Post-return experiences and transnational belonging of return migrants: a Dutch–Moroccan case study

JUNE DE BREE,[*] TINE DAVIDS[*] AND HEIN DE HAAS[†]

[*]*Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN), Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

[†]*International Migration Institute, James Martin 21st Century School, Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford, UK*
hein.dehaas@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Abstract *In this article we explore the links between return migration, belonging and transnationalism among migrants who returned from the Netherlands to northeast Morocco. While transnationalism is commonly discussed from the perspective of a receiving country, this study shows that transnationalism also plays a vital role in reconstructing post-return belonging. Return migration is not simply a matter of 'going home', as feelings of belonging need to be renegotiated upon return. While returnees generally feel a strong need to maintain various transnational practices, the meanings they attach to these practices depend on motivations for return, gender and age. For former (male) labour migrants, transnational practices are essential for establishing post-return belonging, whereas such practices are less important for their spouses. Those who returned as children generally feel uprooted, notwithstanding the transnational practices they maintain. The amount of agency migrants are able to exert in the return decision-making process is a key factor in determining the extent to which returnees can create a post-return transnational sense of home.*

In recent years, return migration has attracted increased attention. Particularly in Europe, it is commonly seen in terms of the restrictive immigration policies that have led to a greater emphasis on (forced or voluntary) return as a policy tool or aim (see also Black and Gent 2004, Blitz et al. 2005, Koser and Black 1999). Yet, the issue of return migration is not new. The western European experience of 'guest workers' from Morocco (and other countries such as Turkey) is a particular case in point. In the 1960s and 1970s, the governments of both sending and receiving countries, as well as

the migrants themselves, looked upon their stay as temporary. Then, particularly after the 1973 oil crisis, receiving countries such as France, Germany and the Netherlands started to experiment with policies to stimulate return migration, but the anticipated large-scale return of Moroccan migrants did not happen, mainly because of the dismal economic and social situation in Morocco and restrictive immigration policies in the European receiving countries. Consequently, many migrants decided to settle in western Europe, which triggered a process of chain migration through family reunification and family formation (De Mas 1995; Entzinger 1985; Penninx 1982; Reniers 2001).

That many Moroccan migrants did indeed settle in Europe should not obscure the fact that many have in fact returned – and these are not mainly elderly men. In fact, 61 per cent of all Moroccan male migrants and 81 per cent of all Moroccan female migrants who emigrated from the Netherlands to Morocco between 1995 and 2004 were younger than 50 years. In addition, a substantial group of predominantly ageing Moroccan migrants have developed a specific form of pendular migratory behaviour that entails spending several months a year in Morocco while maintaining their official residence in Europe. Such forms of mobility rarely fit the dichotomous categories of 'returned' versus 'settled' migrants (de Haas 2006).

It should not be taken for granted that Dutch-Moroccan return migrants will fit smoothly into their communities of origin.[1] Several studies on return migration challenge the view that return migration is the natural ending point of the migration cycle, or the equivalent of 'going home' (Koser and Black 1999). The imagined or real 'home' left behind might be changed upon return and the return migrants themselves are likely to have changed through their stay abroad (Ghanem 2003). Accordingly, return migrants attach new meanings to culture, identity, home and place in their country of origin (Hammond 1999). Return migration is thus best understood as a new phase in which belonging to a 'place' and 'community' has to be renegotiated.

In this article, we aim to explore the role of transnationalism in this renegotiation and construction of post-return belonging. Because a certain receiving-country bias characterizes the transnationalism literature, debate and research have focused mainly on the transnational orientations and activities of immigrants in western receiving countries rather than on the migrants' post-return integration and sense of belonging. This is striking because the lives of migrants' families and friends in the countries of origin are also likely to become 'transnationalized' and it would be unrealistic to assume that migrants would readily 'give up' their transnational activities and orientations after return.

In this article, we aim to fill part of this gap by studying Dutch-Moroccan return migrants' post-return experiences in northeast Morocco. We seek to explore how, on their return, Dutch Moroccans construct a sense of home. In particular, we look at the role of transnational practices and orientations in creating a sense of belonging. We also look at how motivations to return, gender and generation affect these processes. However, before turning to our case study, we shall elaborate on the central concept of transnational belonging.

Transnational belonging

The concept of transnationalism challenges the dichotomies of permanent versus temporary settlement by pointing out that migrants are not necessarily oriented towards either origin or destination countries, but can identify with several places, communities and societies at the same time (Vertovec 2001). Vertovec calls this *transnational consciousness* – or, in other words, 'depictions of individuals' awareness of decentred attachments, of being simultaneously "home away from home", "here and there", or for instance being British and something else' (Vertovec 1999: 4–5). Besides belonging to a local place or community, therefore, a migrant's sense of belonging can also be fundamentally transnational (Brah 1996). While scholars usually apply the term to migrants living in receiving societies, returnees are also likely to construct a multi-local sense of home (Pedersen 2003).

How does a transnational sense of belonging arise? Many authors refer to networks or practices through which processes of transnationalism are channelled. According to Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc (1994: 7), transnational identities and transnational practices are interlinked:

> An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies. … Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation states. … They develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organizational, and religious and political – that span borders.

To what extent is it necessary to maintain transnational practices to experience transnational belonging? For example, some authors claim that 'bodily geographic mobility' is unnecessary for developing transnational orientations (Levitt 2003; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Migrants can establish transnational belonging without travelling to the countries to which they feel they belong.

