"Being left behind" Gendered forced return migration, women's agency and the NGO battle, the Moroccan case

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Abstract

In this article I focus on a still unknown form of gendered forced return migration: migrant women and youngsters are left behind in their country of origin by their husbands and fathers, particularly during the summer holiday. Marriage migration is the only way to settle legally in The Netherlands, for men and women. Nevertheless we see primarily women and children being left behind and forced into return migration, hardly men. Looking at women's resistance to this forced return migration, it is important to examine organised efforts and individual women's agency on the one hand and the strategies of the husbands and fathers on the other hand. I will argue that the transnational context of marriage migration creates a deteriorated power balance in favour of men to the detriment of women.

Keywords: forced return migration, being left behind, transnational ties, power balance, women's agency

Introduction

Women are usually absent from the analyses in classic migrant studies, the presupposition being that women did not migrate independently, but only with their husbands. Women were seen as economically dependent on their husbands and their marriage was assumed to be the legal basis of their residency in Europe. The consequence of this legal dependency meant that women had a very weak and uncertain position in relation to accessing health and social services and a vulnerable position in relation to domestic violence (Freedman 2003)). At the end of the last century, research on women and migration began focussing on the intersection of migration, gender, ethnicity and class (Salih 2003). In the meantime, a tendency developed - the feminisation of the migrant streams, not only in marriage migration but also in labour migration. At the same time, another migrant stream can be identified, that of the 'return migration' of women and children and this migration stream is forced and feminine.

Nowadays because of the restricted migration politics in the Netherlands, migration from Morocco (and other countries) to the Netherlands, has decreased. Practically the only way to settle legally is by marriage. But this is not just for the women who want to migrate. In 2001 more than half the Turkish and Moroccan population in the Netherlands got their marriage partner from the country of origin (of the parents) (Hooghiemstra 2003, Sterckx and Bouw 2005). This number, however, decreased between 2001 and 2007 to 17% and, from then on, the decrease stopped. This was not only the case for men but also for women. Moroccan-Dutch men and -women get their marriage partner from their country of origin but 70% of the current transnational marriages involve women and 30% men (Sterckx et al. 2014).This figure is based on research from 2014, but also confirmed by figures from the 2017 CBS statline (Central Bureau Statistics in the Netherlands).

But this is not the only trend that has been identified. What we see today is a new development – a gendered form of forced return migration: women, young people, and children, who are left behind by their husbands and fathers, particularly during the summer holiday. In this article I focus on this gendered forced return migration. Why is this forced return migration mainly feminine, when marriage migration is not excluded for men? Moroccan men and women marry to migrate to the Netherlands while forced return migration, being left behind, has a feminine character. Even though there are Moroccan men who enter a transnational marriage, we could find only two cases of men being left behind. A second question is about women's agency. Is this forced return migration interpreted by women as their victimhood? Can we examine organised efforts and individual women's agency in subverting or co-opting these forms of forced return migration?

This gendered forced return migration is still not very well understood, so I will draw attention to this phenomenon, the previous history of this research and the category of women concerned. Next, I will explore the background of the marriage migration of North African migrants and the transnational context. Looking at women's resistance to this forced return migration, it is important to examine the organised efforts made by women organisations and the individual women's agency on the one hand, and the strategies of the husbands and fathers on the other. I will argue that the transnational context of marriage migration creates a deteriorating power balance which favours men and is detrimental to women. Thanks to transnational women organisations this forced return migration has become a policy item to combat.

FORCED RETURN MIGRATION

Annually, primarily during school holidays, migrant wives with or without their children, sometimes children without their mother, with or without Dutch nationality, are forced by the wife's husband and the children's father to make a return migration to

the parent's country of origin. Reasons for this can differ. Usually there are marital problems but there can also be problems in upbringing, education and fear of Dutch society ("too much freedom for women and children") which play a role too. The husband/father withholds the wife/mother's and children's identification papers (passports and residence permits) and returns alone to the Netherlands. Women are confronted with barriers to their return to the Netherlands, and with problems if they succeed to return. The children's problems are related but usually different in their effects. In the Netherlands, the number of women and children of Moroccan and Turkish origins (Bartels 2005) and from other countries, who were left behind or forced into making a return migration are estimated (Smits Van Waesberghe et al. 2014) as there is no formal registration process. [1] This forced return migration of women and children takes place among all sorts of migrant groups and in countries other than the Netherlands (Codrington 2013, Appendix). Very little is known about this subject. We will limit ourselves here to Moroccans in the Netherlands. They top the number of calls to the *Landelijk Knooppunt Huwelijksdwang en Achterlating* (LKHA), the Dutch Center of Forced Marriage and Abandonment's helpline and there has been some research conducted. (See Appendix, for a statistical view of the number of cases from 2015-2019, who registered asking for helpline advice. This number is increasing, probably because the helpline is becoming better known). Moroccans have emigrated to a great number of countries. The issues related to being forced into return migration by being left behind in the country of origin will, therefore, be known in other countries to which Moroccans have emigrated and where they have established themselves. Some cases from Belgium are found. But unfortunately, no further research is known on this topic.

