

Migrant Narratives

Storytelling as Agency, Belonging and
Community

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In this last chapter we will focus on the migrant as storyteller. Collating the material presented so far, we will examine how storytelling is done and, especially, discuss three essential aspects that are closely related to modes of migrant storytelling: Time, memory and storytelling techniques. These are necessary to shape and develop modalities of performing narratives. Time and timing are central elements of migrant storytelling as migration more sharply divides life into blocks that do not follow a settled life course. The role that memory plays in migration narratives is inseparable from the storytelling process because it links those time blocks and sometimes blends one into another. Asking how memory is employed and invoked in order to construct and convey one's migrant story is, therefore, a central issue for our project. And, lastly, memory organisation, time sequencing and temporality can only be accomplished with storytelling tools or techniques and strategies that are essential to narrative construction. To give stories shape, even to make events into stories or silence them, migrants need a tool box of narrative strategies.

Günther Anders, a Jewish refugee philosopher who fled Nazi Germany in 1934, wrote in his philosophical essay on “The Emigrant” that,

We have learned that time has to be imagined [as one dimensional and straight]. ... This is prejudice. If a curriculum vitae has a dramatic turning point because of a *Damaskus* or *Kristallnacht*, if the ongoing life has to be filled with completely new content/knowledge, with content/knowledge that has no linkage to the ‘ante’, then the new length of time is not viewed as an extension of the previous length of time, but as a road that that goes off at a very sharp angle from the previously travelled road. ... Thus, these two life periods are felt to have different lengths and cut across each other. Every sharp turn makes the previous life invisible.... My previous lives in Paris, New York and Los Angeles are deeply shaded, dark memories I have difficulty to recall. The view around these time-corners seems impossible; ... Time periscopes don't exist.

(Anders 2021 [1962], pp. 14–15; [authors' translation])

Anders's argument and observation – which he shares with many fellow refugees – is that the memories and perception of time spent differ substantially for each emigration period. Some appear as shortened, fragmented or even as foggy memories, other seem extended and clear (Anders 2021, p. 15). He does not fully delve into the reasons why that might be so, which memories have value and fit a retrospective narrative and which do not. He discusses memory in order to discuss modes of being a migrant: The stubbornly liminal, the resilient, the re-turning emigrant, the being invisible, the becoming visible, the prices that are attached to certain decisions about how one's life is to be led after turning at the crossroads. His narrative is personal and philosophical. But his categories can be utilised to reflect on the ways in which migrants shape such crossroad and review sharp turns and disruptions in narratives that help navigate the turns and bends of migrant life stories. In short, we need to ask which experiences remain important topics, how are stories memorised and retrieved and, finally, which techniques are used to articulate these. By necessity, all three categories are overlapping; but dividing them into different categories for the sake of analysis helps to clarify their roles in migrant narratives.

Time

Every migrant experience contains the above-mentioned crossroads and turning points that make up the personal travelogue to the point where researchers and others are present to listen, to read and to question. The past is located somewhere else in a time zone of another, almost-previous life or lives. Günther Anders's essay reminds us that not all stops are of equal importance, and not all periods spent at such stops will be of equal importance: Some will be prevalent, others shaded and forgotten. But the cutting up or, rather, the turning points of a life story constitute the frame within which migration storytelling necessarily sits. It sits between the place that once was home or stable residence and the point from which the narrative is performed; that is not necessarily the endpoint, but the point where we receive the account or parts of it. Günter Anders wrote his essay in 1962 from his home in Vienna; his philosophical and personal reflections look back at his core migration (flight and exile) to the US, which was preceded by a flight to Paris in 1933. He managed to get to the US three years later, where he lived in New York and Los Angeles (1936–1950). He returned to Europe to live in Vienna until his death in 1962 (Grosser 2021, pp. 62–63). His migration CV shows very clearly the core structures of such moves. A curriculum vitae gives a normative structure to a life; this then needs to be filled with memories, stories, silences. When filled with narratives, the migrant CV changes and not all parts will have equal importance for memory and storytelling. Time is shortened and time is extended; it is cut out and frozen; it slows, it quickens, it pulsates (see the sections about memory and narrative techniques).

Time and narrative are closely linked; in fact, narrative turns time into a human experience and thus into identity (Ricoeur 1984, 1985, 1988). According

to such philosophers as Paul Ricœur, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum and others, the way of understanding, telling and living life by and through stories is a human universal (Meyer, 2017, pp. 312–318; Meyer 2018). People tell their stories and, thus, shape events into meaningful experiences, thereby enabling themselves to navigate and negotiate biographical choices and deviances. In order to create meaning, the storyteller uses a timeline to lay out beginning, climax, turning point and coda (Labov and Waletzky 1967). With regard to time, the coda, the closing part or aftermath of a narrative, fulfils a special function: Here, the narrator takes his or her standpoint in the present to evaluate the events of the past. Codas often include time shifts from time told (referring to past events and actions) to time telling in the present tense, and thus navigate a sense of self – or rather a sense of selves – one which is engaged and entangled in the events and actions in the past (“erzähltes Ich”) and one in the present which looks back and evaluates those events and actions (“erzählendes Ich”) (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann 2004, pp. 115–126). The use of the present tense marks the enlightened and grown self and can be used to dissociate oneself from past actions. Emplotment thus means appropriating time: Whether the narrator wants to relate constancy or change of character or persona, the correlation of past, present and future is a way of creating meaning in narrative.

