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IOM International Organization for Migration

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very difficult.[1]

Unwilling to stay and unwilling to leave: the pride and pressures of the uprooted

Naema Tahir

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[1] *The Little Prince*, Antoine De Saint-Exupéry (in the English translation by Katherine Woods, Harcourt 1943), original title, *Le Petit Prince*.

Naema Tahir (1970) is a British-Dutch writer and lawyer. Her parents originally come from Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

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The question of whether to return to my homeland has troubled me for many years. It began in 2005. I had been living in Strasbourg where I worked as a legal expert for the Council of Europe in the field of human rights and migration. While in France, I had taken up writing in my spare time and this had resulted in a number of books including, incidentally, a collection of essays on migration and Muslim identity [2], and a novel on the self-determination of Muslim women in diaspora [3]. Writing is addictive. So, I took a few years off to devote myself entirely to my new craft. It was in this setting that the question arose: should I stay in France or return to the Netherlands?

Moving house is of course no small thing. Moving, especially to another country, can be one of the most dramatic experiences that human beings undergo, hovering just below the death of a loved one, life-threatening disease or divorce [4]. For this very reason I had made a resolution not to keep hopping from country to country every so often. I had experienced enough moving as a child. Before I turned 16, I had already migrated five times back and forth between three different countries: England, the Netherlands and Pakistan.

My fivefold migration started from the village of Slough where, in 1970, I was born, not far from Heathrow airport. In the same year of my birth my father sent me together with my mother and sister to Pakistan, where my family is originally from. He thought that was where we belong. He said he would join us later, but that he had to stay a little while longer to earn a living for us as postman for the *Royal Mail*. Two years later, it was not my father who joined us in Pakistan but my mother, sister and I who made our way back to England. This was not to be a permanent move. When I was nine, our family, which by then consisted of six children, moved to the Netherlands – to Etten-Leur to be precise. Again, when I was thirteen, all of us – except my father – left for Pakistan. By the time I was fifteen, I found myself back in the Netherlands once more.

To return to my resolution: I did not want to keep country hopping as an adult. Yet ridding myself of this inveterate habit proved difficult. It was dyed-in-the-wool. After having moved back from Pakistan as a teen, I remained in Holland long enough to study law in Leiden. But a few years after finishing I moved to Nigeria to work for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. One short year later, I returned and remained in the Netherlands

[2] *Een moslima ontsluiert*, Naema Tahir (Houtekiet, Antwerp, 2005).

[3] *Kostbaar bezit*, Naema Tahir (Prometheus, Amsterdam, 2006).

[4] *Acts for Families: Children and Family Moves*, 1999, report by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

for another three years, only to leave for Strasbourg, where I hoped – and positively expected – to reside permanently. As I mentioned above, after almost three years' work I took unpaid leave to devote myself to writing. Still living in Strasbourg and with extra time on my hands to think and write, that selfsame question came back. This time the choice was between the Netherlands and France: should I stay or return?

I did the former. I extended my leave to several years and relocated to the Netherlands, largely because of the language. Dutch is the language I am best at, better than my mother tongue, Punjabi, my father tongue, English, and better than Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, which I was taught at schools there. I write in Dutch; yet, since I learned it only after emigrating to the Netherlands when I was nine, Dutch remains an acquired skill rather than a second nature. Because the language is not intrinsic to me I felt the necessity to be immersed in an environment where just about everything I see and hear is in Dutch. This would enrich my writing, giving it form and content, making it more complete. *"Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins"*, says Heidegger. "Language is the house of being." This I indeed felt.

I felt that my home was where my language was. For a while, that was a beautiful notion. Surrounded by Dutch – the language of my craft and characters – I felt content. Nevertheless, as the end of my leave came closer, that same old question arose: shall I move back? It was about France this time. I hesitated and wavered, and after over a year of weighing the options I chose to stay in the Netherlands. However, the sense of loss of not returning to France, a place I once called home, was intense. It did not fade quickly but remained constant. I had only read about such sorrow: the loss adult migrants feel when they leave their homelands. Some years earlier I had even scolded these migrants in an opinion piece, because they ended up stuck in futile dreams of their homelands and the desire to return to them [5]. I wrote that these migrants would be better off opting for their host country, the Netherlands. They should move beyond their sense of loss for the fatherland they left behind. They would do well to embrace their new country – embrace it as you would a mother – because that mother welcomed them with open arms and offered them many new opportunities. Isn't that just what they had come for? Couldn't their new motherland simply help them to forget their loss?

[5] *Moslimmigranten moeten voor Nederland kiezen*, 18 June 2002, opinion piece, NRC Handelsblad [Dutch newspaper].

