

Return migration and development: a complicated marriage

Tine Davids and Ruerd Ruben

Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing attention for the potential contribution of migration to “development” in migrant-sending countries (Özden and Schiff, 2007). Return migration takes a somewhat special and ambivalent place in the - often assumed - unilateral relationship between migration and development. On one hand, return migrants have traditionally been attributed a crucial role in stimulating the possible local process. They are often expected to generate *braingain* or, more generally, contribute to social and cultural linkages that enhance the availability of capital and knowledge resources that might provide a significant development impulse to the society of origin (de Haas, 2005). If the rhythm of development in their country of origin takes a positive turn, migrants are likely to be amongst the first to join in and recognise such new opportunities, thus reinforcing these positive trends through investing and/or returning to their origin countries (de Haas, 2007). Consequently, sending countries are believed to benefit from the return of their migrants, who’s financial and human resources are believed to contribute to development.

On the other hand, especially within Europe where immigration policies have become stricter (partly in response to growing xenophobic attitudes), remigration becomes more and more related to the shift and changing perspectives in immigration policies, which have led to a growing emphasis on (forced and voluntary) return rather than integration (Black and Gent 2004:4-5; Blitz and Marzano, 2005:182-183). In the Netherlands, for instance, in this context of growing interrelatedness between remigration and restricted immigration, policy memoranda were formulated by the Dutch ministry for Alien Affairs and Integration, suggesting that development cooperation should be used as a strategy to contain the influx of migrants (Verdonk, 2003). While the minister of Development Cooperation stated at the same that - although containment of migration and international cooperation are not the same - they are indeed linked together, implying that an effective return could be favoured through international cooperation (Ardenne, 2003). In addition, sustainable return could contribute to local development processes. Return and remigration - forced or not - thus became part and parcel of a political discourse of which NGOs working with migrants, refugees and development were very reluctant to take part, rendering remigration and return a highly problematic phenomenon from a development perspective (PON, 2004).

In this article we provide a reflection on the phenomenon of return migration based on extensive field research on the sustainability of remigration processes under forced returnees, carried out by staff of the Radboud University Nijmegen

Centre for International Development Issues (CIDIN).¹ We argue for the importance to consider return migration as a process of mixed embeddedness and depart from an understanding of remigration within the framework of the politics of belonging. We demonstrate that such an approach leads to new insights regarding the complex interfaces between social, economic and psychosocial factors influencing local embeddedness processes, and we identify major intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence this process of mixed embeddedness. Most importantly, the study reveals that prospects for better local embeddedness of return migrants in their countries of origin strongly depend on the loving circumstances provided to them in the host country.

In so doing we share an approach in line with, and certainly inspired by Ton van Naerssen's own approach concerning the relation between migration and development and his keen interest for international entrepreneurship, where the concept of mixed embeddedness originates from. In particular since he always advocates that it is a common mistake to equate development with economic growth and loose sight of the human dimension in development: "However the issue of development is much more complex and includes social, cultural and political aspects" (van Naerssen in Nijenhuis *et al.*, 2007:15).

Returning, development and belonging

From a research and policy perspective, the link between return migration and home country development is not new. The Western European experience with "guest workers" from Morocco and Turkey provides early examples. In the 1960s and 1970s, both sending and host-country governments considered their stay as temporary. They were generally expected to return after a few years and to deploy their financial resources and newly acquired knowledge for the economic development of their home countries. In particular after the 1973 Oil Crisis, receiving countries such as France, Germany and the Netherlands experimented with policy incentives to stimulate return migration. The general image is that such policies failed and that the majority of migrants became settled in Western Europe, triggering a process of chain migration through family reunification and family formation. Low return migration coincided with the increasingly pessimistic views on the development potential of migration (Entzinger, 1985, Penninx, 1982, de Bree *et al.*, forthcoming).

More recently, within the renewed attention for remigration, return is increasingly considered as the natural thing to do for migrants, while at the same time, many positive influences for the country of return are attributed to it (see: Black and Gent 2006). Return is thus seen as an indicator for the maturing of a state and a way of contributing towards peace processes in post-conflict

¹ The research is based on a pilot study from 2006 among a total of 131 voluntary and involuntary returning migrants from Western Europe and relocated migrants from mainly Angola, Guinea, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia and a standardised monitoring study from 2007/2008 on assistance to 178 involuntary returning irregular migrants rejected asylum seekers and ex refugees in six different countries in three different continents: Sierra Leone, Togo, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan and Vietnam. In this study, quantitative methods (such as standardised surveys, factor and regression analysis) were used in combination with qualitative methods (such as in-depth interviews and life history analysis).

countries or (in the case of former Yugoslavia) to reverse ethnic cleansing (Black and Gent, 2004, Black, 2001, Eastmond, 2006). The most recent buzz word emphasising the bright side of return migration is that it could trigger the development of the home country. European policy makers have been quick to embrace this viewpoint and readily incorporate it in the new migration policies.

In this discourse where migration policies are articulated with development policy, return is all too often and too easily considered as simply 'going home'. As if it would be possible to just take up life where one has left. Although the post-return experiences of migrants are relatively understudied, empirical evidence shows that return is almost never simply going home (Ghanem 2003, Hammond, 1999, Pedersen, 2003). Let alone that going "home" would simply contribute to local development (Van Houte and De Koning, 2008). Consequently, many of the real experiences of (re)migrants do not fit into the dichotomous categories produced in the discourses that oppose "returned" vs. "settled" migrants (see also: Snel *et al.*, 2004).