In migrant narrative, emplotment through time stances and time shifts shows how migration is framed and interpreted by the narrator. For example, telling time before the first departure can be narrated as paradise lost (Løland 2020); this is a common trope as life is often remembered as stable, as slow moving. The change, the actual leaving, is then remembered as something coming up. The lifestyle migrant storyteller might, however, describe a growing wish to start anew, a sense of time stalling which means life is felt to be too slow, stagnant even. Hence, we often encounter the topic and narrative pattern of the quest as a way of shaping time. Narrating migration as a quest with an initial call and a plot of overcoming obstacles and encounters with quest companions and foes gives the experience a set temporal frame and also the perspective of a happy ending. Mabel’s example shows clearly how she interprets her migration experience as a quest and derives meaning from this interpretation (Ahmed, this book).

The migrant narrative, however, might also be framed as the opposite: Conditions becoming unbearable, dangerous, life-threatening. When a growing sense of departure was felt as being imminent, the story is told with urgency, the narration about the weeks before flight or departure can have a breathless quality; more often it is narrated as a short, dense sequence.

The journey, the getting there, can be a longer narrative or not mentioned at all. In lifestyle migration the getting there is close to meaningless; it is the settling there that shapes the narrative. In refugee narratives, the getting there can stretch over years and include long periods of waiting in camps or detention centres, and this might well be the core migration narrative. Time stretches interminably, waiting is painful and uncertain, and that uncertainty is

traumatic and tortuous. Behrouz Boochani's memories of his flight from Iran and detention on Manus Island exemplify the stretching of time as pain and as punishment (2018); suffering through detained time is his core migration experience and his core narrative project. Waiting stories express time as being stalled, even frozen.

Waiting stories are varied, they can voice the waiting for closure like the wife in Laura Huttunen's chapter in this volume; it can be the waiting to be able to return, waiting for asylum. Amela, who has been waiting to hear about her husband's fate after he disappeared during the war in Bosnia, is living in two time zones moving at different speeds: waiting and hoping, and getting on with life. She manages to make a new life for herself and for her children in Finland and, in that sense, time is moving on for her. But the major narrative in her life is frozen time, an ongoing sense of painful liminality: "'There is no peace, not for him, not for me' she says"; Laura Huttunen expresses the sense that the lack of closure "keeps the narrative obsessively future-orientated". As long as Amela does not know the fate of her husband, she cannot bury him as her culture demands, time stretches in endless waiting without hope of arrival.

Liminality is thus not merely a state in a ritual life cycle; for migrants, liminality is experienced and narrated as a permanent sense of being in between, a neither here nor there. This sense of in-betweenness can be but does not have to be traumatic; it can simply be narrated as part of a new subjectivity that is the migrant self. The Australian writer Sarah Turnbull, in her memoir of building a new life in Paris, describes this as being 'almost French' but knowing that she will never quite get there. This sense of liminality in her migration narrative involves both a sense of being enriching and a constant labour to fit in. Often the sense of being in between is told as a comparison story, as she does between her life in Paris and her home city Sydney:

The reality is in France I'm still an outsider. There seem to be so many contractions, so many social codes for different situations that make life interesting but also leave you feeling a bit vulnerable. Living in Paris requires constant effort. ... Yet in Sydney it was as though back in my old environment I could finally drop the guard I didn't even know I'd been carrying.

(Turnbull 2018, p. 166)

Living in an ongoing present of liminality is narrated as being vulnerable; in her case it is the sense of having to be "on guard" that so aptly describes the sense that while a full "arrival" is not achievable, a sense of being settled can be expressed: "The insider-outsider dichotomy gives life a degree of tension. Not a needling, negative variety but rather a keep-you-on-your-toes sort of tension that can plunge or peak with sudden rushes of love or anger" (*ibid.*, p. 298).

Arrival, however, is often narrated as a story of finding place and settling into a new location. Although liminality might still be the state a migrant is in, the "arrival story" is expressed as a new era in the life story. This is pertinent in

Anya Ahmed's interview partner "Mabel" who describes her new life in Spain as a new chapter (Ahmed, this book). Arrival can also be narrated as being followed by a long time-stretch of integration and then belonging or as taking a stable perspective from which the story is told. Children very quickly will have spent more time in the new country than the old one, whereas adults and parents have longer lives to look back at so the period from the point of migration can appear much shorter. The narratives of a settling-in period then turn into imaging and securing narratives involving the future. Future in a migrant story often constitutes a metaphor for stability and thus a slowing down of time. Annabel Whaba states in her essay on the migration story of her family that, for her siblings, belonging to Germany was a stated arrival and thus permanence: "My siblings had to settle in Germany, did drop their Egyptian identity, in order to be like everyone else. That was successful. What lay behind became meaningless" (Whaba 2022, p. 34 [authors' translation]). To pick up Günther Anders's thoughts about emigrants' uneven sequencing of time, Whaba's siblings extended the German time slot of their life story and erased the memories and thus time spent in Egypt. In that sense "arrival stories" and "integration narratives" can either mark a new sequence that follows other lengthy period narratives, or it can become a lead story that overshadows the past.