The question now turned on the questioner: could one country help *me* forget another? I had chosen to live in the Netherlands after all. I moved there and thought I had everything that I needed: my language, my vocation as a writer and thereby the sense of being at home. Nevertheless, I missed France. I missed the beauty of Strasbourg. I missed my work as a lawyer, the international atmosphere, the noble mission of safeguarding human rights. But above all I missed something I could not get back in the Netherlands: I missed my life as an expat, a life in which you are always a little different from everyone else. I missed all these things dearly, just as if I were missing a lover. I had heartache, which, when it concerns a country, we call homesickness. That homesickness flowed onto paper and later became my novel *Eenzaam heden* [6] . "The Solitude of the Present", as it could be called in English, tells the story of a migrant who languishes in a host country due to his desire to return to his homeland and his simultaneous inability to turn that desire into reality.

It would be difficult to find a human who did not want to be at home somewhere, all the more, to *feel* at home somewhere. Almost from the moment the umbilical cord is cut and we are freed from the body in which we were formed, the desire to feel secure, safe and *at home* emerges. Nevertheless, in due course, we leave our parents' homes to seek our fortunes. Both aspects – leaving home and the desire to feel at home somewhere – are part of what it is to be human.

The Little Prince talks about this in the eponymous philosophical fairytale by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The lonely and lovely prince travels to different planets asking men, animals and a flower questions about life. He asks the flower to explain what men are. 'Men?' echoes the flower, 'They have no roots, and that makes their life very difficult'. The words of the flower still feel instantly right to me, but what does the flower mean exactly? That humans are rootless and that they need roots to live happy and easy lives? Would it mean a person should do whatever he can to put down roots? Should we conclude that those incapable of doing so, for example, many from the first generation of immigrants, would do best to return to the place where they once had roots, and therefore a better chance of belonging? Is that why many migrants desire for the return to their homeland or a country which they at least call home?

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6. *Eenzaam heden*, Naema Tahir, (2008, Prometheus, Amsterdam).

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The desire for return is perhaps the most common migrant dream. It tells us something about the desire to once again be in a homeland, to recover the past and to be home again. It also reveals the unwillingness or lack of ability to be able to stay, to put down roots and to integrate into the country of migration. The less someone feels at home, the stronger the desire to return home may become. At the same time, this desire to return home hampers a person's ability to feel at home somewhere else. Instead of focusing on the present, migrants try to recover the past and in doing so, become stuck in it. To them, the present is foreign, as Salman Rushdie expressed. The past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time [7].

This essay explores why migrants become captives of the past, dreaming of their homelands. I will not so much try to find out why someone might want to return home but why one does not in fact go back – even though one contemplates on doing so all the time. In essence I will try to understand the migrants' melancholy. This consists of the perception and the pain of losing one's homeland, making return the most common (day)dream. It also consists of the fact that the wish to return is never fulfilled, partly because it is hard to do so and partly because there are positive reasons for staying in the host country. It is important to become acquainted with that emotion, that melancholy. People who do not feel at home, or who would rather leave, are unhappy and unhappy people do not make for a happy society. I've opted for a literary route to analyse this, since it provides many more opportunities to gain access to one of the major, unchartered areas of the migrant experience: the unwillingness to stay and the unwillingness to leave.

[7] *Imaginary homelands: essays and criticism 1981 - 1991*, Salman Rushdie – London, Granta Books, 1991.

THE MIGRANT NARRATIVE

The migratory experience shows us why a person would want to swap one country for another. It shows us why our society is selected by migrants and how it changes as a consequence of their arrival. There is an abundance of migrant narratives. Our policy documents are brimming with them, they adorn our statistics, and we base our politics on them. The Netherlands alone is home to two million immigrants and their innumerable stories.

Over the years, I have heard many migrant narratives. As a trial representative for the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service [8], I heard the stories about the journeys and escapes of litigating migrants and asylum seekers. As a protection officer for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, I wrote down the poignant, and even harrowing stories of people who had fled from terrible situations. And as a legal professional for the Council of Europe I studied the national legislation and practices of all European countries, which had ratified Article 19 of the European Social Charter concerning migrant workers. All these stories from migrants or refugees were, however, squeezed into a bureaucratic form so that they suited legal proceedings, a file or a form. The stories were aimed at gaining residence permits, access to integration or return programmes or, through the stories, the migrants sought something as simple as a stamp in a passport. They were compelling stories, expressed with a particular goal in mind, distilled from a complex reality. Yet my colleagues and I sometimes wondered to what extent these stories were fabricated or twisted to suit the procedural requirements so that they would lead, for example, to recognition as a refugee. This 'talent for mending' of the applicants meant that many stories were incomplete, to say the least. This makes it hard to drill down to the true reasons why someone swaps one country for another, why one person returns and another does not, why the longing for home continues to exist even if one does not return.