Origin and destination societies do not always easily accept transnational belonging. In fact, belonging is a highly politicized process. The concept of the 'politics of belonging' pertains to the specific political projects – such as selective immigration policies, citizenship arrangements and return migration policies – that aim to mark the boundaries of those who do and do not belong to a certain group (cf. Yuval-Davis et al. 2006). For a migrant, creating a sense of home implies mediating these kinds of boundaries with other identity markers, such as class, gender, ethnicity and age. More precisely, the construction of (transnational) identities and belonging is mediated between discourses, institutions and subjects (Davids and van Driel 2005).

An important discussion in this context is on how transnationalism and local integration relate to one another. Recent work on migrant transnationalism highlights the *simultaneous* orientations of migrants in receiving and destination countries (Faist 2003; Snel et al. 2006; Vertovec 2004). This challenges the classical assumption that

immigrant integration automatically coincides with decreasing orientations towards the society of origin (de Haas 2005). In fact, some research suggests that transnational activities can even facilitate integration or a local sense of belonging (Portes et al. 1999, 2002).

Earlier scholars often presumed that returnees would be unable to overcome the structural constraints to their reintegration into their countries of origin embedded in traditional values, institutions and power relations (Cerase 1974; Gmelch 1980; King 1986). Now they emphasize the returnees' agency, which enables them to rework discourses through their own practices and personal constructions of 'home'. Pedersen (2003) draws attention to the returnees' potential to create a sense of home by reconciling (local) social expectations with (transnational) personal preferences. Cassarino (2004) and Duval (2004) also explain how immigrants prepare for their return by maintaining social and economic transnational practices, which eases their reintegration. Transnational practices can therefore also facilitate local integration and belonging in the context of return migration.

Definitions and operationalization

In this article, we investigate how Dutch-Moroccan migrants create a sense of post-return belonging in northeast Morocco and at how transnational practices affect this process. *Belonging* pertains to emotional attachment, feeling at home and feeling safe (Lovell 1998, Yuval-Davis et al. 2006). We focus on belonging to a place or country. *Transnational belonging* then refers to feelings of being at home that cross the borders of nation-states (cf. Vertovec 1999).

Furthermore, we define *transnational practices* as economic, socio-cultural and political activities that literally or symbolically cross borders of nation-states (Al-Ali et al. 2001; Portes et al. 1999; Snel et al. 2006). We distinguish between transnational activities that literally cross borders of nation-states, such as calling family in the Netherlands, and transnational activities that take place within the borders of Morocco, such as meeting other Dutch-Moroccan return migrants (cf. Al-Ali et al. 2001). We only consider transnational orientations and practices directed towards the Netherlands and not, for instance, Moroccan communities in other countries.

In an attempt to understand the role of transnational practices in post-return integration and in creating a post-return sense of home, we investigate the meanings that returnees attach to both transnational and local practices. In general, the concept of 'integration' simplifies our understanding of the complex ways in which people create a sense of belonging after settlement or return. Since integration implies adaptation to the society's dominant norms, it also suggests that the receiving society is socially cohesive and homogenous (cf. Anthias 2006). This risks constructing newcomers as 'others' and implicitly assuming that returnees simply blend into their origin communities on return, thereby deflecting attention from the complex societal mechanisms involved in the production of narratives and practices of identity and belonging (Anthias 2006: 20). We thus approach

integration from the viewpoint of individuals finding their place in society rather than adapting to its dominant norms.

Table 1 below illustrates how the study, largely inspired by Al-Ali et al. (2001) and Snel et al. (2006), operationalized Dutch-Moroccan returnees' economic, social and political transnational and local practices. Besides *current* practices, we considered Dutch-Moroccan returnees' *past* local and transnational practices, namely when they were still living in the Netherlands, to assess how past practices affect post-return belonging. In the results section, we compare six different subgroups of returnees according to age, gender and motivations for return. Because not *all* (previous and present) practices are applicable for each group, we only discuss the most relevant ones, explicitly those that characterize a particular subgroup.

Table 1: Overview of transnational and local economic, political, social and cultural practices

Practices	Transnational	Local
Economic	Remittances (sending or receiving money and goods to/from family in the Netherlands)	Reliance on family in Morocco for money and goods
	Business (investments, commerce, travelling to the Netherlands for business negotiations)	Business (investments, commerce, business negotiations)
	Maintaining access to Dutch (disability) insurances and pensions (for example, filling out letters)	Gaining access to Moroccan (disability) insurances and pensions
	House possession in the Netherlands	House possession in Morocco
		Labour in Morocco
		Education in Morocco
Political	Reading Dutch newspapers	Reading Moroccan newspapers
	Following Dutch politics/news	Following Moroccan politics/news
	Voting in the Netherlands	Voting in Morocco
	Membership of a Dutch political party	Membership of a Moroccan political party
	Holding a Dutch passport	Holding Moroccan passport
Social	Contact with family/friends in the Netherlands (paying visits, telephone, email)	Contact with non-migrant family/ friends in Morocco (paying visits, telephone, email)
	Contact with Dutch (Moroccans) in Morocco (visits, telephone, email)	
	Involvement in Dutch (Moroccan) organization in the Netherlands/ Morocco	Involvement in Moroccan organization
Cultural	Reading Dutch books/magazines	Reading Moroccan books/magazines
	Watching Dutch television	Watching Moroccan television
	Writing or speaking Dutch	Writing or speaking 'Moroccan' languages (including Berber and French)