Arrival and integration time can also allow the narration of a sense of future, of looking forward. This is often expressed in stories about the successful settling of the children. The acceptance of a new status quo is narrated as extending one's own migrations' experience into the next generation and that of the grandchildren. Amela is expressing this quite clearly; while her life feels stalled, her children can move on: "Life continues, my children at least have a future. My daughter is grown up now, and she is pregnant, maybe something good will come in the future" (Huttunen, this book).

Narratives of aspiration, of hope and planning for a future, are told to extend time beyond the present and to imagine time beyond the drama that is migration as a core narrative. These aspirational imaginings contain a new life, a different future than was once envisioned.

Memory

When we think about the storytelling migrant, we need to consider memory as an essential pre-requisite of narration. "Memory" as Julia Creet reminds us, "in all its forms, physical, psychological, cultural, and familial, plays a crucial role within the contexts of migration, immigration, re-settlement, and diasporas, for memory provides continuity to the dislocations of individual and social identity" (Creet 2011, p. 4).

Without memory there is no storytelling. What is remembered and how it is expressed is what we gather as stories. What is forgotten, wrapped in silence, suppressed, is harder to get to; but it might be evoked: By an interview situation, during therapy, or by children searching for answers to their questions.

As researchers, we have to listen into the gaps, try to trigger memory, accept silences but notice them as well (Eastmond, this book). We also have to accept that memory is not necessarily set, it might evolve and change; it might be tied less to place but also to emotion, connection and absences in general. Some memories are set and are retold as ready-mades (Bönisch-Brednich 2002, p. 309); other memories are evoked through an interview situation and unexpected questions. They might be triggered through news items, children's curiosity, smells, sounds. Julia Creet argues that

Memory is where we have arrived rather than where we have left. What's forgotten is not an absence, but a movement of disintegration that produces an object or origin. In other words, memory is produced over time and under erasure.

(Creet 2011, p. 6)

Migration produces memory that has by necessity certain traits and certain suspensions. And memory can be produced and performed or withheld. The way memory and migration are expressed by migrants is as fascinating as it is difficult to grasp. When retrieving or evoking migrant stories in an interview situation, we need to be aware of our role as the trigger of such memories. The withholding of certain migration stories is something we will need to expect; the question is how we interpret such withholding which often appears as silence or a statement of having forgotten or of being unable to remember.

Silences and memory gaps

Katrin Ahlgren points to this when she argues that

narrating silence as a conscious act can also be a result of the asymmetrical relationship between the talking subject and the researcher ... intentional silence is to be distinguished from what is *unspeakable* or *untransmissible*.

(2021, p. 843; see also Eastmond, this book)

The migrants themselves have to constantly make decisions about which story can be voiced and shared and which stories might be known but are categorised as "narrative matter out of place" (Bönisch-Brednich 2019, p. 68; McCarthy, this book). Narrative matter out of place can be stories that are part of the migrant experience and reflection but do not fit into the wider political and historic paradigm; unpalatable, non-fitting attitudes of migrants towards the host country or the home country are generally not openly shared. The unspeakable memory, such as rape, has either to be locked away or needs to be painfully worked into unpractised modes of expression (Eastmond, this book). Gabriele Schwab, in *Haunting Legacies*, uses Veena Das's work to apply the category of dissociation to explain narrative coping strategies that employ silences

and silencing. Dissociation is an extreme form of psychic splitting that helps to sustain life under catastrophic circumstances (Das cited in Schwab 2010, p. 20); dissociation as a narrative mnemonic strategy can assist coping and even healing. Das states that “the transitional space of narrative, and especially memoir and literature, may facilitate such a practise [storytelling in contained spaces] in the service of healing and reparation” (Schwab 2010, p. 20).

Roger Frie defines this compartmentalised form of storytelling as the “memory gap”, arguing that “in order to address a traumatic history there must be a context in which talk about the past can be generated and supported” (2017, p. 179). Memory gaps are often evident in transgenerational storytelling; stories are not told and children know not to ask. In her essay on the Egyptian connections of her very German family and her Egyptian father, Annabel Wabha recalls knowing not to ask why the family never travelled back to her father’s home country: “That we never went to Egypt appeared perfectly normal to me, I never asked ... I only realised that there was a reason when I finally asked my parents in 2005”; her finally questioning and learning this reason was caused by an external trigger: Hate crimes against refugee centres in Germany at the time (Wabha 2022, p. 33).

Unlocked memories, or seldom talked about recollections, can still make it to the surface by the next generation. Memory work by migrants’ children can build stories out of the more hidden layers of ghostly narratives. Such stories, as Maria Turmakin describes it, are parts of our mnemonic traditions where “I was not the author of my memories, not even their keeper, but merely their unwitting host” (2013, p. 23). Such stories are often described as being felt as an undercurrent (*Grundrauschen*) in these children’s lives that needed to be brought to the surface to be viewed and touched. (Bönisch-Brednich 2019, p. 7; Spieker and Bretschneider 2016, p. 133; Schwab 2010). Similarly with silenced or traumatic topics as discussed above, children of migrants, often refugees, describe these undercurrents and their inability to even ask questions as haunting, as a fog, or dense mist or muddy terrain. This corresponds with children of World War II survivors describing a sense of shadows or of a dense mist covering their childhood memories resulting in their inability to get closure as adults. Silenced memories thus remain at best opaque, at worst frightening or haunting, traumatic shapes that have a ghostlike quality (Lohre 2018; Schwab 2010).