How can we then get closer to the truth behind migrants' stories? For me, the migration experience is something I personally experienced. Like many writers, I delve into my own experiences for my writing. My background and personal migration history were partly formed by that of my parents. In my quest for understanding, I try to find out as much as possible about my family's migratory history. But I have kept finding myself before closed doors, as many questions are off-limits, the answers hidden behind shame, honour or pride. If you are proud of your fatherland – a character trait not seldom found in many first generation migrants – you are ashamed of

[8] Nederlandse Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst

having traded that country in for another, especially if you have managed to make it your new homeland. Many do feel ashamed of the fact that they enjoy living in a foreign country more than living in their own. They are ashamed to express that they feel closer to the people of their homeland, but yet continuously choose to live away from them.

I have become convinced that we are better off using our imaginations to get to the migrant's full story. Literature may express the nuances, details and aspects much better. It is also less politically charged and personal, also less private since it does not directly involve the minutia of someone's life. Of course literature is fiction, but it aims at reflecting the truth. Literature is the truth, you might say. Literary characters can be archetypes that belong to a category. The first generation immigrant in my novel *Eenzaam heden*, called Humayun, whose story I will analyse in this essay, embodies not only himself, but also an entire category of migrants in the same way that Anna Karenina is not just the story of one solitary woman who craves for passion and freedom. She too is an archetype, someone who represents a particular category of women. The migrant Humayun in *Eenzaam heden* was inspired by my father. He belongs to the category of first generation migrants. They left Asia as young men to work in the West. Simultaneously, they continued to long to return to their homeland. They took steps gradually to enable that return: they sent their children back ahead of them or they had a house built and then waited for their pensions which were to pay for life back home. Humayun is one of these migrants. As a character from my novel, I will use him to demonstrate why return is desired, yet rarely satisfied.

DREAMING OF RETURN, DREAMING OF STAYING

On a certain afternoon in the early 1960s, Humayun, a nineteen-year old Pakistani notices that many men have left his Punjabi village. They have left for London. They heard that the British government was looking for healthy workers from the former colonies to work in its industries. Before the men left, they promised their parents, wives and children that they would be back soon. Their stay abroad would only be temporary, focused as it was on building a future in Pakistan, their homeland.

Humayun becomes somewhat jealous of those who emigrated. The best of them left. They all spoke English and were fairly well educated. They all had jobs to look forward to [9]. Humayun decides not to stay behind. Wasn't he one of the best too? On the day of his departure to London, his father makes Humayun promise something: 'No visits,' he says to his son, 'I want you to return for good.' It is as if his father knows that visits to the homeland would only serve to delay his son's final return and temper the desire to do so. Humayun promises. When he sets foot in London, he has a single goal. He wants to get rich and return to Pakistan with his newfound wealth. To this end, he gets a job at Heathrow airport. He works hard, but when his savings don't mount as rapidly as he wants, he starts gambling and plays the lottery. He then decides that he simply cannot go back to Pakistan if he doesn't win the jackpot, thereby erecting – consciously or not – a first barrier to returning home.

Many other barriers follow. Humayun marries a Pakistani woman who wants to stay in England. They have a daughter, Dina, who attends school and starts integrating. They buy a house and have more children. Meanwhile, Humayun keeps on gambling and playing the lottery, never winning much, certainly not the jackpot. Gradually he starts feeling guilty. He is afraid that he has started to put down roots in England. To counter this, he does everything in his power not to feel at home, not to become too British. This is partially subconscious: his memories of the past, of Pakistan, shut out any thoughts of England, which make putting down roots and integrating impossible. However, his aversion to integration is also deliberate, since he is very able to integrate, if he wished. After all, his English is as good as his mother tongue, his skin as light as that of many Europeans and his manners gentlemanly. Even his

[9] *The migration process in Britain and West-Germany*, p. 16-17, Heather Booth (1992 Ashgate, Hants).

diligence at work benefits his integration. Nevertheless, as soon as he is eligible for promotion, he surprisingly refuses. The reason is, he prefers to keep working in his insignificant position, which will not allow Humayun to become too comfortable in England. He is not supposed to develop a real fondness for the place, since his true love is for Pakistan. With increasing frequency and vehemency, he starts to portray himself outwardly as a 'true' Pakistani. He only eats Pakistani curries, speaks Urdu as much as possible and keeps his wife indoors instead of giving her the opportunity to succeed as a businesswoman (which she clearly has the talent and motivation to do).

In England, Pakistan just wouldn't go away [10]. Humayun finally tries to force his daughter to think only of Pakistan. Dina is obliged to speak Urdu at home. She must eat only Pakistani food and wear the *shalwar kameez* – Pakistan's national dress – even at school where school uniforms are compulsory. Humayun wants to prepare his daughter for her return to Pakistan, where he contemplates to marry her off to a fellow Pakistani. To feed her desire, he takes every opportunity to tell her great stories about his homeland. It seems as if he is becoming aware of the fact that his own dreams of return would be hard to achieve and hopes therefore that his daughter would return in his stead.