Methodology

We conducted the study in and around the town of Berkane in northeast Morocco from December 2006 to April 2007. A purposeful stratified sampling served to select respondents covering various motivations for return, based on the assumption that such motivations will affect feelings of belonging (Cassarino 2007; Pedersen 2003). Informed by typologies on motivations for return (Cerase 1974) and an analysis of other factors, such as gender and age, which are likely to affect return decisions (Black et al. 2004), we developed six categories of return migrants based on motivations for return, gender and age. These were:

1. first-generation men who returned because of socio-economic problems in the receiving country;
2. first-generation men who returned to enjoy retirement;
3. first- and second-generation men who returned to invest and improve their lives socio-economically;
4. first-generation spouses who returned because their husbands decided to return;
5. second-generation adolescents who returned because their fathers decided to return; and
6. second-generation women who returned in order to marry.

Stichting Steun Remigranten (SSR), a foundation in northeast Morocco that supports return migrants, helped define the first five of the six categories mentioned above. The SSR, which assists Dutch-Moroccan returnees in their dealings with Dutch government and social security institutions, helped establish the particular combinations of gender, age and motivations for return per category.

Furthermore, 14 of the 23 informants came to us through SSR. Because they usually only visited the foundation if they needed socio-juridical assistance, the sample is likely to be biased towards returnees experiencing post-return problems. To counterbalance this bias and to include a sufficient number of less problematic cases, we selected the remaining nine returnees by means of snowball sampling. To reduce the bias of snowball sampling we ensured that none of the latter returnees belonged to the same families as other returnees within the sample.

Because of the sampling methods and the small sample size, one should not consider this study representative of the whole Dutch-Moroccan returnee population in northeast Morocco. Its purpose is rather, through the in-depth exploration of a limited number of cases, to gain insight into relationships between motivations, the circumstances surrounding return, feelings of belonging and transnational practices.

We collected the case study material through semi-structured, in-depth interviews focused on life histories, which we supplemented with participatory observation. Interviewing returnees in their houses or sharing time and activities at private places (sometimes by staying in their houses for up to a week) generated additional information about their living conditions and relations within the household.

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Setting the scene for the politics of belonging

Northeast Morocco is one of the main regions from which migrants living in northwest Europe come. In many ways, it is an area in transition, for it is where traditions and modernizing influences meet. On the one hand, especially because of the large amounts of remittances, it is becoming increasingly transnationalized (Obdeijn et al. 1999). Modernizing influences are also visible in the rise of individualism, in a tendency towards nuclear as opposed to extended families, and the increasing prevalence of divorce. Yet, on the other hand, northeast Morocco remains one of the more conservative regions in the country. Non-migrants living in emigration areas often have ambivalent attitudes towards international migrants. Although they represent a world of luxury and financial opportunities, they are not always valued positively. Migrants can be perceived as 'selfish', 'arrogant', and 'bad Muslims' if they refuse to spread their wealth among the community (cf. de Haas 2003). It is in this setting that (Dutch) Moroccan return migrants have to (re)create a sense of home.

The institutional framework in which feelings of belonging are constructed extends to the Dutch context, for most returnees are entitled to various Dutch social security payments. Migrants over the age of 65 can export their Dutch pension on their return. Those who became unemployed in the Netherlands through illness can retain access to their labour disability insurance. Returnees above the age of 45 can make use of, or combine, their pension or disability benefits with the provisions available under the Return Migration Act. This arrangement encourages return by covering returnees' expenses involved in moving to Morocco and providing an allowance (around €500 a month) for post-return living costs for the rest of their lives.

In exchange, returnees permanently lose their Dutch residence permit. Under the terms of the Return Migration Act, they also have to renounce their Dutch citizenship, although they can opt out of the scheme and legally return to the Netherlands during the first year. They retain nominal access to visas to visit family and friends in the Netherlands and their partners can keep their Dutch citizenship. Generally, male migrants' spouses and children, who were either excluded from the Dutch labour market or were too young to gain direct access to state benefits, have only *indirect* access to their husbands or fathers' benefits. As we shall see, this differential access to Dutch welfare state benefits is important for understanding Dutch-Moroccan returnees' different experiences of post-return belonging.

Different practices of belonging

In the following sections, we explore how return migrants negotiate a post-return sense of home in northeast Morocco, and how transnational practices affect these processes. Motivation, gender and stage in life are what largely determine the amount of leeway a returnee has to negotiate a transnational sense of home. Importantly, men who came back to retire and to enjoy improved living conditions were the only group that always had a personal desire to return. The others had less agency and negotiation power during the return decision-making process. This distinction is essential in explaining the extent to which return migrants have the room for manoeuvre to create a transnational home.

Table 2: Characteristics of migrants who returned because of problems in the destination country

Informants	Sex	Age[a]	Marital Status	Left	Age when left	Motives for leaving	Back	Age when back	Motives for returning
Mohammed[b]	M	50	Married	1984	27	Reunifi-cation	2004	47	Unemployment Divorce Illness
Kamal	M	49	Single	1976	18	Labour	1998	40	Unemployment Illness
Mimoun	M	52	Married	1987	32	Labour	1991	36	Unemployment Divorce Illness
Ali	M	75	Married	1964	32	Labour	2005	73	Divorce Illness
Said	M	49	Married	1975	17	Labour/ Reunifi-cation	2004	46	Unemployment Illness
Driss	M	64	Married	1965	22	Labour	1997	54	Unemployment Divorce Illness

a. Age at the point of interview.

b. In all instances, pseudonyms are used to protect informants' privacy.