The fact that this issue of forced return migration by leaving behind migrant wives and children from the Netherlands is being broached has to do with the political action of a transnational NGO (Non-governmental Organisation) working in Morocco (Berkane) and in the Netherlands (Utrecht/Zaltbommel), named SSR, *Stichting Steunpunt Remigranten, (*The Foundation for the Support of Re-migrants).[2] On their behalf, research was conducted by the Dutch government (Bartels 2005), politicians were asked to look at the situation and a national policy was developed. A helpline, knowledge and expertise centre for professionals, the above mentioned LKHA, *Landelijk Knooppunt Huwelijksdwang en Achterlating*, (The Dutch Centre for Forced Marriage and Abandonment), was set up

[1] https://www.kis.nl/artikel/we-zetten-veel-te-weinig-vraagtekens-bij-een-lege-stoel-de-klas. (We do not question enough when there are empty chairs in a classroom) Retrieved April 11, 2019. This is an article based on research about migrant young people and abandonment in their country of origin (from their parents). One can find an educated guess regarding the cases of neglects, being left behind in the years 2011 and 2012 as being between 364 and 1,631 in the Netherlands.

[2] http://www.steunremigranten.nl/

in 2015 for those individuals who were either left behind, threatened with being left behind or under the threat of forced marriage. An overview of the number of people and their countries of origin who have been helped by this helpline can be found in the appendix.

PREVIOUS HISTORY

The SSR Maroc (Berkane) has been demanding that attention be given to this problem for years. From its very beginnings, questions about forced return migration (by leaving wives and children behind in Morocco) have confronted the SSR. Originally this forced return migration was seen as occurring incidentally but SSR started to set up a separate filing system for it, and did demand attention for this phenomenon from the media and politicians. SSR worked with solicitors in the Netherlands, specialised in migration law and family law. After several years, this forced return migration revealed its structural character and its peak occurrence which was primarily at the end of the summer holiday. In 2000, the SSR began setting up files on these women and children in a more systematic way, making the phenomenon visible. From that time on, Dutch Members of Parliament started asking questions to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Advisory Committee on Aliens Affairs funded an anthropological research project which was conducted between November 2004 and January 2005 in the Netherlands. In June 2005, supplementary research was carried out in Morocco and the research project's findings from both countries were published (Bartels 2005).

The Mudawanah working group in the Netherlands, a transnational women's organisation, set up to inform Moroccan migrant women about the reform of the Moroccan family law of 2004. This women's organisation started an awareness raising campaign to inform Moroccan migrant women in the Netherlands and Moroccan women in Morocco about this reform of the family law, in Morocco (2004), about the changing position of women, and about women and children being left behind and forced into return migration. It offered solutions on how to prevent and solve these forced practices.

In the years following, the Dutch government supported (women) organisations like the SSR, the *Mudawanah* working group, and others. Islamic based organisations like SPIOR[3] developed public campaigns against forced marriage and published information about marriage by force in several books and in a number of languages such as English, French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish and Arabic. Platforms were set up to disseminate information for local policy and care providing.

[3] SPIOR is the acronym for the Platform for Islamic Organisations in Rijnmond *(Dutch: Stichting Platform Islamitische Organisaties Rijnmond)* and is the Islamic umbrella organisation in Rotterdam and neighbouring towns, in the Netherlands. Most of the mosques in Rotterdam are members, as well as many socio-cultural organisations, youth and women's organisations. http://www.spior.nl/what-is-spior/ Retrieved April 11, 2019

In the meantime, research continued in Morocco and in the Netherlands with the assistance of SSR, the working group Mudawanah and local women organisations in the Netherlands. Cases were collected in Morocco and in the Netherlands, interviews were conducted, theses and articles were written, about migrant women and children being left behind (De Bree et al. 2009, 2011). Expert meetings were held and research was extended to include Turkey and Somalia (Codrington 2013).

WHO ARE THE WOMEN CONCERNED?

Different categories of women and children forced into return migration to the country of origin (of the parents) can be identified. De Poorte (2004:352), for example, distinguishes three categories: underage girls, women/girls on holiday, unaware of remigration/the threat of being left behind, and wives forced into return migration against their will.

Forced return migration therefore has three distinct categories: (1) children/young people, especially girls, one or both of whose parents think their upbringing is problematic, sometimes they are forced to marry, (2) wives and children voluntarily going along and then being left behind and thus forced into return migration, and (3) wives and older children who agree to return migration under pressure. This research is aimed primarily at the first and second category: wives/children and young people voluntarily going to the country of origin but forced into return migration when left behind. During the research period, stories did the rounds of husbands alleged to have been left behind. Sometimes wives threatening to leave husbands behind does occur, especially in the first stages of a marriage. As I found no single instance of forced remigration of husbands, I am assuming this is a very small minority and so I am ignoring the category of husbands left behind. We are therefore concerned with a gendered form of forced return migration.