Dina realises what is going on. She has other dreams. She is a brilliant teenager, doing really well at school, and notices she likes being English and wants to keep living in England. For her, there simply is no other home than London, her birthplace. She wants to put roots down there, build a future, marry a 'native' Englishman. In bureaucratic lingo, Dina wants to integrate. However, she fears her father will not acknowledge or permit that. She is horridly afraid he will tear her away from England. One night, she dreams her fingers have turned into strong, crooked, long roots. Now awake, she gets up and runs into the garden. With strength born from despair, she presses her fingers into the soil. She wants to put down roots. Quite literally. She wants to remain rooted in the soil like a tree, because trees are most certain they will stay put. She doesn't want to wait for a future which consists of dreams about a homeland lost in the past. She believes in the present, her mantra being that the present alone

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10. *Compare The Rainbow Sign, 'In Pakistan, England just wouldn't go away,'* Dreaming and Scheming, H. Kureishi. Faber and Faber, 2002, London.

can make no man wretched[11]. She hates her father's unwillingness to appreciate his new country. She says:

'We migrants hesitated, were distant and proud. We, the constant travellers, felt tortured by the guilt of leaving our homeland which stopped us from loving our new land as one would love a home. Guilt and shame were our pesticides, our poisons that stunted the growth of our roots, even scorched them, until our current existences hurt, because we wanted them to hurt. We longed for pain in our present lives, for only pain could overcome our guilt and shame that we left. Therefore we never arrived. We never put down roots. We suffered. We cried tears of sickness. We remembered our lost pasts until they replaced our presents, until they took away our desire to become rooted in this new country, scared as we were of becoming uprooted from our old. But I didn't have an old country. All I had was this country and I wanted to feel home here. I knew I would manage. I was different from my parents who refused to put down roots, even though they could. We all had the capacity to do so; we the people who appropriated the world for ourselves. We the people who left and acted like we'd never arrived. We, the Migrants with a capital 'M'. If only we could decide to fill our lungs with the same perfumed air that was breathed in our imagined paradise. If only we'd put down roots! If only we'd let them tunnel into the soil which already accepted us, but which we gave nothing in return.'

Up until the end of the novel, Humayun dreams of returning home and Dina dreams that her father will stay and integrate. Both dreams, however, are unattainable. Their full realisation negates the essence of being a migrant.

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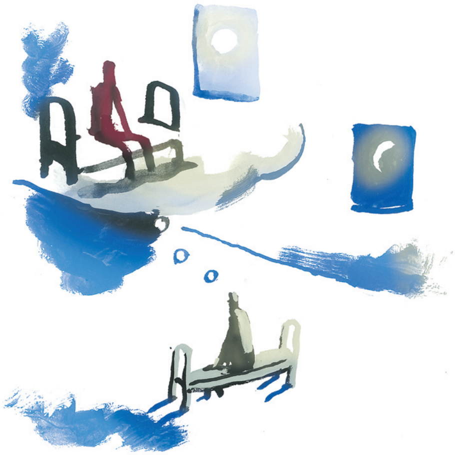
11. *Seneca, The Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium, Letter V.*, English translation by Richard M. Gummere, London, 1917., Letter 5.

12 THE FIRST GENERATION'S DREAM VERSUS THAT OF THE SECOND

Dina mentions guilt and shame as the reasons why her father cannot put down roots. He is afraid that if he does so, he would be renouncing his fatherland. He went abroad to be of great use to his homeland, not to bid it farewell. Simultaneously, he can only return if he has achieved what he set out to achieve: wealth, status and education. He has to be more than if he had stayed in Pakistan. In other words, he has to prove that the separation from the country he loved was worthwhile. That separation must have been necessary, inevitable and for the benefit of many. He needs to have acted patriotically and not egoistically, migrating for his people and country. Even though at the time, he was tempted to emigrate because he didn't want to be left behind while the others moved away, his move was, nevertheless, first and foremost motivated by his love of Pakistan. It was in service to his beloved fatherland, that he did not want to stay behind and remain small. Rather, he wanted to be a great man. He believed that would be instantly possible, once he moved to the West. But he couldn't integrate in the West. And, because of that he could not become a great man. Therefore, he simply found it impossible to go back to Pakistan. Under such stars, neither Humayun's wishes of permanently returning nor those of Dina of permanently staying are able to be achieved. Both ideas are beautiful. Both are unrealistic.