Return driven by problems experienced in the Netherlands

All the migrants who cited social and economic problems in the Netherlands as their main reason for returning were first-generation middle-aged men (see Table 2). Until those problems arose, none had intended to return to Morocco and planned to stay in the Netherlands. They had held jobs, been married (several to Dutch women), raised children, had Dutch acquaintances (particularly colleagues), learnt to speak Dutch and took an interest in Dutch politics by voting, reading newspapers or watching news programmes. Before returning, most of their transnational activities, such as family reunions and meeting other Moroccan migrants in mosques, took place *within* the Netherlands. They had been less engaged in actual border-crossing activities. For example, although all the men went on holiday to Morocco at least once every two years, they rarely remitted any money to their family there and half of them only telephoned their family in Morocco once a year. Accordingly, these migrants generally felt at home in the Netherlands and planned to settle there permanently.

However, a combination of problems experienced in the Netherlands led them to opt for a previously unanticipated return. Thus, negative (push) factors rather than positive (pull) factors prompted their decision. The economic, social and health problems they faced during the last years of their stay in the Netherlands included

unemployment and divorce (in some cases more than once), which in turn led to social isolation and, even, psychological problems like depression. For these reasons, all the men decided to return to Morocco, but to bring with them their Dutch disability benefits and/or to take advantage of the provisions of the Return Migration Act.

In their cases, instead of just going home to where people expect them to belong, return was the strategy they chose to handle the social, economic and psychological problems that had arisen in the Netherlands. For them, nominally sharing the same ethnicity or citizenship with people living in Morocco did not guarantee an easy reintegration. In fact, they felt alienated upon return and did not 'automatically' reintegrate into local society and culture. As Kamal put it, 'the first year was very difficult. I was still thinking in Dutch. If you return from Europe you are not the same any more; you are rather European. Those people here are 30 years behind; it is not the same as Europe. Those people here are stupid.'

One cannot easily capture these men's circumstances with dichotomous categories such as 'settled' versus 'returned'. Despite their increasing detachment from Dutch society during the last years of their stay in the Netherlands, they tended to be highly negative about Moroccan society. For example, they generally avoided social contacts with extended family (sometimes even their spouses), other non-migrants and Dutch-Moroccan returnees. They tend to perceive non-migrants as 'others' by morally positioning themselves 'above' them. These men construct identities along the axes of modernity and tradition, in which they position themselves as 'modern'. They yearn to belong to and identify with the 'modern' Netherlands and associate tradition with Moroccan time and space. Their self-perception as modern men coincides with a reluctance to participate in local Moroccan society and their preference for some sort of solitude.

We call their social positioning 'translocational' (cf. Anthias 2006: 27) in that it results from a constant internal dialogue that frames their experiences in either Dutch or Moroccan references. They typically remain highly nostalgic towards Dutch society, which symbolizes a time and place before their problems arose and, accordingly, upon their return they feel a strong need to maintain transnational ties, practices and sense of belonging. The meanings they attach to the institutions that provide their Dutch disability benefits, their only source of income, reinforces their local sense of belonging. As Mimoun describes:

> Once in a while I look through all the paperwork I received from the Netherlands just because I miss the Netherlands; I miss it every day. I receive my disability benefits from the Netherlands. Morocco does not give me anything. If I would fall ill while not having this money, how could I survive here? The Netherlands is not my home country, but it is almost like that. My contact with the Netherlands continues; I receive letters that I have to fill out. If these letters stopped, everything would fall apart.

Interestingly, Mimoun does not see regular form filling as a burden. Many people might view it as a denigrating device that Dutch institutions maintain to articulate a discourse of control over migrants' lives and their dependency on the Dutch state, not

to mention remind them of their low economic status and lack of economic self-reliance. However, instead of disliking these Dutch institutions' bureaucratic procedures and interference in his private life, Mimoun cherishes the practice of form filling and drafting letters. For him, the letters represent his lifeline to the Netherlands and help him articulate a hybrid Moroccan Dutch identity. His disability benefits and the relationship he has with Dutch institutions confirm that he belongs to the Netherlands, which makes him feel economically and emotionally safer and more secure while living in northeast Morocco.

Besides this economic transnational practice, these returnees have relatively little opportunity to remain culturally, politically and socially involved in the Netherlands. They tend to regret their limited access to Dutch television channels and newspapers, for they are eager to keep up with Dutch news and to remain in touch with the Dutch language. They wish they could visit the Netherlands more often, not only because of the family and friends living there but also because of their more general attachment to Dutch society. Three out of six men had reported failing to obtain a tourist visa because of the Netherlands' ever more restrictive immigration policies and now bitterly regret having never applied for Dutch citizenship. They experience this inability to obtain visas as a severe problem, as Said stated:

> I do not get a visa if I want to go on a holiday to the Netherlands. But why? I have my ex-colleagues there, my brothers, my sisters, my brothers-in-law. I really want to go there; I want to see what is new. I was living there for half a century; I know everything there. I do not want to stay in one place; I want to go back and forth.