Within this dichotomy, return implies smooth (re-)integration into the country of origin, which is - especially in the case of forced returnees - almost never the case. Not only is the dichotomy of returned versus settled not adequate to understand the remigration process, the term integration also falls short in capturing under which conditions migrants arrive to some form of settlement and acquire a sense of belonging. Integration within the public and political discourse on migration usually goes accompanied by connotations of adaptation to dominant norms in society. This suggests that the receiving country is one of social cohesion where existing cultural, ethnic, class or other difference are fully neglected (Anthias, 2006). Research has shown that in reality this process is far more complex. Returnees have to negotiate all these differences from a different predisposition after their migration experience, which contradicts the idea of simply fitting in because they arrive a gain in their country of origin (de Bree *et al.* forthcoming). Approaching (re)migration from such an integration perspective constructs newcomers in receiving countries foremost as the 'others', thus ignoring the predispositions from returnees or just considering that they can easily blend.

Furthermore, in particular in the case of forced migrants, remigration often implies returning to a changed country, where social relations, political structures and economic conditions are not what they used to be when the place was left. Confronted by such difficulties and given the sometimes difficult conditions of (re)settlement, the relation with development becomes very fragile. Expecting returnees that did not have the intention to return in the first place, to invest in a society where they do not want to be, turns out to be a strongly overestimated perspective.² It remains largely neglected how efforts for trying to gain some sort of belonging on behalf of returnees might counteract (at least in the short run) with their eventual attribution to the development of their countries of origin. Articulating remigration programs with development policies - as described above - tends to disguise the critical relation between individual sense of belonging and the politics of belonging as part of that same development process. Politics of belonging refers to specific political projects that try to define the boundaries of those who belong to a certain group or nation and those who

² In contrast to what NGOs and policy makers refer to as 'voluntary return', in this article, those migrants who did not manage to obtain a permanent permit to stay, or returned outside their own personal desire, are referred to as involuntary or forced migrants.

cannot exercise this belonging. Restricted national migration policies, citizenship arrangements or return projects are all critical aspects that can contribute (or not) to the re-construction or reconstitution of such boundaries and differences (Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2006).

Returnees have to actively negotiate these boundaries and differences upon their return, trying to construct a new sense of belonging and to formulate an identity. In studying the return process and its possible relation with development, this process of belonging has to be taken in consideration and needs to receive more emphasis and exploration than it has received so far within development studies. In order to do so and to avoid the negative connotations of the concept of integration as described above, we opted for using the alternative concept of mixed embeddedness for exploring whether return can be sustainable or not.

Embeddedness

Why mixed embeddedness?

Embeddedness is a concept originally developed and used within the context of institutional economics, launched in 1985 by Granovetter to identify trust as part of social networks that are crucial for the successful transactions of companies. Mixed embeddedness has also been used by Aldrich (1995), Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) and Kloosterman (2006) in exploring immigrant entrepreneurship. The basic idea of this concept refers to the process in which a person, organisation or company is able to participate in a given society depending heavily on the identity dimension (see also: Davids and van Houte, forthcoming). Although it may be argued that embeddedness is just another word for integration, it is important to bear in mind that in trying to conceptualise this process differently (from the way it is used in public integration and migration discourses) by using new or different concepts and metaphors can help to open new avenues for understanding the complex nature of society-group interactions.

Translated to remigration research, (re-)embeddedness entails a multidimensional concept that refers to an individual finding his/her own position in society and feeling a sense of belonging to and participating in that society. It consists of economic, social networks and psychosocial dimensions that are interrelated and could reinforce each other. As such, it takes remigration to be an ongoing process distinguishing different grades of participation and belonging to a society, which can be applied equally to migrants and non-migrants. Embedding is not simply measured by adaptation to dominant norms. Nor can re-migration be considered isolated from other stages in the migration cycle; it involves the experiences of dis-embedding in the country of origin when leaving, as well as the experiences of embedding in receiving countries.³

In contrast to departing from the predisposition that constructs migrants as 'others' in receiving countries and re-migrants as 'alike' in sending countries, the concept of mixed embeddedness proposes to explore in what way and in how far re-migrants are considered to be 'others' or construct themselves as 'others' or as

³ See also Boyd and Griego (2003) who distinguish different stages of the migration cycle.

'alike'. The dispositions with which a re-migrant arrives in the country of origin cannot be taken as given but need to be explored based on the everyday epistemologies of the returnees themselves. Following this approach, the operationalization of mixed embeddedness implied a mixture of quantitative methods (such as standardised surveys and regression analysis) that can be used in combination with qualitative methods (such as in depth interviews and life history analysis).

Mixed Embeddedness and Sustainable Return

Black *et al.* (2004:25) distinguishes between three elements of sustainable return: the subjective perspective of the returnee, the objective conditions of the returnee, and the aggregate conditions of the home country. Building on the concept of embeddedness, this means that not only measurable socio-economic indicators are taken into account, but also the importance that returnee attribute to these different elements plays a role. This approach furthermore assumes that individual sustainability is needed to guarantee a contribution to the stability of the home society.