Similarly, for my own father a return to his home country was more than just an idea. Even though he never actually achieved it. Twice he sent his family back to Pakistan 'forever'. The first time I do not remember. I was still a baby. The second time I was almost fourteen and living in the Netherlands, where my father had moved us to a few years earlier. Father wanted to leave England because he was of the opinion that it was becoming increasingly hateful towards immigrants and because of his general curiosity of other countries. The migration from England to the Netherlands was relatively simple, because father and his family had British passports. As EEC citizens, we had freedom of movement. Despite the language differences, we felt just as at home in this European country.

Yet, three years later we migrated again. I can remember packing my suitcase for the journey to Pakistan and leaving our town, Etten-Leur, as if it were an everyday occurrence. This was the fate of people who live in a country not their own, or so I thought. I believed, as did my parents, that we would find a home waiting for us in a Pakistan that was never going to be complete without us. I said goodbye to the Netherlands as if my entire future would now take place in Pakistan. In order to steer that future in the right direction, my father 'temporarily' stayed behind in Etten-Leur where he would set up his own company which would provide for us. His dream was to export Pakistani goods to the West. As soon as his company was viable, he would also leave the West. But (as I mentioned above), the opposite happened; my mother and the six children returned to Etten-Leur after two short years in the East. In spite of this, the hope of a definitive return remained unaltered. Father predicted that he would one day build a house in Pakistan, when his business had become sufficiently successful. Moreover, he hoped to marry off his children to Pakistanis so they would make homes there. Immediately after his retirement, he made concrete arrangements to move there my mother. But father, who retired four years ago, still lives in the Netherlands.

Let me go further with the character Humayun. For him, the dream of return to his home country has become gargantuan – taking up more and more space in his life – because it has not been fulfilled. After having promised so passionately and so often that he would leave England *soon*, he feels pressured to do so. Let's presume that Humayun, in stead of moving to Pakistan, suddenly migrates to the Netherlands. To some degree, this relieves his anguish of not being able to leave England for his fatherland.

Years pass in the Netherlands where Humayun has found a job in a factory close to The Hague. He works hard, he sends money to Pakistan to build a house there, and he promises to return once he retires, as do many migrants. When his father suddenly passes away Humayun feels free to start visiting Pakistan. He does so twice a year to supervise the building of his home which should be complete at his retirement age. However, when he does actually retire, an unpleasant surprise awaits him: his pension is far smaller than he expected. Humayun receives the modest sum of 60 Euros per month, for which he paid premiums while working in England. In the Netherlands he only receives part of the Dutch state pension paid to everyone who reaches the age of 65, because he did not live in the country for forty years. In addition, when his wife reaches retirement, a year later, she only receives part of her state pension because she is married to Humayun. He also took no private pension while temping at the factory.

His small pension disappoints him enormously. But, because the time has come, Humayun undertakes measures to have his pension transferred to Pakistan. What comprises a modest sum in the Netherlands can be an ample provision in Asia. However, it turns out that, after moving to Pakistan, he and his wife will only receive part of their joint pension. According to the Dutch pension legislation, Pakistan is not one of the countries you can take your full pension to. Every month, they would receive exactly six hundred Euros. That amounts to 10 Euros per person, per day. Humayun refuses to accept that this amount would be enough for him and his wife to live comfortably in Pakistan. He is angry at the Netherlands. Why do its officials think Pakistan is a poor country where everything is cheap? And why didn't the authorities tell him about the pension system before? Above all, why do officials presume that he would not want to visit the Netherlands once in a while for which he would definitely need more money? Humayun cannot help but feel terribly wronged. His back is pressed to the wall. At the moment, his situation is played before his mind's eye as one of gross injustice.

It is clear that Humayun has no regard whatsoever for the justification of the pension system, due largely to his ignorance of its rules. He does however start to think about his situation realistically, perhaps for the first time. He hardly has any savings. *Why do I need savings?*, he always thought to himself. After all, he had expected a good sum of money upon retirement. That is why he was also a little too optimistic. For example, he took four new mortgages on the surplus value of his home in The Hague so he could build a house in Pakistan. With that money he also bought a little farm there so he could enjoy his own fruit and vegetables. The house in the Netherlands has therefore not been paid off. If he were to sell it, he'd barely make a profit. In fact, because of the economic crisis and resulting drop of the house prices, he may yet be left with a small debt. What adds to the sorrow is that he had hoped to buy furniture and electrical appliances for the house in Pakistan from the profits, so he and his wife could have all the modern conveniences there that they had become accustomed to in the West. That isn't important only to him. What would his family in Pakistan say if Humayun lived in a house with almost no Western things in it? Humayun decides to convince Dina, his daughter, who, since her character has also evolved in the narrative, has become a legal professional, and married with children, to buy the house in The Hague from him. He hopes she'll give him a good price for it. He even expects she will financially support him. It is her Pakistani duty to look after her parents financially from time to time. "Internal remittances" he calls them [12].