As Smith and Guarnizo (1998) and Levitt (2003) confirm, we can see from this category of men that transnational orientations can remain very strong even without physical transnational mobility. However, as these men state, their lives would be greatly improved if they had more opportunity to incorporate transnational practices into their post-return lives. For these returnees, the constraints on their ability to maintain these practices might well negatively affect their feelings of belonging. The institutional obstacles notwithstanding, given that negative (push) factors mainly drove the return of these men who had initially planned to stay in the Netherlands, they were quite unprepared for their return.

Despite their negative attitudes towards Moroccan society and dearth of transnational practices, however, they do not consider returning to the Netherlands a realistic option because of the high cost of living and difficulties in obtaining residence permits. Mohammed, for instance, also mentioned social obstacles:

> My life is better here because I am far from the problems I had in the Netherlands [he divorced twice and has two children with each ex-wife]. I also have a big problem here because I am far away from my children, but it is still better this way. I could not marry a third time in the Netherlands. Maybe my children would not visit me any more if people talked badly about me. So I

believe it is good, my children there and my wife here, it is good for them and for me. This way the love between the father and the children remains good.

Mohammed obtained a four-year visa that allows him to visit his children in the Netherlands every three months. Consequently, so long as he can travel to the Netherlands now and then, his life in Morocco remains bearable. For these returnees, return to Morocco remains the best compromise taking into account their circumstances, particularly if there remain sufficient opportunities for maintaining transnational practices.

Table 3: Migrants who returned for retirement or innovation

Informants	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Left	Age when left	Motives for leaving	Back	Age when back	Motives for returning
Karim	M	73	Married	1966	32	Labour	2000	66	Retirement
Ahmed	M	67	Married	1966	26	Labour	1996	56	Retirement and unemployment
				1998	58	Illness wife	2002	62	Retirement
Hicham	M	72	Married	1968	33	Labour	2006	71	Retirement
Khalid	M	43	Married	1971	7	Reunifi-cation	1989	25	Labour
Najib	M	32	Single	2000	25	Labour	2006	31	Labour

Return for retirement and socio-economic improvement

In this section, we discuss two groups of migrants who returned to retire and to enjoy better socio-economic conditions – namely ageing, first-generation male migrants, and relatively young first- and second-generation men. The two groups share an essential characteristic – their return to Morocco is voluntary and planned. The retired men always intended to return to Morocco after fulfilling their 'labour duty' and/or obtaining their pensions in the Netherlands. They prepared for their return by maintaining intensive transnational practices throughout their stay abroad, such as through pendular migration, constructing houses and maintaining social relations. At least initially, they had left their spouses and children behind in Morocco, a situation that would sometimes persist until their return to Morocco. As household heads, they sent remittances (amounting to up to half of their salaries) and paid regular visits. To prepare for their return, they also consciously maintained close contacts with friends, acquaintances and neighbours in Morocco.

The men who returned for socio-economic reasons showed similar behavioural patterns. They had relatively good jobs in the Netherlands and a realistic chance of staying on there. Rather than driven by negative circumstances, their return was motivated mainly by a personal desire to invest or to find more satisfying work in

Morocco while they were still in a financial position to do so. These entrepreneurs saw transnational practices as an important element in preparing for their return. When they were still living in the Netherlands, they maintained close ties with family members in Morocco, which placed them in a favourable position to join family businesses on their return. For instance, Khalid married his cousin and later took over the olive store of his uncle and father-in-law. Najib remained in daily contact with his family and acquaintances in Europe and Morocco by telephone, which prepared him to take over the management of his father's farm on his return.

These practices greatly eased their return. Being well-placed in Moroccan society economically assured their status as men and breadwinners. While those who returned because of the problems they experienced in the receiving society live in rented housing, the retired men had already built or bought houses in Morocco while they were still living in the Netherlands. By Moroccan standards, retired returnees often enjoy a relatively high and secure income. The even more successful men who returned for their greater socio-economic advancement live comparatively luxurious lives. Consequently, they feel respected and do not have negative attitudes towards other return migrants, non-migrants or Moroccan society in general.

On return, they feel a strong desire to maintain social, economic and even political transnational ties and practices and, unlike those whose return was constraints driven, they match this wish with a capability to do so. In addition, transnational practices often serve to spread the risks encountered in Morocco because of limited social welfare and employment provision, unreliable health insurance systems, corruption and lack of legal protection for their businesses. Maintaining transnational social networks, particular with children and other kin in Europe who can send money in the event of financial problems, improves their social security. In fact, returnees often consciously send their children to Europe for this purpose. Many hold Dutch citizenship or a permanent residence permit, without which they would not have taken the risk to return. The returned executives sometimes manage to gain access to European insurance arrangements. Khalid, for example, managed to insure his car with a German insurance company.

Transnational practices, however, not only spread the economic risk but also enhance a returnee's local social status. For example, in northeast Morocco, European passports are a huge status symbol. A 'culture of migration' often characterizes emigration areas such as northeast Morocco, where people regard emigration to Europe as the key strategy towards assuring an economically successful future. Returnees who decide to keep their Dutch citizenship are highly aware of having 'something that the others do not have'. In this sense, holding a Dutch passport enhances a person's local sense of belonging in that it provides both social status and a permanent option to return to the Netherlands.