De Poorte (2004:352) emphasises that this is a very diverse group which is primarily related to the legal status of those concerned. There are wives/children and young people who have the Dutch nationality, and the nationality of the country of origin. There are wives/children who do not have Dutch nationality. Instead they have a residence permit, provisional or non-provisional, for a defined or undefined period of time, or they have lost this due to the length of their forced remigration. Sometimes a woman's nationality will differ from the children's. In practice, this can cause special problems. Research has shown that wives are left behind if they do not have, or no longer have, a Dutch residence permit because it has lapsed during their stay in the Netherlands. There are husbands who do not extend their wife's MVV, *Machtiging Voorlopig Verblijf* (*Authorisation for a Provisional Stay*) or do not exchange it for a provisional or non-provisional residence permit. This means that these women are in the Netherlands illegally and either have no

rights or no longer have rights. This makes wives in this category completely dependent on their husband and his family. But even if the MVV has been converted into a provisional residence permit, the woman is still dependant on her husband and her marriage to stay. This is for a period of five years. After five years, a woman can ask for a non-provisional residence permit. Until the end of 2012 it was possible to get a non-provisional residence permit after a stay of three years, but the period has now been extended to five years.

The group which is the main focus of this research therefore, is forced into return migration and to remain in the country of origin while it could live or could have lived legally in the Netherlands. The type of force differs for children and young people from that which the wives endure. Adult married women are legally competent, meaning that they themselves have control over their place of residence. This is not the case for children/young people who have not yet reached the age of majority. They are not yet legally competent and their parents are responsible for them. That is true as well for children/young people for whom the parents think there have upbringing difficulties. This can cause problems even in cases of initial agreement with remigration. Children who have been forced to return migration have to adjust to the new situation. What initially was agreement can turn into a situation they experience as forced remigration (De Bree et al. 2009, 2011).

FORCED RETURN MIGRATION IN MOROCCO: ESTIMATION

It is not easy to provide clear figures of the numbers of wives/children and young people forced into return migration to Morocco. The Dutch Embassy in Rabat (Morocco) does not register people who are left behind, who come to the embassy for a copy of their residence permit or passport. This is why I will base my estimate of the numbers of wives left behind in Morocco on available figures from the NGO SSR.

Yearly reports made to the original, SSR, support centre in Berkane, account for an average of twenty-five to thirty women per year. These figures do not include the women who left for the Netherlands without receiving any further help from the SSR, or women who succeeded in returning and waited in the Netherlands for their proceedings for admission to the Netherlands. Sometimes they were obliged to return to Morocco if they were refused admission. In all cases, these are women who could have Dutch children. If we assume that nowhere near all the wives/children and young people left behind report to the SSR, figures are much higher. Not all Moroccan wives living in the Netherlands and holidaying in Morocco with family are aware of the existence of the SSR support centre either. Berkane is situated in North-East Morocco. Most Moroccan migrants who come to the Netherlands, come from that area and from the Rif Mountains. Additionally, Moroccans emigrate to the Netherlands from primarily the western coastal area, the cities

in central Morocco and from the Atlas Mountains. Therefore twenty-five to thirty reports, the yearly numbers of SSR, only provide an indication of the total category of wives/children and young people forced to return migration. We assume that a figure approximately three times this number would be a more accurate estimate of the number of wives left behind. Twenty-five to thirty women in North-East Morocco represent only those women reported. One can double that to estimate the total figure for Morocco. Generally, for every woman, we have to calculate two children. The decline in numbers of SSRs over the last six years is remarkable, on the other hand, though, the LKHA in the Netherlands indicates the highest number for Morocco (see Appendix). As mentioned, in the Netherlands research (Smits van Waesbergen 2014:127) estimates the numbers of forced marriages and forced migration by leaving behind, by an educated guess for migrants from all countries in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, that is not differentiated for countries.[4]

POWER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES, BETWEEN PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

We are speaking here of husbands and fathers who force their wives and children into return migration by leaving them behind, or of parents who inflict this on their children/young-adult progeny. This is why we place this phenomenon within the realm of power that husbands exercise over their wives/children and young-adult progeny (see above: Categories 1 and 2). However, research shows that there are also mothers who support their husbands in leaving their older children behind. This makes it important to analyse the roles power relationships play between husbands and wives and between parents and children of whatever age. What role do differences in power play in threatening to leave persons behind, on the one side, and in actually leaving them behind and thus forcing them into return migration on the other? How can we then allocate a place to power as a phenomenon? Can we characterise as repressive both the power husbands have over their wives and children and the power parents have over their children? Can we characterise power as a one-way traffic, both the exercise of power by migrant husbands over their wives and children/young people and its exercise by migrant parents over children/young people? In these cases, we are speaking of males as oppressors and females as the oppressed, or of parents as oppressors and children/young people as the oppressed. In these relationships power is a quality or

[4] Smits van Waesbergen et al. (2014:127) give the following numbers for the years 2011 and 2012, related to the Netherlands, based on an educated guess: forced marriages between 674 and 1914, marital captivity between 447 and 1,687, abandonment (forced migration by leaving behind) between 364 and 1,631. These are numbers used to make an educated guess for forced marriages and abandonment for migrants from all countries in the Netherlands. Not only for Morocco.

possession of the oppressors. Perhaps a characterisation of this sort can facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon of leaving behind. But this characterisation is too limited though if one approaches this problem from the point of view of Dutch-Moroccan transnational relationships. Therefore, in working out this problem, I use the concept of power not as a quality, or possession, but as a relational factor. Power as a relational aspect rather than an attribute that is tied to a person or a group (Bartels 1993, Giddens 1982) creates dynamic interactions. "There are constant changing power relations between individuals who take varying positions in different situations". Thus, in human interaction one constantly deals with power. So, when power is viewed in this way, nobody is ever completely autonomous or dependent (Bartels 1993).