The economic dimension of embeddedness refers to questions whether a returnee can rebuild a sustainable livelihood. Chambers and Conway (1991:6) define a sustainable livelihood as follows: A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (i.e. stocks of resources, claims and access) and activities required for making a living. In practice, a livelihood comprises the extent to which an individual owns, or otherwise has access to resources and assets, such as income, housing, land, livestock, transportation, education and health care. Moreover, it encompasses the livelihood capabilities which individuals can maintain and expand with these assets. Livelihoods are sustainable when they can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance their capabilities and assets, provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for next generations, and guarantee net benefits to other livelihoods both at local and global levels and in the short and long term (Chambers and Conway 1991; De Haan *et al.*, 2004; De Haan and Zoomers, 2003).

Social networks represent another dimension of embeddedness. Boekestijn (1988, 89) stressed that social relations provide migrants with the feeling of being accepted, and that social acceptance is a crucial factor for migration success. Social networks are important for acquiring information as well as sharing personal and intimate relations. In a more dynamical sense, social networks can add to social capital. Social capital refers to the features of social organisation, reciprocity, networks, information flows and social safety nets that emerge from social contacts between individuals in the society. This could lead to a more efficient and stable position of the individual in society. Whether returnee can benefit from social capital depends on the type of social networks they maintain. Not only the quantity and frequency of individual social contacts are important. Social contacts become valuable when there is some sort of 'closeness', the feeling that one can really rely on the other. According to Cassarino (2004:275), social networks are crucial for understanding the ways in which returnees can mobilize their resources while at the same time being involved in creating and maintaining cross-border social and socio-economic networks. For sustainable embeddedness, these networks need to be responsive to specific pre- and post-return conditions.

In addition to material wellbeing, psychosocial wellbeing is equally essential for finding one's place in society, and to acquire a sense of belonging to that society. An important aspect of this psychosocial well-being refers to the ability to construct and express one's identity. It provides an individual with a place in society, and at the same time establishes the connection between the self and that society (Ter Maat, 2002:15). Being free to construct one's identity and having this identity accepted in a wider society, leads to a feeling of belonging and attachment to certain localities, although these attachments and the way in which returnees position themselves may at the same time be highly trans-local (see also Anthias 2006, de Bree et al. forthcoming).

Identity is always dynamic, multidimensional and contextual (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1991). Identity is not a fixed and given character of a person. Rather, it is a dynamic process: a changing view of the self and the other. It is constantly influenced by different – sometimes opposing – processes (Ghorashi, 2001:22). The process of migration and remigration represent such processes (Nagel and Staeheli, 2004). Changes in geographical and cultural settings can lead to dramatic identity changes. In addition, returnees may also construct a transnational identity, which comprises a set of new hybrid cultural forms combined out of different cultures (Appadurai, in Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002:4; Brah, 1996; Dwyer, 2000). Upon return, a complex situation is likely to emerge. The returnees' new hybrid identities do not necessarily fit into the home society that has likely also undergone significant changes. In the ideal situation, the migrants will combine the best of both worlds and could benefit from this (Ghorashi, 2003:5). However, this situation can also create a feeling of 'in-betweenness' for the returnee; the feeling that they do not belong anywhere anymore (Ghorashi, 2001:119). The reaction of each individual returnee could be found somewhere between these two extremes.

It will be clear that all these dimensions of embeddedness are highly contextual and may differ consequently amongst countries. Notwithstanding these differences, in the research project carried out by CIDIN, we tried to analyse the influence of assistance provision (by governmental or non governmental organisations) on the prospects for re-embeddedment of migrants in their countries of origin. We especially considered the influence of the migration policies in the host country on the process of sustainable return migration.

Findings

The most important findings in exploring remigration as a process of mixed embeddedness indicate that (a) there is considerable diversity amongst the experienced levels of embeddedness amongst return migrants, and (b) individual return migrants experience wide varying degrees of economic, social and psychosocial embeddedment. In the majority of the cases concerning involuntary return, the returnees have barely been able to construct a sustainable livelihood (see also Van Houte and Davids, 2008 forthcoming).⁴

⁴ See also Van Houte and de Koning (2008) *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*. Research Report. Nijmegen: CIDIN, Cordaid and AMIDSt, and Van Houte and Davids (2008m forthcoming) 'Development and Return-

Economic embeddedness

On the economic dimension of embeddedness, many returnees who participated in the survey managed to meet their basic daily needs, such as accommodation and a certain amount of income, but their situation is often unstable. House ownership was very low and consequently most returnees had to live with relatives, sometimes causing tensions due to overcrowded houses. Also in terms of income, most returnees remain in an unstable and dependent position. In the sample of the 2007 return migration study, 50 percent fully depended on sources of income other than their own income generating capacities, such as allowance from relatives, remittances, loans, public relief, or humanitarian assistance.

Not having control over their own income, or depending on unstable sources of income puts these returnees in a very vulnerable position. The migrants that manage to generate a somewhat more independent income through salary or revenue from trade (50 per cent) are not necessarily in a sustainable income position either. Only 30 per cent of those with stable employment report that their income is sufficient to support themselves and their dependents. In sum, returnees are often worse off in terms of access to independent housing and income compared to their pre-migration situation.