Moreover, social, political and economic transnational activities facilitate local belonging in other ways. For a start, they ease local integration and help returnees create a more personal (transnational) sense of home. Karim, for instance, is a member of an organization that defends the socio-juridical rights of Dutch-Moroccan returnees, which entails both helping other Dutch-Moroccan returnees solve their

problems and travelling to the Netherlands to lobby Dutch institutions. In this way, he combines a high level of socio-political integration in Morocco with the opportunity to travel regularly to the other country to which he feels strongly attached. Khalid, however, in addition to his regular businesses has plans to start a typical Dutch-style cheese store in Morocco, for he has a strong wish to create 'something Dutch'. This activity would not just serve local economic integration and security, but would also be a public manifestation of his (partial) Dutch identity.

Table 4: Characteristics of returned spouses

Informants	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Left	Age when left	Motives for leaving	Back	Age when back	Motives for returning
Hakima	F	50	Widow	1978	21	Reunification	1984	27	Joined husband
Naima	F	35	Married	1990	18	Reunification	1995	23	Joined husband
Aicha	F	49	Married	1986	28	Reunification	1990	32	Joined husband
Fatima	F	43	Married	1986	22	Reunification	1996	32	Joined husband
Jamila	F	60	Widow	1980	33	Reunification	1994	47	Joined husband
Dounia	F	51	Married	1981	25	Reunification	2004	48	Joined husband

Return of spouses

Compared with the male returnees discussed above, the first-generation and middle-aged spouses who returned to Morocco with their husbands (see Table 4) were generally more restricted in their ability to make independent decisions about their emigration and return. Four women strongly resisted returning because they wanted to give their children a good future in the Netherlands, but they capitulated when their husbands threatened them with divorce and the removal of their children. Divorce is regarded as highly 'shameful' in Morocco and would potentially have left them without any economic and social support from their ex-husbands or even their own family. With little or no education or formal work experience, they had limited access to alternative economic and social resources. They did not speak Dutch, and their (transnational) social life remained focused on their household and family. Consequently, most stated that they would be unable to cope with a divorce, so decided to obey their husbands and return to Morocco.

Upon return, all the women experienced child-related problems, which generally strengthened their wish to return to the Netherlands. The children tended to be unhappy about their fathers' decision to return to Morocco, which in their view had ruined their lives by depriving them of excellent opportunities in the Netherlands. Most women do not feel the need to maintain any post-return transnational ties, except for the minority whose children and/or husbands still live in or have returned to the Netherlands. Transnational practices like calling children twice a week and receiving remittances do not increase their feelings of local belonging. On the

contrary, they experience being part of a transnational household as extremely problematic because they prefer to be together with their husbands and/or children.

The way these women define their 'home' is relatively independent of space or national boundaries and more focused on family relations. They centre their social positioning and identity on gender and their roles as mothers and spouses: their home is where their family is (or wants to go). Instead of taking into account their own preferences, they wish to return to the Netherlands to provide their children with a good future or to reunite with them and/or their husbands. As Fatima states, 'I do not think about myself. I have forgotten myself. I only think about the children. I want my daughter to have work and an education. In the Netherlands, this would be possible. That is why it is better to live in the Netherlands.'

Consequently, for these women, compared with the male return migrants described earlier, transnational practices play a very different role in the processes of belonging. While the extent to which they can incorporate transnational practices into their lives determines post-return belonging for most men, for their spouses these practices do not ease their uprooted feelings. They do not have personal feelings of belonging in the Netherlands and barely identify with Dutch society and culture. In contrast to the men who returned to retire or invest, the pre-return social relations these women maintained with family in Morocco (such as visiting them annually) also did not facilitate their post-return sense of belonging. They still feel uprooted because their children are unhappy in Morocco, because they are separated from their children, or because they never wished to return in the first place. This exemplifies how gender affects the exact role of transnational practices in constructing post-return belonging.

Table 5: Characteristics of returned adolescents and marriage migrants

Informants	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Left	Age when left	Motives for leaving	Back	Age when back	Motives for return
Hind	F	27	Divorced	1982	2	Reunification	1993	13	Joined parents
Hayat	F	25	Divorced	1986	4	Reunification	1996	14	Joined parents
Souad	F	39	Married	1974	6	Reunification	1983	15	Joined parents
Amine	M	24	Single	1983	0	Reunification	1994	11	Joined parents
Ikrame	F	47	Married	1967	7	Reunification	1981	21	Marriage
Samia	F	43	Married	1975	11	Reunification	1983	19	Marriage

Return of second-generation family migrants

The last two categories of returnees are second-generation adolescents who returned with their parents and second-generation women who returned to marry (see Table 5).

While the first group had little control over their return migration, the women who returned to marry could exercise their agency. Whereas the adolescents were forced to accompany their parents back to Morocco, the other women 'returned' to marry and live with husbands whom they had met while on holiday in Morocco. Although they would have preferred to remain in the Netherlands where they had grown up, they made a conscious decision to stay with their husbands who refused to leave Morocco. Despite these differences in agency, *all* the second-generation women experienced 'return' as very difficult, though the two who returned to marry and whose return was largely voluntary eventually managed to garner transnational practices and create a better sense of home.