The other advantage is that if Dina buys her father's house, he will be able to stay with her every time he visits the Netherlands. It'll be as if he never left. The idea pleases him. He plans to travel to the Netherlands frequently. In spite of everything, he cherishes an image of himself as a businessman who has to travel. Moreover, even though he has retained his British nationality, part of him is Dutch too. In any case he's a European, and not merely a Pakistani who stayed in Pakistan and cannot travel abroad. He believes that he simply must maintain ties with both Pakistan and the Netherlands. Being a grandfather also means he has to travel to the Netherlands. Who else can reinforce the ties between his grandchildren and their true fatherland? Finally, he also has to travel to the Netherlands to see his children, because they won't come and visit him. After all, Pakistan is very far away. It's not – like Morocco or Turkey, which Dutch people often compare it to – nearby. His situation and that of his children is more akin to that of Dutch immigrants living in Australia or America [13]. They live rather far away and

12. The transfer of money by migrants to members of their family to provide their livelihood.

13. *Compare the stories from Het wrede paradijs, Het levensverhaal van een emigrant*, Hylke Speerstra (2008, Contact, Amsterdam). He relates the migrations of Dutch people to faraway places.

for the journey you have to have the resources.

Humayun then contemplates his financial obligations. His relatives depend on him. He sometimes sends them remittances. Every time he visits Pakistan, they drop by. There are days that he basically holds court for all the many cousins who come requesting money and advice. Recently, a cousin asked Humayun for a loan in a way he couldn't refuse: by crying on the floor in front of him. This cousin, who is trained as a lawyer, had once helped Humayun get a permit for the farm he bought years ago. Incidentally, the farm employs a guard, whom Humayun also has to pay every month.

Humayun realises that his many responsibilities complicate his immediate return to Pakistan. *That is a shame*, he thinks. He is old, has a heart condition and difficulty walking. He doesn't want to die in the Netherlands. That would be beneath his dignity. Being there would also be bad for his health, which would certainly improve if he were in Pakistan. He can breathe more easily there. He speaks the language. It is a great relief to him that there he doesn't have to stutter, pause and search for words when expressing himself – as he does in Dutch, in the simplest of situations. *It's a shame*, he thinks again, *that I cannot return*.

Lastly, for a peculiar reason he thinks that the Netherlands, and the Dutch themselves, deliberately categorize him as a foreigner, literally an *allochtoon*: someone who has originated from another country and is therefore never capable of being fully Dutch [14]. By continuing to regard him as a foreigner, the Netherlands emphasizes that he is not Dutch and that he will ultimately have to leave permanently. It is as if he would only feel welcome if he left for good and definitely not if he were to travel back and forth, which he expects to do.

14. The Dutch word *allochtoon* is derived from Greek: *allos* meaning 'another' and *chthõn* meaning 'earth, land' it is used in the Netherlands to indicate those originating from another country.

What exactly is Humayun's problem? It is all too evident that Humayun's nostalgia for a glorious return has left him unsentimentally naive and arrogant, making his return highly improbable. But the central point here is more general: it is often thought that if the conditions are met and all obstacles (legal and otherwise) have been removed, migrants who want to return will actually do so. This is then referred to as successful return [15]. But what does that mean exactly, "successful return"?

A successful return is a permanent return. It suggests one has left the Netherlands for good. The migrant is no more. He had become a returnee. He has disappeared and will never ever come back. Many of those who choose to return, for example, migrant labourers from the 1970s, were even subjected to travel restrictions to prevent them from again entering the Netherlands. The idea seemed to be: 'Didn't the migrants themselves want to go home?' Is it then not fair to say they should stay away from the Netherlands for good?

This train of thought is rather bizarre. First, it is expected of migrants to integrate fully, at times even to assimilate into the recipient country. Once a former migrant returns to his fatherland, it is expected that he bids farewell to everything and completely turns his back on his adopted country as if he had never lived there. Of course, residing in the Netherlands excludes residing in the fatherland, and vice versa. However, returning to the fatherland and living there as if one has no ties whatsoever with the former host country, is rather odd. The difference with asylum seekers is remarkable. During their asylum procedure, even if the asylum seekers spend years in the Netherlands, they are not encouraged to integrate. Asylum seekers are expected to have no or only trivial ties to the Netherlands during the asylum procedure. Thus, if no refugee status has been acquired, it could be presumed that the asylum seeker may readily return to where he or she came from (or, for that matter, knock on some other country's door). It would seem that asylum seekers are only supposed to have ties with their country of origin, even if they reside in the Netherlands.