Although for voluntary returnees the economic situation is different and not as fragile as for involuntary returnees, their return is not always economically successful either. Often, these migrants depend on 'Old Age Pension' (AOW) or 'Occupational Disability Insurance' (WAO). In addition, 45+ returnees can sometimes make use of an occupational disability insurance provided under the 'Remigration Act' (REM) (de Bree et al. forthcoming). This arrangement encourages return by covering returnees' travel expenses and monthly living costs. Returnees that are most successful in economic terms are those who voluntarily returned, were well-prepared and without any assistance. In the case of Suriname, for instance it was registered that people who returned independently and without any assistance were better prepared than those returning within the government-sponsored program for return, as this financial incentive for return often leads to too quick decisions (Bredewold, 2006; Huis in 't Veld, 2006).

Social Embeddedness

For fulfilling material needs, it is critical to find meaningful social contacts. Only 42 per cent of the return migrants stated that they could rely on their social contacts for material support (mainly accommodation). Living with family members not only implies having access to shelter, but also sharing in the household's other assets and income. Furthermore, having access to meaningful networks could also bring them into contact with their relations, who could provide returnees with employment or in another way help them rebuild their livelihoods. However, only returnees from privileged socio-economic backgrounds seemed to have access to these kinds of social relations. In less

migration: from policy panacea to migrant perspective sustainability', *Third World Quarterly*. The authors would like to acknowledge the researchers whose work this essay is based on: the master students that were engaged in the 2006 pilot study: Adriaan Kauffmann, Lieke van der Putten, Suzanne van Hattum, Marieke van Houte, Maaike Derksen and Maaike van Kruijsdijk, Femke Knoben, Laura Huis in het Veld, Femianne Bredewold, Bas Kleinhout, Judith Stegeman, June de Bree and the researchers that were involved in the 2007 research project: Marieke van Houte, Maaike Derksen, Moira Galloway, Alice Johansson, Mireille de Koning, June de Bree and Machteld Kuyper.

wealthy families, as returnees stretch the already limited budget of the household, they tend to cause a major burden. This explains part of the frustration that relatives sometimes express towards their returnee relatives. It may be no surprise that relatives in already unstable wealth cannot be a source of material assistance to returnees, since - as many returnees state - : '*they do not have anything themselves*'.

Most returnees have, for a number of reasons, only a small network of people on whom they can really rely. Mostly, these are members of their nuclear family. This puts returnees again in a rather vulnerable position. Returnees who lost these relations or for any other reason, do not have enough contacts on whom they can rely for their material (and emotional) needs, run the risk to become isolated. Social capital is thus of vital importance both for involuntary as for voluntary returnees upon and after return, to become part of local networks for information provision, access to resources and exchange networks (see also Casarino 2007).

Psycho-social embeddedness

A majority of involuntary returnees could rely on their social contacts for emotional support. This includes being able to confide in their social contacts, feeling trust towards and comfort with their contacts, sharing experiences and spending time together. Married respondents highly depend on their spouse to find emotional support and for sharing their problems. Three quarters of the sample state, however, that they changed during their time abroad and that they sometimes face difficulties in the country of return because of their modified identity. As returnees have often stayed abroad for many years, they have adopted some of the norms and values of the host country, and this influences how returnees perceive and behave towards the home country.

The way returnees are perceived by the society in the country of return strongly depends on the extent to which a returnee had a 'successful' migration experience. When a returnee was forced to leave the host country and, or did not manage to bring back money or assets, return is frequently seen as a failure. Consequently, these returnees are often stigmatized, excluded and discriminated. Differences in attitudes or behaviour from the dominant patterns are usually not accepted as being positive. This makes it difficult for them to construct a feeling of belonging. As a result, almost 40 per cent of the respondents claimed that they had trouble in expressing their identity as a returnee, and some of them preferred to conceal their 'returnee' status in trying to adjust to the dominant culture again. Behaviour that deviates from the norm is generally not well received and frowned upon.

In contrast, those returnees with a positive and successful migration experience were happy to be back and gained status from their newly acquired skills. As the experienced socio-economic changes also led to something meaningful for them and their family members, their behaviour was also generally better tolerated. This illustrates that different dimensions of embeddedness are interrelated and reinforce each other.

This also holds true for voluntary returnees: the more successful the migration experience the better re-embedded in the country of origin. However, it does not mean that all returnees easily adapt to their country of origin again. In the case of

Morocco, for instance, it became clear that in constructing a sense of belonging returnees apply transnational practises. They are not exclusively embedded in the local context of their communities of origin, but generally feel strong needs to maintain a number of economic, political and socio-cultural transnational practices (de Bree 2007; de Bree at al. forthcoming 2008). These return migrants uphold in varying degrees their Moroccan-Dutch or a Dutch-Moroccan identity. The transnational practices they exercise in constructing such an identity are highly dependent on motivations for return, gender and generation. Especially for former male labour migrants the incorporation of transnational practices in their lives is critical for establishing feelings of post-return belonging, whereas such practices were less relevant for their wives. Instead, they prefer to return to the Netherlands to improve the lives of their children, who feel uprooted in Morocco despite the transnational practices they hold.

Other aspects of the psychosocial dimension of embeddedness refer to psychological condition and the feelings of (un)safety. In often post-conflict societies where migrants migrated from, this is a key issue in itself. Furthermore, the migration experience can cause a feeling of cultural bereavement, which may include the loss of social structures, cultural values and self-identity. This may cause serious psychological disorders such as depression, phobia and schizophrenia (Bhugra and Becker, 2005). Psychosocial embeddedness in (post-) conflict countries depends very much on the feeling of safety. Physical un-safety is often still experienced in post-conflict countries due to lasting disputes and social and/or political tensions. This affects the mobility and limits the choice of place of residence for the returnees, who are restricted in returning to or visiting their pre-war homes or communities. Furthermore, in almost all countries, a lack of general safety feelings was reported due to unstable economic conditions and fragile livelihoods.