Astrid Erll discusses such shifting of storied memories that can be told and keep being told into the next generation as “memory fundamentally mean[ing] movement: Traffic between individual and collective levels of remembering” (2011, p. 27); and it is this movement that permits the making of new and more appropriate connections with the past. When memories can be brought up again to travel between generations, new narratives can be developed, ideally resulting in a deeper understanding of trauma. The silences or partial memories stretch into the next generations and might then be articulated or reshaped; certain topics might continue to be suppressed, others might be re-interpreted and contextualised. Once migrant narratives are being retold

by children or grandchildren, we are listening to a re-mix of child and adult perspectives which give memory and storytelling a nuanced maturity (Bönisch-Brednich 2019; Turmakin 2013).

Efficient storage and retrieval

In order to shape memory into narratives, we need mnemonic markers that allow us to bookmark and bring up stories (Bönisch-Brednich 2019). In collective storytelling, for example in families, certain phrases, songs and jokes can be used to retrieve memories together. To reclaim memories, to retrieve them, are essential techniques of migrant storytelling. The past is structured by one or more biographical and geographical breaks that partition narratives and give them shape. Such mnemonic markers can be metaphors, places, memories and crystallised episodes, pictures or objects. Research has increasingly recognised the role that smells and other sensory markers such as sounds or taste can play in evoking the home country. Smelling the past, for example through the blossom of certain flowers or food, is a powerful memory evocation (Sayadabdi 2022).

The past can also develop a life on its own; it can be haunting migrants in dreams, in everyday situations reminiscent of tense situations in the migration process, for instance, the task of queuing can remind migrants of border controls or visa application. Haunting legacies, as Gabriele Schwab calls such memories, are often described in metaphors. Things can be remembered as fog, as mist, as closing in on you, as locked rooms, as darkness. Metaphors can stand for a story that is yet to be developed but is currently existing in a black box of the mind. In a recent conversation, Brigitte was told about a never-acted-on, but perfectly prepared migration to New Zealand; the person could not remember why she never left: “It is like a black box to me. I still have the translated documents and all from 40 years ago, I even had a job lined up; I simply can’t remember why I stayed in Austria” (personal communication 18.10.22). Metaphors, as Katrin Ahlgren points out, “can compensate for words and expressions not yet acquired” (Ahlgren 2021, p. 843). They can stand for a story that is yet to be developed.

Metaphors are also used in storytelling to emphasise a successful, maybe even happy, migration. Anya Ahmed’s interview partner Mabel told her life-style migration story as a quest for the best life (this book); people describe a new country as like a safe haven, anchoring after a storm, finding paradise on earth. Such metaphors and the attached stories often have a spiritual element; it was meant to be, it had to happen, there were signs and so on. Such spiritual elements are part of a set of mnemonic markers that help to explain the migration decisions; they are a part of justification narratives.

Photographs and memory pictures support and locate memories; there is a strong tendency to anchor stories by citing “scenes”, snapshots, and short film clips from memory, often narrated as “my favourite picture” plus story line, “I will never forget that moment when ...”, “It was like a movie scene but it was real”. Such pictured scenes, whether existing or not, are deeply set memories

that allow instant evocation; they are hitching posts for storytelling, especially stories that describe a special, meaningful episode, a moment or experience of intense emotion. This can be happiness or relief (sighting the Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island) or it can be a moment when life shattered into pieces (Amela's "picture of her husband being driven away to his death" Huttunen, this book), or a rescue out of a desperate situation (Escher, this book).

Effective re-evocation is also accomplished by trigger phrases or sentences belonging to a narrative that captures a whole world of experience. Bönisch-Brednich's family narrative of war trauma, occupation and eventual transportation to West Germany was always started by a trigger. Her mother's trauma was evoked by her stating (shouting) "The Poles are worse than the Russians", which was for her and her family the encapsulation of terror, the end of the war, the occupation and finally expulsion (Bönisch-Brednich 2019). For collective memory it can be a crucial situation that the whole group had to go through or remembers as jointly met crossroad (Karner, this book).

Spatial and sensory paintings – scenes

Creating memorable scenes within migrant storytelling works very well by employing the senses, painting scenes that draw the listener into the life of the migrant and its core experiences and moments. Migrant children often talk about the learning of being different being defined by physical difference, by language and by food. They share with us the memory of having to bring lunches to school that were labelled as smelly or yuck; consequently, they will share their ability as adults either to celebrate their migrant food traditions or to choose to blend in with local food habits. Blending in or standing out can become the intergenerational matrices of migrant-family stories (Meyer, this book). Some powerful embodied food memories are painted in the movie "The Big Fat Greek Wedding" (2002), in which food scenes are clearly set memory markers of difference, adaptation and merging. These scenes strongly resonate with migrant children. Sensory memories by children, the embodied narratives of being different, also serve as a bridge between memory and the present. Such stories demonstrate the past as well as a present and future that include settling narratives and retrospective analysis.