We are not dealing here with husbands as active perpetrators and wives as passive victims. Husbands can be passive too and wives can be active. What is important is that there is a relationship in which husbands and wives influence each other and exercise power over each other. Power in this view is a product of interaction. The resources of power that people have at hand are related to the position they take with regard to one another. But power is not determinate to social position. As Giddens (1982) commented, social structures and individual acting suppose each other. What is essential is having the resources, the media by which power is employed in the routine course of social action. With this in mind, wives have agency and are also active players. I am dealing here with a 'power balance'. In a balance, relationships can weigh heavier on one or the other side. When power is in perfect balance, husbands and wives, parents and children can use it equally. Within an unbalanced power relationship, the scope for one party is larger or broader. This research deals with husbands having more scope to use power than wives do and, as a source of power, the use of the threat of leaving behind and being forced to re-migrate. This is why this research also looks at the women's reaction.

In researching being left behind and the forced return migration to the country of origin, we cannot only consider the relationships between migrant husbands and wives, or between migrant parents and young people in their country of migration i.e. the Netherlands, we must also take into account the transnational links that exist with the country of origin, Morocco in this case. After all, these transnational links make the phenomenon of forced return migration possible. The question is thus whether husbands leave behind wives and children or parents leave behind their children on the spur of the moment or as a strategy, a purposive attempt to achieve something and limit the scope of power of wives/children and young people. In other words, do husbands or parents use the threat of leaving behind and forced return migration against their wives, children and young people, as a source of power and, if so, why do wives not use this technique? It is important here to see how transnational relations influence the power positions of

husbands and wives, parents and children, and investigate the extent to which the context of these transnational relations weaken the position of wives, young people and children and strengthen that of husbands and parents.

TRANSNATIONAL LINKS AND NETWORKS

The model most familiar to Moroccan men and women from the country of origin features an unequal balance of power between men and women that gives men a significantly larger freedom of choice and movement than women. The husband is responsible and chooses what happens and how. The advantage for wives is that they are freed of economic problems and will be recognised socially in their role and position as wife and mother; in principle, they will feel secure in this state. Wives arrive in Dutch society from a society that maintains this dominant ideal of 'harmonic inequality' (Stolk and Wouters 1983) where responsibilities and roles are clear. After migration, they encounter a new vision of man-woman relationships in which husbands and wives are, ideally equals, and are requested to behave like this. Dutch society requires that they are independent, that they start to participate at a completely different level, the level of a 'partner in equality', a mother and an employee. They are expected to learn the language and to operate independently from their husbands. This means that migrant wives must trade in economic and social security for self-awareness and a more equivalent power relationship but, at the same time, that they remain dependent upon a husband for their residence status. This means that a migrant man must take a new look at the roles of husband, father, and breadwinner. Wives are no longer dependent upon their husbands but begin to move independently within Dutch society, outside the usual women's world. This implies a shifting balance of power for husbands. Wives become less dependent, except in the legal sense. Concurrently, we observe among the migrants the tendency to define ethnic boundaries around the family and to emphasise gender-based relationships. How can we recognise this tendency developing among Moroccan migrant wives in the Netherlands, focusing on the issue of being left behind and forced return migration as a means to power for men?

MOROCCAN WOMEN IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BEING LEFT BEHIND: WOMEN'S AGENCY

All the Moroccan women in the Netherlands with whom we talked about being left behind and forced return migration for this research, said they were aware of the phenomenon. Most of them could also name one or more cases in their immediate environment. Many stories of this phenomenon do the rounds. Particularly wives of the first generation, some of whom have older children and have been in the Netherlands for years, say they are afraid of being left behind during family visits. Many wives say they do not want to go to Morocco on holiday for that reason. At the same time, they also say

that they do not want to refuse because that will make their position in the Netherlands even more difficult in relation to their husband.

There are differences between the women. Wives who have problems with their marital relationship, explain that they are afraid of being left behind. They related something similar about their children. Young girls, who regularly clash with their parents about their overly-free behaviour, seem worried. This occurs less often for boys but the phenomenon is known. Social workers who work with wives and children confirm these stories. It is clear that wives and girls in Moroccan-Dutch society see incidences of being left behind as a very real threat. Research done with Moroccan migrant wives in the Slotervaart neighbourhood of Amsterdam shows their situation is characterised by fear and stress (Martens 2003, Koudstaal et al.2020). This research did not ask about the fear of forced remigration but social workers indicated that it was a constant source of anxiety and a very real part of these women's lives.

Can we differentiate among those women actually left behind? Generally speaking, one can differentiate between younger and older women. Younger wives often have been married for five years or less and therefore still have a provisional residence permit. If they live with their husband at the husband's parents' home, they are often left behind because of family pressure. If the married couple lives independently and the wife is forced to return migration, the initiative usually comes more from the husband's side than the family's. These wives sometimes still have small children, even babies who are left behind with their mothers. The central theme in cases of this kind is marital problems influenced by family pressure.