The majority of all returnees proved to be in vulnerable psychosocial positions. Psychological problems and a rejection by the home society of certain elements of their identity and the related pressure to adjust to dominant norms and values, affect their psychosocial embeddedness. However, these hardships do not prevent 64 per cent of the respondents to feel at home in the community of return. Presence of family and friends, home ownership and personal identification with the country were indicated as most important reasons for this.

Influencing factors

As mentioned above, the process of embedding and re-embedding is highly contextual and depends on diversified socio-economic opportunities. In a post-conflict country such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, favouritism among different ethnic groups played a significant role in the process of embedding. Notwithstanding these differences, we would like to discuss briefly the influence of two particular factors on the re-embedding process: (a) the position of the returnee in the migration cycle and (b) the impact of different types of assistance provision on the prospects for enhancing embeddedness.

Migration Cycle

The experiences gained in the migration cycle of the returnee migrants plays a crucial role in their possibilities upon return. Especially, the circumstances under which one came to and left from the host country, and which living circumstances were experienced abroad, proved to have an essential impact on psychosocial embeddedness, thereby strongly influencing social networks and economic embeddedness upon return.

All respondents from post-conflict countries stated that insecurity and unsafety were important reasons to flee. In addition to these macro factors, there are always other - often personal - reasons at the micro level that provide the direct trigger for leaving the country. The caseload proved that motivations to flee or move are never one-dimensional but always involve a complex combination of different factors and motivations. As van Naerssen argues: “the fact that people migrate is often taken for granted, however when interviewing migrants it becomes clear that the decision to migrate is in most cases not taken deliberately” (van Naerssen in Nijenhuis et al., 2007:15). A migrant from Angola (interviewed in the Netherlands) stated that he wanted to migrate already for a long time for economic reasons. After the outbreak of the conflict that was internationally recognized he was supplied with legitimate grounds for migration and a refugee status. Another female migrant from Somalia who fled to another part of the country and eventually left because she did not belong to any clan which affected her identity and safety in the new pro-clan policy, declared that at the same time she escaped from her husband who she did not want to see anymore. Here, a combination of ethnicity, safety and gender-related reasons represented the basis to out-migration. There are many examples of situations where the conflict was an important reason to leave the country, but seldom was it the only driving force.

Cross-section analyses of surveys and life histories can unravel the ways in which macro and micro factors in a complex connectivity work together in stimulating a person to become a migrant or refugee. Motivations and stimuli that appear in large scale surveys easily as mainly economic or political, in reality are far more complex and interwoven. The reasons and events that caused people to migrate are also related to the expectations they have regarding their stay in the host country. It appears that if migrants go with the intention to eventually return and are better informed of what they can expect during their stay in the host country (i.e. temporary protection until return once the conflict had ended), this contributes to returnees being psychologically better prepared to accepting their return and to rebuild their lives once returned. Furthermore, migrants who expect they would have to return eventually invest substantially more in maintaining their transnational social networks. The extent to which these initial motives and practices play a role before return takes place, has a decisive effect on the way returnees can accept being back.

Additionally, the living circumstances provided in the host country also play a crucial role. Migrants often spend a significant period of their lives in the host country. Actually, the majority of the forced migrants become (more) depressed because of the insecurity and the problems they face during their stay in the host country. This applies especially to migrants that did not have any chance to make themselves useful with work or study in the host country. A forced migrant interviewed in the host country says: ‘I don’t like thinking too much, because I

almost get sick. (...) Too much pressure what will happen tomorrow. I am exhausted' (Knoben, 2006).

Returnees, who managed to maintain independent living circumstances abroad through work, having access to independent housing and by maintaining broad social contacts are on all dimensions significantly better embedded than those who did not have these opportunities. Although migrants without a permanent permit to stay are often engaged in low-skilled jobs below their qualifications, and the skills or knowledge necessary for these jobs were often not very relevant for finding employment upon return, they greatly benefited from the possibility to work in a number of ways. First of all, it gives them the opportunity to save some money which they save to take back after return or send back to their country of origin, thus strengthening their social networks. Both savings and remittances contributed to the returnees' economic and social embeddedness. Moreover, being incorporated in a working environment abroad and generating one's own income gives migrants the possibility to remain their self esteem and develop their survival skills.

Social contacts, independent living circumstances and the possibility to work allowed migrants to take control over their own situation and lead an active life without depending fully on asylum centres and social benefits. In contrast, migrants are held in asylum centres and depend on social welfare, often do not manage to take control over their lives upon return and thus face a disadvantage regarding their prospects for becoming embedded. Even while the more independent conditions abroad did not cause a large improvement in living status compared to the life one prior to migration, it prevents the degradation of self esteem and enables the maintenance of survival skills that are critical for creating embeddedness upon return.

A final influencing factor within the migration cycle refers to the conditions under which return takes place. The legal status of migrants at the point of return influences the agency they have in the decision to return. Migrants who returned due to pressure or force from authorities expressed their frustration for 'not being ready yet', both mentally and practically. Furthermore, it has an impact on the way returnees were perceived by the people in their home society. For example, in Sierra Leone, it became quickly known when a forcibly deported returnee arrived handcuffed and under the supervision of policemen, and these people were often severely stigmatised, thus affecting their psychosocial embeddedness. The specific individual characteristics of returnees combined with their position in the migration cycle represent a returnee's complex background that should be taken into account when considering the type of assistance provision suitable for the returnees.