All informants grew up in the Netherlands. They attended Dutch schools, spoke Dutch fluently and most of their friends were Dutch. Three of these returnees did not speak any Moroccan Arabic, Berber or French at all and they had limited knowledge of Moroccan society and culture. Although most of them used occasionally to visit Morocco during summer holidays, this hardly prepared them for return. As Amine states:

> The problem was that we did not really know Morocco. I always thought that Morocco was the same as the Netherlands. I did go to Morocco during summers, but everything is different then. Everybody is coming from Europe to go to the beach, to have a good time for four weeks. I only played with children who also spoke Dutch. You think it is a good country, but you do not know anything about life in Morocco.

These returnees thus experienced their return to Morocco as a shock and all the women experienced severe difficulties in their marriages. Although all the women had entered into their marriages more or less voluntarily, they experienced serious problems with the husband's family with whom they lived, sometimes resulting in divorce. Their post-return experiences stand in great contrast to their upbringing in the Netherlands, as the case of Ikrame illustrates:

> It was really difficult in the beginning. All those traditions, the Moroccan culture, I had never known them when I was in the Netherlands. My parents-in-law were really old-fashioned. I was like a whore to them; they did not accept me. They were laughing at me because I did not know what to say, how to walk, how to behave, how to dress. *You do not feel safe*, you are not sure whether you can speak or not, whether you are doing something well or not, so I decided to keep quiet. I was so unhappy then, I wanted to commit suicide. I felt humiliated, used, alone and treated like a slave.

These individual post-return experiences stand in stark contrast to the politics of belonging. Whereas top–down approaches to belonging often assume that migrants (including second-generation ones) 'naturally' belong to their country of origin, the case of Ikrame clearly shows that she felt lost in a Moroccan culture she did not share

and how she saw her non-migrant parents-in-law as enemies. Whereas the politics of belonging tends to ascribe only one, fixed and essentialized 'Moroccan' identity to these women, this perceived common identity has little relevance for the individual post-return experiences of these women.

Upon their return, all the second-generation women lived very isolated lives. They either remained at home as housewives, as in the cases of Ikrame and Samia, because their parents-in-law would not allow them to work, or, as in the case of the adolescent women, they were not able to continue their secondary schooling partly because of the language barrier but also because they were not encouraged to do so. Consequently, the female adolescents tend to express great anger towards their fathers for having taken them away from their lives in the Netherlands. Amine, being a boy, had more opportunity to integrate into Moroccan society because he was able to attend school. Although he too had his problems, especially with teachers who used to beat pupils, he had a better chance of establishing an independent social life in Morocco.

Second-generation female 'returnees' tend to experience particular difficulty establishing friendships with non-migrants, who they feel do not accept them. They also often violate social expectations through their inability or refusal to speak Moroccan Arabic. Hind, who initially lived in a small village, stated:

> I had no friends in the village, only my sister. We thought they [non-migrant youngsters] were really strange – not just strange, incredibly strange! One day I asked a girl about marriage, what she wanted in the future. She told me that she would agree with anything that her parents decided. Then I thought, 'never mind, I cannot deal with those people.' … We had to live there for years, but you can never become one of them. We were just like foreigners there. People were also laughing at me when they heard I was going to marry: 'she cannot cook, she cannot clean, she can do nothing.' When my sister and I were talking in Dutch, they said: 'there you go, they start talking this other language again.' No, I could never be one of them, ever.

Hind's case shows that there is no sign of any kind of belonging based on a nominally shared Moroccan citizenship. She clearly has another identity whether it concerns gender, ethnicity or citizenship. She even speaks of being a foreigner in this process of simultaneously being excluded and excluding herself. It is rather telling that the second-generation returnees did not speak of 'their return'. Even though Morocco is their country of birth, they see the Netherlands as their home. This exemplifies the problematic nature of labelling these second-generation migrants as 'Moroccans' who 'return' to their country of origin.

Transnational practices remain highly important in these returnees' lives. Amine and Hind are economically dependent on remittances from nuclear family members in the Netherlands and are in almost daily contact with them by telephone or email. Every summer family and friends from the Netherlands, who sometimes stay for up to two months, pack their houses. During this period, they revel in the opportunity to speak Dutch instead of Berber or Moroccan Arabic. They prefer to read Dutch rather

than Arabic (which most of them cannot read anyway) and to watch Dutch television. Since second-generation returnees attach high emotional value to the Dutch language, opportunities to use Dutch occasionally enhance their local sense of belonging.

However, for adolescent returnees such transnational practices neither solve nor attenuate feelings of being uprooted. None of them managed to find stable employment. Hayat and Souad occasionally worked as interpreters, which were moments of great happiness for them because they were able to earn money by using Dutch, but such (transnational) experiences only temporarily help to create a greater sense of 'feeling at home' while being in Morocco. In the case of Hind, transnational socio-cultural practices even increase social distancing, as when she speaks Dutch with her sister in the presence of non-migrants. In this sense, she did not manage to reconcile public expectations and personal preferences (cf. Pedersen 2003). For such reasons, second-generation adolescents wish to return to the Netherlands.

However, after a decade of living constrained lives, the women who returned to marry eventually managed to create an improved sense of home in which transnational identifications and practices play an important part. The recent introduction of a new Dutch law requiring migrants to pass a Dutch language test before obtaining a visa, created an opportunity for them to work as Dutch language teachers for prospective migrants. Besides the obvious social and economic gains, teaching Dutch also allows them to assert their Dutch identity. As Samia put it, 'I do not want to forget the Netherlands. It is nice that I can give Dutch lessons. I just love the Netherlands. I really feel like a Dutch person, more than a Moroccan.'

