language examination. In this sense the obligation for the migrating males to pass the language exam in order to be eligible for a family unification visa mitigates for their partners a risk of not being able to lead their marriage in Germany. If the women were to agree to marriage and the men were not able to pass the exam, the women would be confronted with the alternatives either to migrate to Turkey or to get divorced. The women apparently circumvent both of these options by postponing the official marriage.¹⁰

From the point of view of most of the female migrating spouses, marriage represented a pre-condition of investing time and effort into language learning. Only after they had ensured the long-term perspective of the relationship through an officially contracted marriage were they willing to take on the burden of attending a language course, which sometimes involved moving to a different city and living temporarily with relatives, in hostels, and so on.

Our assumption is that the male marriage migrants would also have liked to proceed like that – formalizing the marriage before passing the language exam – if they had had the opportunity; in first attending the language course they ran the risk of putting a lot of effort and money into language acquisition in vain, should they not be able to get married in the end. However they obviously did not have the means to insist on an earlier date for marriage, as their prospective wives living in Germany had the opposite interest and the power to set the conditions.

These observed differences are on the one hand due to the power imbalance in favor of the receiving partner induced through legal regulations (cf. George 2005; Strasser et al. 2009). On the other hand, in the above-cited cases of Turkish couples, they also conform in a certain way to the protective role of the bride's family that can claim – as divorce has to be avoided under all circumstances – to act in favor of the bride's legitimate interest when postponing the official marriage until the eligibility of the potential groom for a family unification visa is ensured.

¹⁰ This situation also had consequences for the collection of our data, as it was far more difficult to arrange interviews with the female partners living in Germany. A number of our male interviewees in Ankara were in principle willing to provide access to their fiancées in Germany, but became hesitant because they were not yet married. It seemed to them risky to ask their fiancée to participate in the study.

2.5.5 Prolonged Time of Separation – A Risk and Burden on Transnational Partnerships

The receiving males object strongly to the language requirement because it increases the time of separation from their wives. If the partnership had not been a transnational one, the couple would have moved to the common household immediately after the wedding celebrations. Even in a transnational relationship in which the partners decide to live together in Turkey no waiting period would be required. For a marriage that is going to be led in Germany, however, the couple is confronted with a waiting period during which they are married, but live in spatial distance from each other. As a partial transition into the men's family, some of the female migrating spouses in our sample had left the household of their natal family and were living with relatives of their husband. Most of the others were still living with their own parents.

Many of our interviewees consider this stressful waiting period as a threat to the stability of their relationship. From the male point of view it is not easy to cope with the lack of clarity due to the unknown outcome of the language examination of their wife; to constantly support her emotionally; and, at the same time, to handle the situation that their wife is participating in a course that is also attended by many unmarried men for a period of eight weeks.

We observed during our fieldwork, and were also told by some female migrating spouses, that during the course period some of the husbands living in Germany contacted their wives very frequently. During such phone calls they would ask, for instance, how she was dressed on this particular day when she went to the course, what she did after the course was over, which one of the classmates she thought was nice, and to whom she had established a better contact.

Such behavior might be interpreted as a type of social control being established from a distance, but one has to keep in mind that the language course and the circumstances around it form *the* dominating issue during this time period in the life of the couple and therefore make up a significant share of the communication between the partners. The great interest of the male receiving spouses can therefore also be interpreted as an effort to share the experiences and to give emotional support.

2.5.6 Who Covers the Costs of the Course and Waiting Period?

The language course period also puts financial strain on the transnational relationship as this period consumes material resources. To what extent this was seen as a burden differed very much among the interviewed individuals depending on the material resources available to them. From a gender-specific angle, however, we could make the interesting observation that the male marriage migrants in general had to rely on their own resources, whereas the vast majority of the female migrating spouses were financed by their husbands in Germany. In certain cases, where the female had come to Ankara from another place, this included the costs for a hotel or

	migrating partners in Turkey	receiving partners in Germany
females	• spatial distance to own family and friends → questioning the norm of virilocality • limitation and control through in-law family → avoiding co-residence • risk of being left by partner due to failed exam(s) → official marriage before starting a language course	• risk of divorce or of obligatory move to Turkey if partner fails in language exam → official marriage only after the test is passed • risk of greater need for assisting and accompanying the partner after migration → supporting the acquisition of German language skills (excluding the sponsoring of language course fees)
males	• risk of financial and/or social dependency & loss of social status → ensuring financial independence • risks due to being an 'içgüvey' → avoiding co-residence with in-law family	• risk of dissolution of partnership during the language course → phone calls, visits, company and accommodation offered by relatives • risk of greater need for assisting and accompanying the partner after migration → supporting the acquisition of German language skills (including the sponsoring of language course fees)

Fig. 2.5 Risks perceived and coping strategies followed by transnational couples (Source: own illustration)

daily expenses. This different mode of covering the costs of the course period could be strongly related to gender roles and the official status of the partnership. While the female marriage migrants were already married and could refer to their husbands in traditional terms as the provider of material resources, the male partners initially living in Turkey had a much weaker position.