Return Assistance

The biggest challenges for migrants upon return are (a) building an independent and sustainable livelihood, (b) gaining trust and respect from social networks, and (c) developing a feeling of belonging. Considering the obstacles that many returnees face, it is of interest to see to what extent assistance can help to overcome these obstacles. We distinguish between different types of pre- and post-return assistance and also consider the relative effectiveness of public and voluntary (NGO) agencies and private networks.

Pre-return preparation assistance, with the aim of facilitating a free and well-informed choice to return, has a positive contribution to all dimensions of embeddedness, especially when provided by friends or family. When migrants could make use of accurate information on the situation in their country of origin from people they trust, it gives migrants the feeling of having a real say in the return decision. This effect was, however, not found when the information was offered by (public) institutions that migrants conceived as the actors that were merely pushing them out of the host country. Moreover, while returnees initially did have confidence in the sincere intentions of NGOs, many of them stated to be rather disappointed in them after return, as the high expectations that were raised about the possibilities in the home country, did not come true. This is not necessarily the result of purposefully given false information, but rather of unclear and under-defined communication about assistance possibilities. For example, this can be the case when NGOs communicate with their clients through third parties, who may not share the same vision on return. In the return migration monitoring study of 2007, the communication between the NGO and the returnee took place through a governmental organisation that had more interest in the return of migrants and therefore may have given a brighter image of the available assistance to encourage their agreement to return.

Incorrect or sometimes misleading information that is meant to 'convince' migrants to return causes returnees to feel tricked into agreeing to do so. The frustration, disappointment and the feeling that their return is a result of an unfair procedure, prevents returnees to accept being back. Therefore, pre-return preparation and information assistance can only have a positive impact when it contributes to return (a) being based on a well-informed choice and (b) being followed up by effective post-return assistance. Most NGOs have not been able to make use of this potential dual role in trying to provide assistance to returnees.

Post-return assistance is the most direct way to try to respond to returnees' needs. Two thirds of the interviewed returnees in the 2007 return migration monitoring study had at least to some extent, access to institutional assistance services after return. While a large variety of assistance facilities are available after return, the focus is usually on financial assistance which can be unconditional sums of money, monetary assistance for starting a business, providing money for (temporary) housing or for medication for a certain period of time. Less tangible forms of assistance, such as information and psychosocial counselling, are scarcely provided. From the perspective of support agencies, giving financial assistance is often the easiest, quickest and best measurable method; especially in situations where many people return simultaneously to their country of origin and need coordinated assistance. Also from the perspective of the returnee, the primary needs after return are material. Monetary assistance that is given to the returnees is rarely monitored and therefore often spent on other purposes than it was aimed for. This unmonitored and incidental financial assistance provided in cash or in kind, proved to have limited effects for enhancing sustainable livelihoods.

In contrast, more focussed assistance for setting up own-account business or service activities significantly and positively contributes to embeddedness. An explanation for this lies in the fact that it is a more conscious process aiming at generating an independent income. This support is often provided in stages, starting with planning and some non-material guidance to help the returnees

decide in what area they would like to engage in a business and asking them to take active steps towards this goal. While financial assistance is certainly important, it is the combination with human guidance aimed towards an independent sustainable livelihood embedded into social networks, which makes business assistance successful.

As an alternative to business assistance, recent initiatives are providing assistance in finding wage employment through subsidised work programmes where returnees are hired for six months by a local firm. These programmes recently started but it remains questionable if, in a country of high unemployment, participants will keep their job after the subsidy has expired. However, the strength of the initiative is that it recognises the fact that not every individual returnee has entrepreneurial skills and can be expected to run a business. It is important to follow the developments of these projects, to see whether the concept can work.

Additional to material assistance, practical information is also essential after return. At the moment, returnees often get lost in bureaucratic requirements that they do not know. In none of the studied countries, however, an information package for returnees was available that guided them through the practical resettlement and legal procedures. Local partner organisations could prepare such an information package for returnees. In addition, in certain contexts of (post) conflict, access to psychosocial assistance is crucial. The virtual absence of this type of assistance has a strong negative influence on embeddedness.

Most important actors in (after return) return assistance are host-government programmes (mainly implemented by the International Organisation for Migration/IOM) and activities by local voluntary organisations funded by Western NGOs. There exist clear differences in the scale and approach between these two different actors. Government-funded institutions like IOM have an advantage in scale and budget. For returnees from host countries that have a programme with IOM and who qualify for their assistance, a substantial amount of money is available. However, local organisations that are funded by NGOs have a better potential to contribute to embeddedness through their small-scaled, more personal-tailored and flexible approach. This gives them more room to respond to specific needs of individual returnees in the assistance provision. Nevertheless, this potential is not fully realised, largely due to budget and staff limitations, but also related to the limited abilities of the partner organisations that are often not specialised in issues of return migration. Therefore, NGOs that work in this area do not optimally use the added value that local organisations could provide. In addition, the flexible and informal character of return assistance also becomes a weakness when there are no clearly defined boundaries about what returnees can expect and what an NGO has to offer.