In a podcast series on migrants in Vienna, Menerva Hammad talks about such experiences as a highly educated adult who reflects on everyday racism. Her childhood memory in Vienna is of being a migrant kid but unable to understand what was wrong with her, just having the knowledge that she was not quite right:

I often had strangers' hands in my hair, you know, from people who wanted to explore the texture of my hair, older people; that was a formative experience. You start feeling uneasy about yourself, you sense that something is not quite right, but you can't work out what's going on.

(Ozsvath 2022 [authors' translation])

The hands in her hair are embodied memory that stands for her childhood migrant experience; the intrusion into her personal space, to have adults touching her in public, is a striking mnemonic device that leads on to other stories about being a migrant.

Hammad describes repetitive scenes that are shaped as “knowing how it feels” to be the other, to be migrant. But mnemonic markers are mostly set by recalling a scene that feels like painted or acted on a stage. Such scenes are encapsulations of visual impressions, of emotional memories and physical memory. An example of a frequent sharing of one such memory is the act of embracing a long-lost person. The hug as a crystallised memory of touching the past, of reconnecting with relatives and friends, is a powerful narrative scene that is understood by all listeners.

Migrants tell of the memory of being embraced by relatives after a decades-long absence, being hugged as the long-lost daughter, son, grandchild, childhood friend. Being hugged for the first time after long absences marks happiness as the relief from sadness. But talking of a hug before departure is often part of a story of leaving without being able to return. A silent hug, unspoken grief that is memorised in that physical closeness that also stands for connection and pain. Bilal J, in conversation with students in Austria, paints such a picture: “The first hug I got from my father as an adult I got the day I was leaving. I don’t know why he hugged me, he also knew maybe” (J. et al. 2020, p. 66). In this story, he states that he does not know why his father hugged him. Yet the hug is remembered and rendered meaningful. It is depicted as a silent goodbye to embrace emotions of pain without talking of pain. This is then cast into a departure story of a secret and hurried escape from Syria.

Such painted sensory scenes can also express coping strategies and thus are told as moral tales to message resilience. The well-known Viennese migrant chef Sohyi Kim uses such a scene to describe her linguistic-integration strategies in Austria: “In the beginning I was like deaf and dumb”. Nothing made sense, and even when she started to understand [hear] she could not speak back [dumb]. But she persisted and trained herself:

I had words I could not pronounce properly; so I practised in front of the mirror and told myself, ‘you are a parrot!’ (laughs). Shut off your brain and move your mouth like all the other people do: do dialect. 100000 times I looked into the mirror and said ‘Das Pferd’, ‘Psychologie’, or ‘Rad’. The teachers said, ‘you can’t pronounce that’; but I can. You have to just practise (laughs).

(Ozsvath 2021)

Kim aims to convey a strong message by narrating this very small vignette as a moral tale: as a migrant you have to adjust to your new environment, and you have to try hard. This is because the environment and its conditions were always there, and you are the new person that needs to learn to fit in; you have to be the parrot in front of the mirror (*ibid.* 2021).

This last example brings us to the final part of this chapter: The tools migrants need and employ to shape their narratives. The toolbox of storytelling strategies and techniques is essential to any reflection on how migrant storytelling works.

Narrative techniques

Migration demands that migrants develop a migrant narrative that is their own and makes sense of their migration experience. This is a deep human necessity, we need and want to tell stories about ourselves, but it is also a social and cultural expectation. We need to have a history and an origin. Migrants need to be able to answer the everyday question: “Where do you come from?” in order to satisfy an audience’s curiosity but also in order to assure themselves (Zhu 2016). Not knowing where one comes from, for example when migrant children get lost somewhere on the way, is a traumatic experience. This last section aims to bring together essential topics and techniques in migrant narratives by showing how “circumventing ‘the truth’ or highlighting some aspects while downplaying others, demonstrates a type of individual narrative manoeuvring which challenges collectively sanctioned modes of remembering” (Løland 2020, p. 754).

As discussed above “mnemonic devices are used to store and narrate information, and also to structure and package them for storytelling” (Bönisch-Brednich 2019, p. 63). Thus, we need to consider which techniques are used as tools to create and to actively remember the episodes of migrant storytelling. Not all that is packed into such a story chest is part of the publicly available inventory. Some stories are shared on a day-to-day basis, such as the “where do I come from?”. Other stories are shared with family and close friends, others again only with a trusted doctor, priest or counsellor; specific stories are carefully shaped for immigration officers. A certain number of stories will not get shared at all, will be silenced or forgotten. Much depends on how one’s own story has to be shaped to fit the new country and its administration and culture (McCarthy, this book). Others will have to be withheld or shared to support making place and shaping a new identity that also supports children and perhaps grandchildren.