Here we are touching on an essential difference between the position of Moroccan wives in Morocco and Moroccan-Dutch migrant wives in the Netherlands. Before the reform of the "Mudawanah" in Morocco in 2004, it was very easy for a husband to cast aside his wife or to divorce her in Morocco. This provided husbands with very significant means of power. Naamane-Guessous (1990) gives harrowing examples of husbands exploiting this power. However, this does not mean that in Morocco wives are solely victims of husbands in processes of repudiation and divorce. Wives also use the options available to them to obtain divorces from their husbands. By leaving home, for instance, and returning to their own families, wives can force husbands to divorce them (Storms and Bartels 2017). Maher (1974) shows that, already before 2004 (the reform of the family law), a wife's ability to use divorce as a means of power is connected strongly to her socio-economic position. Options for Moroccan migrant women to employ divorce as a means to power are restricted much more in the Netherlands as wives are dependent upon their husbands for their residence permits. Often family visits, or exerting pressure on their husbands through their family, is much more difficult to do. The family is much less

present than it is in Morocco and cannot mediate so easily in case of marital problems. Additionally, there is often much less social control exerted via family members. If there are children and husbands divorce themselves from their wives in Morocco, the wives can no longer return to the country of migration and risk not seeing their children again unless they are eligible for a further non-provisional stay after five years.

Women do talk to one other about their fears of being left behind when the holiday period is in sight. They usually do this with women friends, sisters, and cousins with whom they have a regular contact. They also give advice; advice that usually amounts to the wives having more patience, *sabr*, and respecting their husbands.

'*The wife must obey the husband and have a great deal of patience*.'

'*Wives have to respect their husbands in order to have a good marriage*.'

'*Sabr*' (*Patience*) *is important for wives*.'

There are also wives who refuse to spend their holidays in Morocco.

'If I go, I won't come back and neither will the children.'

A huge source of conflict is the freedom of movement wives appropriate or their husbands allow. There are husbands who severely restrict their wives contacts outside home. On the other hand, often wives are afraid of spending time outside home because this can lead to arguments. Wives forced into return migration in Morocco explain that they tried to take Dutch lessons but that their husbands wouldn't allow it. Their husbands also blocked their contact with friends. Most women complained about physical violence, some about sexual violence. There is, however, more to this than meets the eye. Women begin to internalise these restrictions and are often afraid of being outside home (Martens 2003, Drost et al. 2012). Attitudes like this reinforce both husband and wife in their viewpoints and in their relationship to each other with regard to the freedom of movement wives claim for themselves and husbands allow them.

Women do not recommend openly resisting their husbands by talking back to them when they feel threatened about being left behind. Wives do show resistance by being passive, refusing to do the housekeeping, demonstrating psychosomatic complaints, sighing and groaning, crying, and refusing to eat. Often, they also take it out on the children. Additionally, it is also alleged that wives employ witchcraft and use magic means against their husbands. All these forms of resistance offered by the wives are in fact very limited and more or less characterise the sort of resistance demonstrated by wives in Morocco (Bartels 1993). This type of protest is, in fact, counterproductive: it simply confirms the husband's opinion that he has huge problems with his wife and that his wife is uncooperative and untrustworthy.

It is also impossible to define a standard reaction for a husband and a wife. Young, recently married wives sometimes hope that the presence of a child will wake up their husband. That is certainly not always the case. Sometimes wives with a baby are forced into return migration. At the same time, there are wives who do not want to have children, because they fear being left behind.

A last strategy that women could use is looking for formal help, such as the police, social professionals, women shelters and lawyers. But literature (Vergaert et al.2019) and this research shows that only a very small minority of women can use this strategy of formal help. Before the end of a non-provisional stay of five years, they need proof of violence for instance by the family doctor. Otherwise they cannot obtain a provisional stay. Besides, women don't know basic legal services. Sometimes women (migrant) organisations offer consultation but not all of these organizations possess sufficient knowledge about legal migration rules. Sometimes social professionals and the police don't know about the rights of migrant women. That is also a problem for awareness campaigns of the helpline LKHA and the *Mudawanah working group* that try to provide for this, especially before holiday time.

HUSBANDS AND STRATEGY

When primarily marital problems cause a husband to leave his wife behind, the next question to ask is whether this is viewed as an incidental solution or whether there is the question of a strategy being employed. Or, differently said, when husbands leave their wives behind in the country of origin, is this a one-off action by the husband concerned, an impulse, or can forced return migration be seen as a strategy or a purposeful attempt to achieve something? In other words: Does being able to leave behind one's wife and children provide husbands with a source of power which they can exploit to exert authority and control over their wives and children in day-to-day life?

As opposed to their wives, Moroccan men usually do not speak among themselves about their marital problems. *Heshma* or shame is seen as the reason for this. Making known their marital problems reflects badly on their manliness, it tarnishes their reputation, their *ird*, and damages their honour, their *charaf*. That is particularly true for marital problems. Husbands who cannot control their wives have no honour and very little status among men. On the other hand, men do speak in very general terms about marital problems and solutions. Leaving wives behind and forcing their return migration is one of the topics. Men also discuss the regulations connected with a stay in Dutch society and of changes in these. Suggestions are not offered to a single husband personally but are generally voiced.