Compared to the contextual factors and the migration cycle, assistance plays a much smaller role in the process of embeddedness of return migrants. This confirms other findings in the Maghreb region where less than one out of ten return migrants declared having benefited from the support of the public authorities after return (Cassarino, 2007). Moreover, the potentially positive influence that assistance can have is not always fully operationalised. While the challenges of building a sustainable livelihood are mostly only partially addressed, other equally important dimensions of embeddedness such as building social networks and gaining a feeling of belonging are often left aside. An integrated approach is required, where both material and human assistance needs are

addressed, and which can be rely on the social networks structure of the returnees. This implies that assistance activities need far more careful implementation within a framework of reinforcing diverse, multi-activity and multi-location livelihood strategies.

Outlook and Policy Implications

Even for voluntary returnees, return migration does not signify simply going home. Processes of embedding are a key prerequisite for assessing whether return migration can be sustainable and eventually lead to a contribution to development. While achieving sustainable return for the individual returnee is thus already an enormous challenge, it cannot be expected from these returnees that they contribute to development. Rather, the opposite is true: returnees often represent a burden to the household budget and put high pressure on already limited employment, health care and education facilities in the country of return. In contrast to the common thinking and discourse on migration and development, our sample analysis of involuntary returnees experiences points to high risks of deprivation and exclusion for the individual, the household and eventually the community of return.

We also registered a direct and transnational interconnectedness between restrictive living circumstances provided in the host society and their often negatively affect on the possibilities towards re-embeddedment after return to their country of origin. This implies that there are major inconsistencies in current Western European migration policies. While the intention is expressed and budgets assigned to enable return migrants to contribute to development in their country of origin, this intention is severely undermined by extremely restrictive migration policies that constrain the rights of migrants during their stay in the host country. Especially irregular migrants and refugees are constructed as citizens in between states, left with no substantial ways to participate in society or earn a position in that society, (in a sense as 'superfluous'). After spending years in these circumstances, too much damage is done to a returnee to be able to fix this with assistance programmes, which are furthermore too limited in size and duration to be able to make a difference. Encouraging migrants to contribute to development can not merely be accomplished by means of these post-return assistance programmes, but should start with constructive pre-return engagement. This illustrates the strange paradox of expecting return migrants that at a certain stage of their migration process are conceived as superfluous, to transform themselves into actors who can rebuild their societies at a subsequent stage of their remigration process.

Finally, (inter)national citizenship arrangements that are intrinsic part of the current multidimensional development process easily get lost when captured in the static dichotomous opposition of returnees versus settled migrants in the migration discourse on development. Instead of considering these different stages as interconnected phenomena forming part of the same chain, the current migration discourse on development tries to construct them as separate and apart. This renders the already complicated and problematic marriage between return migration and development a very fragile one. Expectations are that this may

further deteriorate with the latest restrictive policy measures agreed upon in the European Union.

References

- Aldrich, H. and Waldinger, R. (1990), 'Ethnicity and entrepreneurship', *Annual Review of Sociology* 16:111-135
- Anthias, F. (2006), Belongings in a globalising and unequal world: rethinking translocations. in N. Yval-Davis, K. Kannabiran, U.M Vieten (eds.) *The Situated Politics of Belonging*. London: Sage
- Black, R. (2001), Return and reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Missing link, or mistaken priority? SAIS Review, XXI:177-199.
- Black, R. and Gent S. (2004), *Defining, measuring and influencing sustainable return: The case of the Balkans*. Brighton: Sussex Centre for Migration Research.
- Black, R. and Gent, S. (2006), 'Sustainable return in post-conflict contexts', *International Migration*, 44 (3):15-38.
- Blitz, B., Sales, R. and Marzano, L. (2005), Non-Voluntary Return? The Politics of Return to Afghanistan. *Political Studies*, 53:182-200.
- Boekestijn, C. (1998), 'Intercultural migration and the development of personal identity: the dilemma between identity maintenance and cultural adaptation', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12 (2):83-105.
- Boyd, M., Grieco, E. (2003), *Women and migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Brah, A. (1996), *Cartographies of diaspora*. London: Routledge.
- Bredewold, F. (2006), *Ik heb mijn wortels dan wel in Suriname, maar mijn kruin steekt nu eenmaal over de hele wereld. De re-embedding van Surinaamse remigranten en de invloed op de identiteitsconstructie*. Nijmegen: Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen.
- Bryceson, D. and Vuorela, Un (2002), 'Transnational families in the twenty-first century', in D. Bryceson & U Vuorela (eds), *The transnational family*,. Oxford-New York: Berg. pp. 3-30.
- Bhugra, D. and Becker, M. A. (2005), Migration, cultural bereavement and cultural identity, *World Psychiatry*, 4(1):18-24.
- Cassarino, JP. (2004), Theorising return migration: a revisited conceptual approach to return migrants. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 6, 162-188.
- Cassarino, JP. (ed.) (2007), *Return Migrants to the Maghreb. Reintegration and Development Challenges. Global Report*. Florence: Robert Shuman Centre for advanced studies, European University Institute.
- Chambers, R. and Conway, G. (1991), *Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century*. IDS Discussion paper 296. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Davids, T. and Van Houte, M. (2008), 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: an Agenda for Qualitative research?' in Jean Pierre Cassarino (ed.) *Contemporary Challenges in Return: In Theory and in Practise*. Florence: Robert Shuman Centre for advanced studies, European University Institute.
- de Bree, J. (2007), *Belonging, Transnationalism and Embedding. Dutch Moroccan Return Migrants in North East Morocco*. Nijmegen: Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen.
- de Bree J., Davids, T. and de Haas, H. (2008, forthcoming), *Reverse Transnationalism. Post-return experiences and belonging of Dutch-Moroccan Return Migrants*. Working paper. International Migration Institute James Martin 21st Century School University of Oxford United Kingdom.
- De Haan, L., Kaag, M. en De Bruijn, M. (2004), *Ways Forward in Livelihood Research*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