The body of a migration story consists of the travel story, including departure, arrival, survival, homemaking and belonging. These topics are part of every individual or family migrant story; they are the chest that holds both the toolbox of storytelling and the actual narratives that are shaped with these tools. The tool box of migrant narratives holds many ready-mades; that is, stories that follow an expected narrative structure and cover migration topics of departure, journey and arrival as well as experiencing a new country and its culture. Such ready-mades will range from being able to talk about one’s new country and the place where the migrant lived; a story about a professional trajectory or the lack of it. It will contain some indication of learning about the new culture. It will be likely to include participating in

food conversations, as these are the weather talk of migrant communities. One can always ask about ethnic food and newly acquired tastes without offending. Stories about food are safe, entertainment and social glue all in one. Such narrative work requires placing information and homing stories. In cases of successful migration and integration, these experiences are often related in humorous anecdotes including funny misunderstandings of the novices (Bönisch-Brednich 2002a, 2014). When migration leads to social exclusion, the ready-mades emphasise eagerness to integrate by praising the new country and culture. Ulla Ratheiser shows how Shazia Mirza uses comedy in order to re-interpret the collective experience of social exclusion into an integration story (this volume).

Naturally, ready-mades differ according to audience: Arrival and departure stories, for example, are part of every-day conversations and of official immigration and employment procedures. These are not necessarily aligned, as immigration officers need to be served a narrative that fits immigration policy, including standardised reasons for seeking residency or refugee status, information about education, financial resources and much else. Migration stories for more private audiences have to contain a justification narrative that conveys a story about decision-making, departure and arrival tales and an indication of having made place or intention to journey onwards. These are narrative-anchoring strategies that need to be somewhat developed, otherwise the narrative is weak, bland and unconvincing.

“Where do you come from?”

Being able to answer the question of “Where do you come from?” is the essential tool that needs to be at hand, and needs to be pretty-much ready-made. Having said that, the answers to this question can require a layered approach, like a set of screwdrivers that are used for different requirements. The answer depends on the knowledge the questioning person has about the home country of the migrant, maybe even the continent. Many migrants from the African continent discuss their discomfort at being labelled simply “from Africa”; they cherish their tribal affiliation, their region, then perhaps, but often not, the national belonging. Their response to “Where are you from?” requires a set of varied responses according to the knowledge and curiosity level of the questioning person. In most cases, however, the migrant has to invent a story that constitutes a compromise about place of origin by giving an answer that will fit the knowledge frame of the new country. In answering the question “Where are you from?”, migrants often position themselves within a collective identity of varying scales (“From Africa”, “From West Africa”, “From Ghana”, “From Accra” and so on). However, the question also gives them the opportunity to individualise their story by following the initial answer with a more detailed account: “I am from West Africa but before I got here, I lived in France for two years”. In analysing migrant narrative, it is worth examining where and when collective versus individual positioning occurs. When

do people talk about themselves as individuals (“I”) and when as part of a group (“we”)? In Hatice’s story, we can see how much narrative effort goes into dissociating her biography from other migrant stories, thereby positioning herself as a potent and successful woman and against the hegemonic discourse on Turkish immigration (Meyer, this book). To have a satisfying and scalable answer to the question of origin is a way of self-positioning and thus a means against positioning through others. The narrative ready made to answer the key question in migrant biographies serves as a way of empowerment navigating and owning a sense of self (Deppermann, 2015).

Justifying migration: Stories about personal growth, learning and success

The decision to migrate constitutes a big life rupture and, consequently, migrant narrative needs to justify this choice of leaving and beginning elsewhere. Hence, migration is related as a personal success and the right choice. Accordingly, migrant narratives often deal with personal growth and learning. The narrative pattern of such a success story is structured in a before and after linked by meeting the challenge of migration. Through courage, discipline and tenacity, migrants come out of the difficulties of migration as grown and enriched individuals in their stories. These stories need not align with real experiences; rather, their purpose is to tame chaos and insecurity through narrative order (Meyer 2017, p. 134) and convey a purpose to the challenges of migration.

Migrant stories of personal growth and learning often deal with a new culture and country and are therefore mostly comparative in style. Everything new is compared with the formerly normal, with the former home (Bönisch-Brednich 2002a, p. 207; Lehmann 2007, p. 192). The toolbox of stories from home does not usually fit the new country’s narrative requirements, but it can be used to compare and to adjust how things are done, thought about, organised and so much more. Comparing countries is a storytelling technique that is essential for learning and grasping new skills. Such stories are ubiquitous and thus we will concentrate on a few striking versions of that important theme. These stories often happen right in the beginning, where the old country is normally favourably compared to the strange habits of the new one. But the longer migrants have stayed in their new country, the more such stories will switch focus and emphasis. As the migrant story is usually shaped as success story, the comparative narrative frame gets more balanced and nuanced. After all, one has migrated for a reason. Again, food stories might still focus on preferring and maintaining the comforting tastes from home (Sayadabdi 2022). But most stories will be told as personal-growth narratives. We will discuss a few examples in more detail to demonstrate how comparing countries is usefully employed in migrant storytelling.