Again, I understand that one cannot live in the host country and the fatherland at the same time. But what is often forgotten is that, mentally or virtually (through computers, phones and satellite TV) migrants often do live in both countries simultaneously. Many migrants have ties both with the host country and their country of origin, sometimes even with a third country. They develop living patterns that incorporate elements

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15. See *Spijtoptanten en de uitdaging van de terugkeer*, Peter van Krieken, Essay 2007 for IOM, published in the IOM jaarbericht 2007.

from these countries [16]. They live between the countries as it were, with "sizeable back and forth movements and regular exchanges of tangible and intangible goods between places of origin and destinations." [17] Whereas in the past, people, societies and economies primarily operated at a local or national level, technological developments in particular have created a fundamentally different pattern. National territory is no longer how things are divided; it has been superseded. Territory is transnational. In this newly charted territory, people behave differently. Migrants behave differently. They go – physically, virtually or culturally – where they can best develop themselves, where they think they can find happiness [18].

Humayun is a modern migrant. Although he keeps announcing and attempting to return, in reality he only wishes to return if his departure is not definitive. He wants to travel back and forth. The Netherlands will not disappear from Pakistan once he returns, just as Pakistan did not vanish from the Netherlands when he resided there. He wants to maintain ties with the Netherlands when he has returned to Pakistan, and in much the same way that he retained ties with home when he first moved away. Definitively deciding on one country over the other is simply a step too far both mentally and materially.

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[16] *De duurzaamheid van het transnationalisme, de tweede generatie Hindostanen in Nederland*, Ruben Gowricharn, in Migrantenstudies, Volume 20, No. 4, 2004, p.252-268.

[17] Portes, A.. L.E. Guarnizo and P. Landolt (1999) *Introduction: Pitfalls and promise of an emerging research field; Ethnic and Racial Studies, vol. 22, p. 217-237.* Please also refer to the article by Gowaricharn, in which he refers to Portes.

[18] *Vier de komst van migranten*, Halleh Gorashi, Ruud Lubbers and Naema Tahir, opinion piece, NRC Handelsblad [Dutch newspaper], 27 January 2007.

Why does Humayun want to travel back and forth physically and mentally? First, there are financial reasons. Money makes the world go round, as it does Humayun. His financial situation is poorly organised. Naturally, this says nothing about migrants as a whole. Various studies show that migrants' wealth generally increases. Nevertheless, many migrants do not arrange their finances in a sound, efficient manner. Humayun is one such financially mismanaging migrant, who – due to language difficulties, little education, false expectations and lack of experience with large sums of money or figures – clearly has dim financial perspectives. He therefore depends on his daughter Dina. He is of the opinion that what Dina earns should benefit him and the entire family. In the Pakistani culture as he knows it, financially supporting your parents remains proof that parents raised their children properly.

Secondly, Humayun has to supervise the success of the marriages he arranged for his children. Almost the only way an arranged marriage can succeed is if it receives the support and supervision of other family members. Together with his wife, Humayun looks after the grandchildren a couple of days a week, while Dina and her husband are at work. The grandparents provide daily care, Qur'an and Urdu lessons for their grandchildren. Humayun takes his grandsons to the mosque. At home they frequently watch Pakistani TV on the satellite. Humayun is not happy that his grandchildren speak only Dutch. Dutch is not understood in Pakistan, where Urdu, Punjabi and English are spoken. He feels an obligation to teach his grandchildren these languages so they may retain their ties to Pakistan. He does not want his offspring to be lost to Pakistan forever. All the more, because Humayun is aware of the fact that his children and grandchildren will only visit the country if they feel connected to it.

The third reason is healthcare. There are, of course, good hospitals in Pakistan. There are even many returnees who work there as doctors thanks to education and experience acquired in the West. Nevertheless, even the best facility does not quite measure up to the care in the Netherlands and Humayun does not wish to lose the advantages of the better healthcare.

Finally and most important of all: Humayun's self-image compels him to remain connected to both countries. In a documentary on modern India, actor and comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar visited a network of Indian parents whose children work abroad as highly-skilled migrants [19]. This network was set up to share experiences, to support one other, to combat loneliness, to socialise, but also to express and celebrate that the parents of migrants have a particular identity and are proud of this. When their children left for the West, they stopped being ordinary Indian parents. They suddenly belonged to a special, much lauded category, linked through their children, to the rich West, to modernity, with social security and bright futures. The same applies to Humayun. His family is proud of the fact that he is connected to the West which pleases Humayun greatly.

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[19] *India with Sanjeev Bhaskar* (2007), four part BBC documentary on his travels in India.