The actual deed of leaving someone behind reveals that this is most likely to be a purposeful action and not one taken on a sudden impulse. Associated actions that appear

together with the behaviour leading to forced return migration are so focused that one can speak of strategy. This is not very surprising in itself. Husbands bring their wives to the Netherlands and determine the domicile of the issue of the marriage. This way of looking at things does not conflict with the Dutch vision governing the forming and reuniting families of, and on behalf of, migrants. The partner in the Netherlands is responsible for the new partner establishing him or herself. He or she must possess sufficient income. That responsibility rests emphatically on the already-established partner's shoulders for at least five years. The possibility of acquiring one's own non-provisional residence permit makes the husband aware of his wife's right to have her own permission to stay in the country. One Moroccan husband said in an interview that he is responsible for his wife's welfare because he brought her to this country. If everything goes well for his wife and if the marital relationship is satisfactory, the husband can claim that he earned these advantages himself. The husband, being interviewed, saw responsibility as a duty; he would have to seek a solution if his wife's stay in the Netherlands was unsuccessful. At the same time, the upbringing and conditioning of the Moroccan husbands means that they have a tendency to attribute responsibility for the failure of a marriage to the wife. Husbands are responsible for the honour of the family while the wife significantly determines that honour with her behaviour (Bartels 1993). One Moroccan woman puts it this way:

> *'Yes, that's how Moroccan husbands think. If a marriage is good, it's the husband who made it that way and if it's bad it's the wife who's guilty. But you do it together, don't you?'*

The theme of husbands being responsible for their wives' return in everyday practice with regard to taking care of taxes, insurance, etc. but also with regard to the residence documents of their wives and children. The intentions can be good. The wives involved, often have had very little schooling and are thrown into a completely different situation in the Netherlands. The husbands are already established. But the consequence is that many wives do not possess their own papers, either in the Netherlands or during holidays in Morocco. In many cases, perhaps the majority, it is the husband who takes care of everything concerning permission to stay in the country. Not being informed about their status leads to extra dependency and gives the husbands an extra source of power.

After arriving in the Netherlands on an MVV (Authorisation for a Provisional Stay), the person in question must report to the Immigration Police within three days. An MVV must be used within six months of issue, otherwise it lapses. Practically no husbands ask their wives, who were permitted to enter the Netherlands under the terms of an MVV, to report to the Aliens Service. Almost all husbands request the exchange of their wives' MVVs for a provisional residence permits. Most of the husbands request an extension of

the provisional stay at the end of five years, in the form of an extended provisional stay or an extended stay on a non-provisional basis. The high costs certainly play a role in these requests. To request a non-provisional permit for an undefined period at the end of a five-year legal stay costs 881 euro. It costs 171 euro to extend the provisional residence permit by five years and 361 euro to amend the provisional nature of the permit after five years. [5] There are husbands who put off requesting the extension of a provisional permit or its exchange for a non-provisional stay until after the deadline. This means that the women have to submit a new request, with justifications. This gives the husband extra space and makes the wife more dependent. If wives do not have the required permits or husbands submit the requests or are responsible for their extension, these husbands gain power to make their wives additionally dependent and to hold onto them. With the request for a permit for an undefined period of time, comes the awareness that wives can take care of their own stay in the country and are, therefore, no longer dependent on their husbands' permission and cooperation. During the research period one informant suggested specifying that the wife herself and not her husband apply for extensions permitting non-provisional stays and permits for undefined periods. Of course, this would also have to be the case for husbands exchanging their own provisional residence permits for non-provisional ones. The high costs of these residence permits was a permanent subject of discussion.

The way the Dutch registry of births, deaths, and marriages operates, creates another possible way of 'erasing' wives from the country. It is possible for husbands to erase their wives' names from the municipal basic administration without their wives' knowledge. This means that wives who are forced to return to Morocco can no longer claim permanent domicile in the Netherlands. During the research period, one informant pointed out that it was possible to stop undesired erasures from the Dutch registry by ensuring that each person had to do all the registering him or herself. Suggestions, especially those from attorneys, were that women themselves be obliged personally to enter or withdraw themselves from the administration and apply for their own permits and extensions. These informants placed great emphasis on the need for women to gain and maintain control over their own papers and documents. But, even in 2019, we see cases where husbands are still able to unsubscribe their wives from the Dutch registry.

Our conclusions make it clear that there are Moroccan husbands who successfully rid themselves of their wives by leaving them behind in Morocco. The case of a husband who left five different wives behind in succession came up during the research period. After disposing of each wife, he returned to the Netherlands with the next.

[5] For 2019: www.ind.nl

It is evident that there are also Moroccan husbands who severely disapprove of forcing wives and children into return migration. One informant stated that while it is the husband's responsibility to make his wife's stay in the Netherlands a success, husbands must take their wives into account if the stay is not going well. Informants believe that there are other options to take if things do not go well. If a marital relationship breaks down, they prefer the solution of legal divorce and the continued stay of the wife in the Netherlands. They accept the husband's consequential, significant loss of honour. But the advantage is that the husband can continue to see his children. Husbands who force their wives and children to return migration do not want to take responsibility for their children. In Morocco, these husbands try to divorce without having to pay alimony for their wives and children. When wives attempt to force their ex-husbands into paying alimony, the husbands usually manage to avoid it. Sometimes wives try to avoid having a divorce too, because they see the solution as worse than the problem. At the same time, this may be why the practice of leaving wives behind still goes on: their wives refuse to divorce them. Forcing family members into return migration to Morocco makes it easier for the husbands because they are less obliged to pay alimony and divide joint property and their honour is less damaged.