One often-narrated reflection in this context falls into the category of shadow biographies. Every migrant carries a life story that might have been, should have been, and thus remains a conjecture. Imagining what life would

have been without migration to the new country most often imagines continuing life at home. For refugees, a shadow biography might be following a different escape route, but for most migrants it is the imagined life trajectory at home with which the new life is compared. As migrant life stories are overwhelmingly told as success stories, the shadow biography is normally employed to compare the new life as being the preferred trajectory to the old one. If that is not possible, as migration has proven to be the wrong path chosen, then we encounter silences instead of comparison. A failed or unhappy migration decision seldom goes beyond narrating facts and some carefully chosen entertaining stories. But a shadow biography throws light onto a narrative, embellishes it and gives it a deeper three-dimensional quality. Sohyi Kim, the celebrity chef in Vienna, offers such a reflection by asking herself how her life would have been had she remained in or returned to Korea:

Without Vienna I wouldn't be as independent as I am now ... I don't know, how would I be in Korea? The same? A lot of people say, they would be the same ... but I doubt that. I likely would have married, had children, would be at home [not working]. Well here [in Vienna] I feel at home, I won't go back.

(Ozsvath 2021 [authors' translation])

A story that presents itself as a shadow biography is also presented as a reasoning for having made the right move. Sohyi Kim asks herself whether she would be the same person had she lived in Korea. With this she implies the question, whether she would still have become a successful, independent celebrity chef. Would she be single? Would her lifestyle be accepted in Korea? By asking all these implicit questions, she also states that she views her life in Vienna as the right life but unusual and unlikely to be achieved and enjoyed in Korea. Shadow biography stories end by asserting one's status as a migrant having found the right place to live. They constitute a statement about one's migrant identity and more so a successfully shaped identity that encompasses the old and the new self. A similar purpose, telling the story of a migrant life of personal growth, is served by revelation narratives.

With revelation narratives we mean stories that are shaped by learning or discovering a key skill or element of the new country. These stories point to the ability of the narrator to grasp the new environment, to having made sudden jumps and skips, in short, having had revelations on the progress to "get" the new country. Such stories are about sudden comprehension, where unrelated bits and pieces suddenly fall into place and form a picture, framed by a new form of knowledge. This is only possible by a preceding longer period of incomprehension and often refusal or inability to understand the subtleties of the new culture. Having such a story to tell is a narrative spotlight as well as a highlight. Sarah Turnbull tells such a story in her autobiography of her new life in Paris. She introduces the story by lamenting the different social rules for

socialising in France, which have been jarring and even scarring her Australian sense of self. The turning point came when watching the French movie *Ridicule* (1996), about life at the court of Louis XVI:

To me *Ridicule* was a revelation. ... The film forced me to face facts – my style of communication does not work in France. It had to change. And gradually it did. These days, I don't feel compelled to fill silences. It has sunk in: there is no obligation to make small talk in France. I've learned to control my Anglo-Saxon impulse to persevere with questions ... I can maintain stoic silence throughout entire weddings and dinners. It may not sound exactly like progress but it beats heading home with a sense of being diminished by wasted efforts.

(Turnbull 2018, p. 273)

This story, we could also call it an adjustment narrative, marks a turning point in Turnbull's life and thus constitutes a key narrative in her account. Things suddenly become clear, are revealed, and she starts analysing her life in Paris according to the set of social rules prevailing in her environment. She is developing a more attuned skill set and thus a hybrid identity that allows her to narrate her life as guided by curiosity, humour, compromises and most of all resilience.

Resilience and agency

Resilience narratives too have an underlying framework of comparison, but they are mainly future-oriented. By emphasising resilience strategies, migrants are telling stories about how to cope in the new environment, how to shape a new life and how to ensure a future. The more recent past is the comparative frame rather than the old country. The past often simply refers to the time after arrival. These stories are about personal growth in a very applied sense. They are less about serendipity (such as watching the right movie at the right time) or inner musings (such as contemplating shadow biographies) than about relaying coping strategies that have been successfully acquired and now guide the new life.

One important medium for resilience narratives is the use of humour. Once you can laugh about yourself, you can share stories of cultural misunderstanding which are always about self-education by using retrospection. Humour and laughter in growth stories are implicitly comparative, as the migrant stumbles about their old knowledge system that does not fit the new environment.

The chapters by Ulla Ratheiser about “Shazia Mirza's comedy” and by Mita Banerjee about the YouTube videos on “German Lifestyle” are great examples of how humour is utilised to offer whole bundles of stories about the new country. Mirza's comedy style is very much about her and her family's integration story in implicitly comparing life in the old and new countries. They

contain carefully chosen and exaggerated examples of cultural misinterpretation or of overdoing integration, which come across as incredibly funny. The German Lifestyle videos achieve this by referring only subtly to the author's Syrian heritage; the stories exaggerate German habits and cultural and social rules (such as recycling) and thus create entertainment and enlightenment.

In narrative, resilience is often achieved through the construction of agency on the level of content and linguistics. Talking about decision-making and having a choice to stay or go often marks the beginning of narratives on lifestyle migration. Labour migrants like Hatice's family might refer to their work ethos and their hands-on approach to life in order to demonstrate agency (Meyer, in this book). Another topic is the sending of remittances and thus supporting the homeland as an act achieved through migration (Ströhle, in this book). When migrants lack this choice, they might want to make up for it through linguistic markers of agency like the frequent use of personal pronouns ("I"), active verbs like "make", "achieve", "manage" or "accomplish" or by the use of active rather than passive voice. Evaluative comments are used to claim a position of power within the narrative. Zoe's first words in her migrant narrative are:

I am glad that I can participate in such an interesting project. I hope that your visit to Cyprus is really creative in all respects and I will try to describe briefly to you a life of migration and diaspora. I was born to a diaspora family because since 1932 my father's brother was the first who migrated to London and then followed all my mother's siblings [...].