As a migrant, Humayun is different from the rest wherever he is. His identity, his self image is determined by his migrant status and the accompanying mobility and transnationality. He has a social and family network of people who, to various degrees, also identify with this. In this way, being a migrant and being different have economical, social and cultural added values through his extended family and beyond. Being different means being better. He has to show that he is healthier, stronger, more in control, properly educated. Humayun has to be better off than those who remained in Pakistan. Ultimately, he left decades ago to seek prosperity. He must prove this prosperity by showing himself to be a benefactor. He has to be generous and in return his relatives will appreciate his economic usefulness to them. If he were to return to Pakistan, his home would have to be different, *better* and equipped with more modern conveniences than the homes of his relatives in Pakistan. Now that many people in Pakistan have internet access he has to show that his access to the world is not merely virtual but also physical – real. Even as far as health is concerned, Humayun has to do better than the rest. He has to be able to do what the Pakistani elite do – to go to a renowned hospital abroad for medical treatment, for example. This, as with so many other things, is a status symbol for Humayun.

Humayun probably won’t be able to meet many of these requirements. He therefore has to act as if he has. When, after a visit, he once again departs for the West, no one at home can know for certain how wealthy he is. In a dialogue between spouses in *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali’s novel about a Bangladeshi migrant family, the father of which returns to Bangladesh to set up a company, illustrates this well. When the man calls his wife in England, things are not going too well with his business in Bangladesh. He nevertheless asks her whether she needs him to send her money. Due to the distance, she can’t know that he isn’t doing well and if she suspects as much, it is easy for her to hide this fact [20]. His invisibility masks his marginality.

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20. *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali, Doubleday (2003).

The appreciation Humayun receives from his Pakistani family and friends can only remain high if he keeps on leaving. Because, if he were to return to their bosom, they will inevitably find out that he is just as ordinary as they are. Or at least that he is less successful than he suggested. The opposite also applies. In the Netherlands, he is a marginal figure in society. To boost his self-esteem, he likes travelling to Pakistan where he does have power, if only due to his ties to the West. You could describe his travelling back and forth as being driven by honour. This sense of honour also pertains to his promise to one day move back to Pakistan. To Humayun, a promise is a promise. And so his promise creates guilt, the one place where he constantly lives.

22 CONCLUSION

Migration is one of the most far-reaching experiences a human can have. For the first time there is this realisation of never belonging anywhere. At the same time, migration provides plenty of opportunities to create one's own home, one's paradise on earth[21].

For this essay, I explored how the first generation of migrants select not one but at least two places which become home, namely both the fatherland and host country. I chose the first generation of migrants as the subjects for my analysis. These migrants seem to desire return to their homeland the most, suffering the greatest distress at its loss. They feel the most ashamed if they do not return, particularly if they are patriotic. As a result, they do not fully live in their new country because, in their imaginations, they continue to live in the country of origin. This prevents them from properly integrating into the host country. After all, the loss of the fatherland is so extreme that the migrants cannot bring themselves to put down roots in their new dwellings. Simultaneously, they experience leaving the host country to return back to their original 'home' as such a great loss that they continue to stay. In essence, these migrants choose to refer to both countries as their home, albeit some would find this hard to admit.

A similar story, one about how migrants seek out their own 'paradise on earth', could be written about the second and next generation of migrants. Their story was not the subject of this essay, because these generations develop a very different attitude towards life. Not only do they have entirely different ideas about their lives and commitment to the host country, which in some cases has become much more of a 'home' country and in other cases quite the contrary, but they also view the ties with their parents' homelands differently. They may hardly feel any or no connection or they may feel even more connected than their parents. If there is any transnationalism, the second and following generations are more likely than their parents to even establish contacts with countries other than those of their parents. Besides this, the second and following generations of migrants have different opinions on subjects such as nationality, loyalty, honour, religion, good and evil, gender, etc. This is why there is often a distinct generation gap between the first and second generations of migrants.

Schubert wrote: *"Dort wo Du nicht bist, dort ist das Glück"*[22]. "There where you are not, there is your happiness". This is valid for many people. In this essay I have tried to demonstrate that this is particularly true for first-generation

[21] *Een moslima ontsluiert*, ditto Note 2.

[22] Schubert, *Winterreise*, Der Wanderer (1816).

migrants. For many migrants in the Netherlands, continuing to reside here is not enough, but leaving is equally dissatisfying. Often, returning forever constitutes a greater loss than staying. Migrants fear the definite because they are used to living in the temporary or primarily in the past. They fear staying somewhere permanently because staying entails opening yourself, exposing yourself and being known by others. Perhaps we should therefore recognise that their living in the temporal is paradise; that many migrants wish to be neither truly here nor there, but everywhere at the same time.

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IOM in the Netherlands

MIGRATION FOR
THE BENEFIT OF ALL

Migration for the benefit of all

Established in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental partners.
IOM in the Netherlands assists migrants with voluntary return to their country of origin and sustainable reintegration. IOM also arranges the travel of invited refugees and family members that have received authorization to be reunited with their families in the Netherlands. As a third activity, IOM facilitates qualified migrants who reside in the Netherlands to help with the development or reconstruction of their country of origin through temporary return projects.