- De Haan, L. and Zoomers, A. (2003), Development geography at the crossroads of livelihood and globalisation, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 94 (3):350–362.
- de Haas H. (2005), International migration, remittances and development: Myths and facts. *Third World Quarterly* 26:1269-84.
- de Haas H. (2007), *Remittances and social development: A conceptual review of the literature*. Geneva: UNRISD.
- Dwyer, C. (2002), Negotiating diasporic identities: young British South Asian muslim woman, *Woman's studies international forum*, 23 (4):475-486.
- Eastmond M. (2006), 'Transnational returns and reconstruction in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina', *International Migration*, 44 (3):141–166.
- Entzinger H. (1985), Return Migration in Western Europe: Current policy trends and their implications, in particular for the second generation. *International Migration* 23:263-290.
- Ghanem, T. (2003), *When forced migrants return 'home': The psychosocial difficulties returnees encounter in the reintegration process*. RSC working paper no.16. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre.
- Ghorashi, H. (2001), Ways to survive, battles to win. Iranian women exiles in the Netherlands and the US. Nijmegen: Radboud University Nijmegen.
- Ghorashi, H. (2003), Iraanse vrouwen, transnationaal of nationaal? Een (de)territoriale benadering van 'thuis' in Nederland en de Verenigde Staten, *Migrantenstudies*, 3:140-156.
- Giddens, A.(1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Granovetter, M. (1985), Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness, *American Journal of Sociology*, 91 (3):481-510.
- Hall, S. (1991), Ethnicity: identity and difference, *Radical America*. 203 (4):9-20.
- Hammond, L. (1999), Examining the discourse of repatriation: towards a more proactive theory of return migration. In: Black and Koser (eds.), *The end of the refugee Cycle: From Repatriation to Reconstruction?* New York: Berghahn Books. pp.227-244
- Huis in 't Veld, L. (2006), *De rol van transnationale contacten bij het opbouwen van een duurzaam bestaan. Een onderzoek naar het proces van bestaansopbouw van vrijwillig teruggekeerde Surinaamse remigranten*. Nijmegen: Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen.
- Kloosterman, R. (2006), *Mixed Embeddedness as a Conceptual Framework for Exploring Immigrant Entrepreneurship*, Eurex Lecture nr. 8. Amsterdam institute of Metropolitan and International Development Studies.
- Knoben, F. (2006), *Een 'nieuw' bestaan in het land van herkomst? Een onderzoek onder uitgeprocedeerde asielzoekers in Nederland*. Nijmegen: Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen.
- Nagel, C.R. and L.A. Staeheli (2004), Citizenship, identity and transnational migration: Arab immigrants to the United States, *Space and Polity* 8 (1):3-23.
- Neijenhuis, G et al. (ed.) (2007), *Migration for Development ? Viewpoints and policy initiatives of the countries of origin/destination, migration organisations and donor agencies, final report*. DPRN report no.3 Development Policy Review Network.
- Özden, C and Schiff, M., (eds.) (2007), *International migration, economic development and policy*. Washington: World Bank and Palgrave MacMillan.
- Pedersen M.H. (2003), *Between homes: post-war return, emplacement and the negotiation of belonging in Lebanon New issues in refugee research*. Working Paper no.79. Denmark: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Penninx R. (1982), A Critical Review of Theory and Practice: The Case of Turkey. *International Migration Review* 16:781-818
- PON (2004), *Kansrijk Terugkeren of Doormigreren?* Noord-Brabant: PON

- Snel, E., Engbersen, G., Leerkes, A. (2004), Voorbij Landsgrenzen. Transnationale betrokkenheid als belemmering voor integratie? *Sociologische Gids*, 51:75-100.
- Ter Maat, I. (2002), *I am a tree with roots in Chile, and branches and fruit in the Netherlands*, Nijmegen: Vrouwen Alliantie Media Producties.
- van Ardenne, A. (2003), Kamerbrief aan Eerste en Tweede Kamer over de notitie 'Aan elkaar verplicht'. <http://www.eerstekamer.nl/9324000/d/292/w29234b1.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2007).
- van Houte M and Davids T. (2008 forthcoming), 'Development and Return-migration: from policy panacea to migrant perspective sustainability', *Third World Quarterly*.
- van Houte M and de Koning M. (2008), *Towards a better embeddedness? Monitoring assistance to involuntary returning migrants from Western countries*. Research Report. Nijmegen: CIDIN, Cordaid and AMIDST
- Verdonk, M. C. F. (2003), *Terugkeernota, maatregelen voor een effectievere uitvoering van het terugkeerbeleid*. 's-Gravenhage: SDU Uitgevers.
- Waldinger, R. (1995), The other side of embeddedness: A case study of the interplay of economics and ethnicity, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18 (3):555-80.
- Yval-Davis, N., Kannabiran, K., Vieten, U.M. (2006), *The situated politics of belonging*. London: Sage.