She starts the interview communication by congratulating the interviewer and thus underlines her own significance in the project. Otherwise, the frequent use of the pronoun "I" is remarkable, again stressing her active role in the cooperation (Christou, in this book).

Another denotation of agency is to underline a character's involvement in the narrated storyline or by singling out events in terms of their tellability: Who and what moves the story forward? (Bamberg, 2005). An example would be the involvement of migrants in national sports: Ferit derives a sense of empowerment from Mesut Özil's success in the German national football team. But we can see how fragile this sense of empowerment is when Özil leaves the team with the official statement, "I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose". When Ferit translates the phrase for the researcher, he replaces the word "immigrant" with the pejorative word *Ausländer* (alien). "Immigrant" conveys notions of agency and choice, whereas "alien" takes up the perspective and judgement of others (Ströhle, this book).

Finally, agency can be established through counter-narratives challenging the big story. This is a common narrative technique in migrants' stories. Hatice uses her own biographical story as counter narrative to jeopardise the hegemonial discourse on Muslim women in Austria as submissive and powerless (Meyer, this book). Introducing one's own voice into or against the

discursive choir of opinions in migration society can be an act of empowerment. Counter-narratives foster diversity in narrative and provide a plurality of positions.

Resilience narratives often address language learning and comprehending linguistic subtleties. What makes a good joke in the new country? How does one frame criticism of something, how praise or acknowledge, how refuse without causing offence? All such linguistic barriers are part and parcel of migrant storytelling and of looking back with humour and comprehension. As such stories are about mastering the new language and its underlying culture, they are simultaneously funny and cathartic.

Closure: The importance of having a coda

Like stories, interviews, memoirs and autobiographies, even casual migration storytelling occasions tend to end with a coda, a summary, a reflection. Again, in order to fit the migrant narrative as an overall story of challenge, quest and success, this tends to have a positive message. Having a narrative of reassurance – this has been good for me/us – is vital to create a balanced and stable migrant narrative that supports life and a future. It might not be outright positive or optimistic, but even a tentative statement about a good move, maybe a life-saving move, or a possibility of a better future, offers a narrative closure that the storyteller can live with.

Sarah Turnbull offers such a reflection in the last chapter of her book:

There is a certain comfort – *serenity* even – which comes from being able to see my experiences in this country as a whole: the good and the bad, the bitter the sweet. Having *emerged* from the *fog* of the early difficulties ... has been incredibly *enriching*, even if it did not seem so at the time ... for me the experience has been *humbling*. Cultural misunderstanding make for snap judgements. *It just takes time in France*. *Frédéric* [her partner] said so a million times. He was right.

(Turnbull 2018, pp. 299–300; emphasis added by authors)

By choosing the term “serenity”, she indicates closure; by using the verb “emerging” she indicates progress; by labelling the arrival phase as “fog” she files it clearly as passed; the term “enriching” relates us to her period of learning, “humbling” to her change from a true Australian to a better version of herself. By naming her partner as a guide, accomplice and cultural coach she extends her story beyond herself.

A coda often covers the migrant story as success, as personal growth, as connection and as having achieved a certain clarity and agency in life. This narrative pattern is not only significant for the individual story and its ending. It also gives us an idea about the migrant perspective within the dominant discourse of integration, social exclusion and discrimination. What kind of self is presented in the coda? Does the story of personal growth end in resilience

or in assimilation? How is the social position of the migrant navigated? When we want to learn about migration and social inclusion, we need to look at the codas of migrant narratives.

Conclusion

Migrant narratives are about survival, success, adventure, ambition, personal growth, political or personal quest, belonging and homemaking, love and serendipity, accidentals or simply getting stuck. A certain reflexivity is necessary to shape stories into a reasonable narrative, a certain wit is needed to make them entertaining. Editing skills are required to choose fitting sequences for specific occasions, to tailor for an audience, to give a story the right word count and the right emphasis at any given time. Being able to tell the migrant story is one of the most useful and essential social skills needed after arrival.

It is important to remember that not every migration experience will be part of the migrant story. Some things are unspeakable, silences will remain and are often essential to hold on to in order to reach a stable migrant identity. Conscious sharing of stories goes with often (sub)consciously withholding others. Some silent stories might eventually be shared with carefully chosen listeners, others not.

Migrant storytelling might employ a set of narrative strategies employed in all life narratives. In this chapter, however, we have tried to offer an analysis of what makes migration narratives into a specific genre of autobiographical storytelling. A life shaped by migration is, as Günther Anders has pointed out, structured by crossroads, angles and thus sequences that require a specialised set of storytelling strategies that sets it apart from other life stories. A migrant life asks for a set of narratives that pays attention to such moves, often violent. The right or wrong construction of the narrative can have serious consequences, but it can also stabilise a social position, it can offer respite from doubts and it can reassure about future possibilities. By comparing countries, by learning to convey narratives of resilience, by learning to employ codas, and even by employing strategic dissociation, migrant narratives are an integral part of living with migration. They give voice to migrations and support the crucial identity work that goes with them.

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