PARENTS AND STRATEGY

Right before the summer holiday period social workers and teachers, or school guidance counsellors, are often confronted by Moroccan young people posing questions about being left behind and forced into return migration during summer holidays. Threats are made to both boys and girls. Boys, who have more scope for movement and freedom, seem better able to deal with the threat than girls. Boys can threaten to leave the parental home if they are threatened with being left behind. Boys seem to have less to lose in leaving their parents; they are freed earlier than girls from the home situation. Girls usually take threats of this nature more seriously and this means that they have no retort. There are girls who say they will run away if they are threatened with being left behind or married off. Youth workers observe the parents becoming more watchful and start threatening to leave their children behind and possibly marry them off in Morocco in the period in which the children leave elementary for secondary school and at later ages when daughters refuse to marry. Parents have the feeling they are losing their grip on their daughters.

Social and youth workers who work with girls often have no clear answers to this. Research shows that those who work with girls feel guilty when the girls are actually left behind or forced into return migration and blame themselves for not having done enough.

Fathers do not always play the main role. Details of a case came up where the mother threatened her daughter while her father remained neutral. This evokes the question of the role of gender cutting across the parent-older child relationship.

As mentioned above, the divorce rate dropped after the reform of family law, but the divorce figure in Morocco is still high. After a divorce, migrant men from Morocco in the Netherlands usually marry younger women from Morocco. One of the consequences is the remarkably high number of stepmothers in Moroccan families in the Netherlands (Brouwer 1997), something that results in many conflicts. In a situation like this, it is not surprising that the new wife chooses the father's side in conflicts centring on children's behaviour. But this does not explain why mothers sometimes take up sides against their daughters when they exhibit behaviour that is 'too free' or when they become 'too Dutch' and want to go out, use makeup, and keep a boyfriend, etc. Mothers sometimes cooperate with their husband to force their daughters into return migration to prevent their own forced return migration. Anthropological research done in North Africa shows that older women, in particular, have a vested interest in maintaining existing family relationships. Mainly these women can be seen as guardians of the tradition. This shows why mothers often keep their own daughters under a very strict regime and urge their sons to oppose their daughters-in-law.[6] But not all older women set themselves up as guardians of the tradition. It is indeed in this category that we find women defending their daughters-in-law against their own sons and mediating with the fathers on behalf of their daughters (Bartels 1993). Older women then find themselves in a key position within the family structure.

Being left behind or forced remigration can bring about severe consequences for years to come. One woman who had been left behind as a daughter and forced into remigration, asks her father every year:

> *"When my father comes to Morocco every year for holidays, I ask him "why did you force me to return by leaving me and my sisters behind?" Then he starts crying. He has lost his daughters. I like to see him crying!"*

CONCLUSION

The most important conclusion to draw from this research is that the practice of leaving family members behind in Morocco and forcing them into return migration, takes place within relationships where there are marital problems or problems of raising children. Wives and children left behind by the husband/father in Morocco often felt an inner conflict in more than one area. This is connected with the desire and longing to

[6] In Morocco, in rural areas and (small) cities a preference still exists for patrilocal settlement i.e. a young couple stays with the family of the husband.

spend holidays in Morocco and see family there. Sometimes wives also hope that family members will be able to intervene in the marital problems. At the same time, they usually recognise the risk that they are running and most suspect that they could be left behind. Often, they are directly threatened with this too. Additionally, all the wives know stories of forced return migration and often they know women who have been left behind. This makes the phenomenon a very real threat. Many wives allow this threat to govern their daily actions. Mutual support is offered but seemingly ineffectively. It does not help when wives protest.

A second form of inner conflict is related to the change in the husband-wife relationship. Dutch society asks wives to put aside the model of 'harmonious inequality' and wives are expected to start and participate as independent individuals and equal partners in their conjugal relationship as mothers, and in society as employees and active participants. Wives who are forced into return migration often have their freedom of movement very seriously limited by their husbands during their stay in the Netherlands. A number of migrant husbands do not seem to agree with this shift in their marital relationship but instead make attempts to demand even more space. In their demands, made in order to acquire more power, this group uses both the economic and the social security that they should offer their wives. These men are able to do this because, in terms of legal rights for residence permits, they are the independent party and their wives the dependent. Women's self-awareness is increasing but they cannot support one another in efforts to gain this. The advice many women give one another consists primarily of a rather ineffective protest which is also characteristic of wives in the countries of origin: complain, be patient, etc.

By threatening wives and children with being left behind and often actually doing this without providing financial support, the balance of power tips completely towards the husband/father, leaving the wives and children only minimal freedom of movement. This is always less than what wives and children would have had if they had had the opportunity to stay in the Netherlands and set up a household separately from the husbands/fathers. Once left behind in the country of origin, the wife cannot make any arrangements with authorities in the Netherlands. Children and young people use schooling as their basis for setting up independent lives in the Netherlands, but most of the time this ends, once they are left behind. They cannot support this ambition in the country of origin of their parents. Usually they do not speak the language well enough to be successful at school and often there is no money for schooling either (De Bree et al. 2009, 2011). Transnational links mean that during the process of 'shifting power relationships between husbands and wives', the husbands' positions of power can shift more dramatically in the country of migration. The legal dependency of wives favours

husbands and disadvantages wives and children. Wives cannot trade their 'harmonious inequality' in for self-awareness and more equal power relationships. The wife's position becomes even more unequal and 'harmonious inequality' disappears because husbands can exercise more power: they can threaten to leave their wives and children behind and actually force them into return migration. Husbands in the country of origin don't have this power.