Interestingly, the women who returned to marry decided to raise their children in 'a Dutch way'. Samia, for instance, claimed that she would never approve of her daughter marrying a traditional man; she preferred a modern, 'like a European' man. Ikrame, who has Dutch citizenship, sends her children to family in the Netherlands every summer so that they can learn Dutch and become familiar with Dutch culture. Unlike the second-generation adolescents, they created a sustainable 'Dutch-Moroccan space' within Moroccan society, which increased their sense of belonging.

Conclusion

This study showed that transnational practices play an essential role in creating post-return belonging. The level of personal desire for return largely determines the size of the post-return transnational framework within which returnees negotiate belonging. The men who returned for socio-economic advancement and retirement came out of personal desire. As they had expected and planned their return, they prepared for it by maintaining transnational practices and social ties, which facilitated local and transnational belonging. Cassarino (2004) and Duval (2004) made similar observations. Men whose return was mainly driven by difficulties in the Netherlands, however, were motivated by negative (push) rather than positive (pull) factors, while their spouses and children had little agency to negotiate the return decision-making process. Upon return, they felt uprooted and experienced difficulties integrating and participating in local Moroccan society. The practical constraints on maintaining

transnational practices to a level that corresponds with their strong transnational self-identification aggravate their feelings of uprootedness and frustration.

Besides the specific circumstances that motivated return, gender and generation also explain differences in the perceived need to maintain transnational practices. For first-generation men, the form and frequency of the transnational practices they wish to maintain predominantly depend on their previous levels of 'integration' in the Netherlands. For their spouses, transnational practices are largely irrelevant to establishing a sense of home because they were never strongly oriented towards or integrated into Dutch society in the first place. They only maintain transnational ties if they have children or a husband still living in the Netherlands. Their desire to provide their children with a better future or to reunite with them mainly motivates their wish to return to the Netherlands. Their socio-cultural positions as mothers and spouses, rather than a lack of transnational practices, cause their feelings of uprootedness.

This shows that the wish to return to the Netherlands can remain strong after many years of return, even without actually maintaining transnational practices. Return to Morocco is particularly problematic for second-generation women because local circumstances and culture conflict with their own values and upbringing in the Netherlands. In particular, those who returned with their parents continue to feel uprooted and long to return to the Netherlands. However, some of the women who returned to marry managed to incorporate transnational practices in their lives. These practices provide them with a stable 'Dutch-Moroccan locality' in northeast Morocco.

This study shows that return is not simply a matter of going home, as top–down approaches to the 'politics of belonging' implicitly assume. Return migration is a much more complex matter in which migrants negotiate transnationally rooted forms of belonging. This study corroborates Pedersen's (2003) argument that returnees who have been able to reconcile public social (local) expectations and private (transnational) spheres are most successful upon return. Those who returned for socio-economic advancement and retirement, who were both locally integrated *and* transnationally oriented, experience the highest sense of belonging and are most personally satisfied with their return migration (as were Karim, Khalid and Najib). This demonstrates that transnational practices can reinforce orientation and involvement in origin *and* receiving societies. Put differently, transnational practices and identifications do not necessarily conflict with 'integration' (cf. Guarnizo et al. 2003; Snel et al. 2006). While this has been argued in the context of receiving societies, this study suggests that transnational practices might also facilitate 'integration' and enhance the returnees' feelings of belonging in the country of origin.

This illustrates that migrants and returnees negotiate their sense of belonging or place in society from a transnational or translocal position. Transnational practices appear to play a crucial role in the mediation between structural constraints and the wishes of individual returnees. A simple dichotomy between nationalities such as 'Moroccan' or 'Dutch', or categories such as 'settled' and 'returned', cannot, however, capture their identifications, nor can they be reduced to the individual characteristics of people. Where the politics of belonging dictates a regime of

differences and boundaries captured only in terms of differences between Moroccan and Dutch citizenship and residence rights, the (transnational) practices of the returnees themselves tend to crosscut such labels and categories.

Rather than simply subjected to discourses and structures, returnees find ways to establish post-return belonging through negotiating different institutional practices and discourses (Davids and van Driel 2005). First, there are those who prepare for their return by maintaining transnational contacts with Morocco while still residing in the Netherlands. These are usually first-generation men with a personal wish to return. Second, some returnees counter structural constraints by using transnational means to improve their social and economic wellbeing. They can do this internationally, by consciously maintaining access to social networks or insurance in Europe, and internally, for example by holding onto a Dutch passport or teaching Dutch. Such transnational practices and identifications also serve emotional needs, for the benefits of greater material security reinforce feelings of transnational and local belonging.

Finally, we suggest that there is a poor fit between (Dutch) return migration policies and Dutch-Moroccan returnees' actual experiences. Many migrants did not return out of personal preference, which seriously complicated their participation in and sense of belonging to local Moroccan society. The essentialist 'going home' philosophy of return migration policies fits uneasily with the fundamentally transnational belonging that the return migrants actually experience. For instance, return migrants are often restricted in their travel to the Netherlands, either temporarily or permanently. In this and many other ways, migration policies obstruct the maintenance of transnational practices, which often has severe consequences for personal wellbeing, particularly among second-generation women.

Note

1. 'Dutch-Moroccan return migrants' refer to all Moroccans who lived in the Netherlands for some time before returning, including those who never obtained Dutch citizenship.

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