Figure 2.5 summarizes the risks of transnational marriages as they are perceived by migrating and receiving partners and the gender- and migration-specific strategies they pursue to cope with them.

2.6 Conclusions

In the analyses above, we discuss some of the risks faced by individuals engaged in a transnational relationship and the strategies they adopt to cope with those risks. Risks associated with transnational marriage migration generally can be distinguished from risks caused by the recently introduced German regulations on marriage migration. Among the more general perceived risks that emerged from the reflections of the migrating partners we interviewed was the concern that due to the establishment of a spatial distance to their own family and friends their own support network would be weak and the potential dependence on the in-law family as well as limitations and control exercised through them could be high. In addition, particularly among migrating males the perception existed that due to the move the risk of experiencing unemployment or downward social mobility could increase.

Besides identifying the perceived risks, the analyses also provided insights into factors that may have contributed to a decision in favour of a transnational marriage. A potentially higher inclination to face the risks that are attributed to transnational marriages seem to be related to gender-specific biographical experiences. For some male marriage migrants the perceived level of risk associated with moving to Germany was apparently diminished if the potential migrant had professional experience in the tourism sector or if he or his family had some history of migration in their family. The skills and experiences that these men had gained made the hurdles to migrating seem relatively lower. It appears that these experiences and skills decreased the uncertainties about migrating to Germany and about how successfully they would be able to integrate into a new society.

The biographies of several female migrating spouses suggest reasons different from those of their male counterparts for deciding to enter a transnational marriage despite the perceived uncertainties that come along with marriage migration. Some of the women had had negative experiences in previous relationships that – even if they did not lead them to deliberately search for a partner in Germany – might have contributed to a greater readiness to engage in a transnational marriage and eventually accept to emigrate. Others had limited chances to find acceptable partners on the Turkish marriage market since they were divorced and/or far beyond the average age for a first marriage; for them, we might interpret their decision to migrate for marriage as their only option to marry.

Since 2007 spouses from Turkey have had to provide a language certificate that proves a basic knowledge of the German language in order to join their partners in Germany. The possibility that they might fail the exam is obviously perceived as a significant risk to entering a transnational marriage. Migrating spouses are afraid of being left by their partner, while receiving spouses – if their partner fails the language examination – are faced with choosing between an obligatory move to Turkey or divorce. In order to minimize or avoid these risks female interviewees pursued differing strategies with regard to the timing of events concerning marriage and migration. Female migrating spouses generally attended the course only after they were officially married. They thus ensured the reliability of the relationship and a final marriage before they took steps towards migration. Female receiving partners – in contrast – in most cases insisted that the potential groom demonstrate he is able to fulfill the conditions for family reunification; marriage was only an option once he had passed the language examination.

As the results presented above indicate, for transnational marriages the temporal order of events is often characterized by short time periods of accelerated activities in which rituals are performed in a condensed manner on the one hand, and by long periods of minor steps and waiting on the other. In particular, the legal requirement to obtain a certain knowledge of German takes time and prolongs the period of separation transnational couples face. In some cases this creates serious challenges and tensions for couples and hence represents a probation period for their relationship.

The period of language acquisition also puts strain on the relationship of the transnational couple in terms of material resources. Language courses cost money, and the full cost is higher if the attendee needs to additionally pay for accommodation and living costs. The gathered data about conditions of attending a language

course revealed different modes of covering the costs that reflected gender roles and the official status of the partnership. When the couple was already married – as was the case for all female migrating spouses – language course participants could refer to their partners as the provider of material resources. Male marriage migrants, however, generally had to cover the costs themselves, sometimes with help from their families. Poorer males – receiving as well as migrating ones – may eventually not be able to cover the additional expenses incurred due to the language-proficiency requirement.

The data we obtained through interviews at the same time clearly provide evidence for the agency exercised by individuals who engage in a transnational relationship with respect to anticipatory actions and cautionary measures. Potential female marriage migrants not only insisted on an official marriage before they put any effort into learning German, but they also tried to guarantee better starting conditions prior to their emigration by reaching an agreement with their future husband to establish an autonomous household as soon as possible instead of living with the extended family. For males migrating from Turkey, ensuring financial and residential independence was also a high priority goal.

Some of the receiving female partners had a strong preference to lead their married life in Germany. Therefore contracting the marriage was postponed until the result of the language exam was obtained and it was clear that the prospective husband could actually immigrate. Both male and female receiving partners generally supported their partners' efforts to learn German emotionally, but only the males also financed the period during the language course in Turkey for their wives.

The pre-migration period in general and the time of the language course and the subsequent exam in particular were perceived to be difficult for all parties involved. In order to give emotional support, receiving partners who could afford it visited or at least contacted their spouses by phone or via internet.

In summary, the analyses presented here aim to deliver a better understanding of the effects of spatial distance not only on organizational aspects such as marriage rituals, but also on the perceptions of individuals who are engaged in transnational partnerships. This includes both their immediate concerns and their concerns about the future. Through the combination of external and perceptual aspects, the aim was to present a fine-grained picture of the social and individual dynamics that characterize marriage migration processes involving Turkey and Germany.

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