This process of shifts in the balance of power between husband and wife, makes it clear why, in principle, being left behind can affect husbands too, even though husbands are hardly ever victims. Most partners in transnational marriages are women (70%). In the Netherlands, they are expected to have an equal relationship and a fifty-fifty balance of power. Wives will be less likely to resort to leaving their husbands behind when there is a marital conflict, because to do so would upset the balance. Husbands who threaten their wives with being left behind and who actually resort to forced remigration profit in terms of power: they restore a distorted power balance that was threatening to become more equal, while wives who leave their husbands behind lose out. Should they make it possible for the husband to join them in the country of migration, they win in their search for an equal power balance. Should they force their husbands into return migration, this undermines their self-respect while husbands who do this, restore their self-respect.

A similar process is valid for parents who leave their children behind. The balance of power between parents and children threatens to become more equal in Dutch society. Children can be more influential and take up freer positions than in the country of origin. In their parent's eyes, children are at risk of derailing or becoming "too Dutch," more seriously than they would in the country of origin. When parents get the feeling that the balance of power is distorted, has become too equal, or that their children are gaining more power than they themselves have, they can choose to use transnational links to restore the balance in their own favour, thus decreasing the power profit of the young people. This process makes the difference between boys and girls clear. The relationship between parents and sons is more equal than that of parents and daughters. Daughters gain more freedom of movement than sons do in the Dutch migrant situation. Therefore, it is more often that daughters are left behind in the country of origin and forced into return migration.

When looking at women's resistance to forced return migration and being left behind, it is important to examine both the organised efforts of resistance to these practices and the individual women's agency in subverting them. Organised efforts of women's resistance have been set up in the Netherlands by the SSR in Morocco and the Netherlands and the Mudawanah working group. This latter group is professional and one that led a number of successful actions. Questions have been posed in parliament, a

research project has been conducted and women have been informed and warned by brochures and an information film. They were even successful in getting government support and a formal helpline, LKHA has been set up. Unfortunately, the most important condition, the term of the dependent residence permit, has not been changed. The Minister of Integration has, in fact, extended the term from three to five years.

Individual women's agency in subverting these practices is not very effective. Strategies to negotiate the dominant position of the man are not elaborated. Most women crafted agency by responding in a discourse about victimisation. Women don't question female domesticity and modesty or men's familial responsibility. They feel victims of the family pressure on the husband to abandon his wife, or the men's bad character manifested during the marriage. The SSR in Morocco offers women who have been left behind the opportunity to make arrangements with authorities in the Netherlands and with the Dutch embassy in Rabat. If the women are successful and get permission to go back to the Netherlands, the SSR and the Mudawanah working group in the Netherlands search for shelter for them. It was the cooperation of these organisations that pointed out and prevented forced return migration in the past. These women and migrant organisations put pressure on the government to create a more women friendly policy and an official helpline, LKHA.

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APPENDIX

Landelijk Knooppunt HUWELIJKSDWANG EN ACHTERLATING (The **Dutch Centre for Forced Marriage and Abandonment)**

Tabel 1. Overzicht achterlating per land juli 2015 tot en met juni 2019. (Overview of abandonment per country July 2015 up to and including June 2019)

Landen per regio (Countries by region)	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**till june 2019**	**Total**
Europa/Europe						
Kosovo		1		1	1	2
Ukraine		1				
UK				1		
Russia						
Denmark						
Total Europe	*0*	*2*	*0*	*2*	*2*	*6*
Noord Afrika/North Africa		1	1			2
Algeria	5	3	9	9	5	31
Morocco	1			2		3
Sudan					1	1
Tunisia						
Total North-Africa	*6*	*4*	*10*	*11*	*6*	*37*
West Afrika/West-Africa						
Ghana	2	2				4
Guinea		2		2		4
Nigeria		1		2		3
Total West- Africa	*2*	*5*	*0*	*4*	*0*	*11*
Oost Afrika/East-Africa						
Ethiopia		1				1
Somalia	1	4	11	9	3	28
Somaliland	2					2
Total East-Africa	*3*	*5*	*11*	*9*	*3*	*31*
Centraal Afrika/Centra Africa				1		1
Cameroon						
Total Central-Africa	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*0*	*1*

Midden Oosten/Middle East	3	2				5
Egypt	4			3		7
Iraq	1	3	2	2	1	9
Iran			1	1		2
Yemen				1		1
Saudi-Arabia				2		2
Syria	2	3	5	1	1	
Turkey				1		
United Arab Emirates						
Total Middle East	*10*	*8*	*8*	*11*	*2*	*39*
Centraal Azië/Central Asia				3	1	4
Afghanistan						
Total Central Asia	*0*	*0*	*0*	*3*	1	4
Zuid Azië/South Asia						
Bangladesh			1	1		2
Pakistan	2	1		2	1	6
Sri Lanka				1		1
Vietnam		1				1
Total South Asia	*2*	*2*	*1*	*4*	*1*	*10*
Total	**23**	**26**	**30**	**45**	**15**	**139**