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The Transnational Family

New European Frontiers and Global Networks

Edited by

Deborah Bryceson and

Ulla Vuorela



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Deceitful Origins and Tenacious Roots: Moroccan Immigration and New Trends in Dutch Literature¹

Daniela Merolla

Generational relationships in immigrant families and the 'deceitful deed' of looking for one's family roots are approached in this chapter through the writings of two Dutch authors from the Moroccan immigrant community in the Netherlands: a short story by Hafid Bouazza, 'De verloren zoon' ('The Lost Son'), and the novel by Abdelkader Benali, *Bruiloft aan zee* (*Wedding by the Sea*). These narratives ironically question individual trajectories as well as major social issues such as (failing) attempts to renew links between 'sending' and 'emigrant' families through marriage. At issue is the constitution of individuals through the negotiation of their identities in the Netherlands.

Approaching immigration and other social processes through literary narratives can be criticized, as indeed it has been, from the point of view of both social disciplines and literary studies. The possibility and adequacy of studying novels as a form of anthropological research is controversial. The sociological approach to novels in literary studies is also contested. In the Netherlands, extensive discussion took place around the publication of a collection of articles entitled *Romanantropologie* (Bremen, van der Geest and Verrips 1979, 1984). Without probing too far into disciplinary quarrels, it is however useful to recall a few aspects of encounters between anthropology, literary studies and the reading of literary narratives.

Undisciplined Encounters

Anthropology and other social sciences construct descriptions and interpretations on the basis of data that are considered more objective than literary writings. The differences in objectivity between literary

autobiography as a mode of writing in anthropological research (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

As to the famous shift from orality to literacy, several studies have considered the interactions between oral and written productions and between 'high' and 'popular' literatures. These studies focused on contexts in which orality and literacy have coexisted for a long time, for example in Europe and in the Middle East, and on contexts in which the acquisition of literacy has developed since the colonial period. There are, for example, the discussions stimulated by Goody's work (1977, 1987) on the interaction between orality and literacy in terms of hegemony and subordination among groups and social classes and by Ong's (1982) study on the mental implications of the acquisition of literacy.

The spread of print literacy in the construction of nations is another important area of study. Anderson (1983) discusses how novels and autobiographies contribute to the narrative construction of the nation as an 'imagined community'. In particular he considers the production of novels and autobiographies as genres in which readers are constructed as collectives that experience a special kind of time: a homogeneous flow of time in which different characters are seen to be performing independent actions at the same clocked time. Such a perception of time is, according to Anderson (1983: 26), homologous to the homogeneous time that he recognizes as characterizing the nation 'conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history'.

Anderson's work has been influential in both anthropology and literary studies and has contributed to interdisciplinary discussion and encounters around questions concerning nationalism, gender and cultural productions (Appadurai 1991, Bhabha 1990, Brinker-Gabler and Smith 1997, Parker, Russo, Sommer and Yaeger 1992, Wilford and Miller 1998). These works indicate that a new interest in novels and autobiographies is coalescing in the social sciences (Alvarez 1995, Moore 1999, Ortner 1991, Thomas 1999).

Turning to literary studies, the question about how to read and analyse literary works is still open. The central criticism emanating from literary studies regarding the socio-anthropological reading of written texts is that 'form and content' are indivisible and that the artistic qualities of literary works go beyond a mere proposition of society and culture. Literary works, and elements of socio-cultural 'information' embedded in these works, are not to be considered as social and anthropological data. Nonetheless, scholars of literature representing other approaches argue that literary productions take place in the framework of expectations conjured up by cultural constraints and historical contexts (Culler 1975,

when they are too old to become fully integrated into the Dutch school system encounter serious difficulties. Without a good knowledge of the Dutch language and without educational qualifications they have difficulties getting a job and find themselves marginalized by society. Children who come to the Netherlands at a younger age or who are born in the Netherlands have a better chance of succeeding economically.

If we consider the new generation of authors from the Moroccan immigrant community who are active in the different artistic fields of literature, theatre and music,⁵ we see that they mostly belong to this latter group⁶ of immigrant children, or they are immigrants or refugees themselves.⁷ It was only in the mid-1990s that a few young Moroccan immigrant writers first succeeded in publishing their novels and short stories, with some winning literary prizes in the Netherlands and in Flemish-speaking areas of Belgium.⁸

These works, initially labelled 'allochthonous' literature, catalysed debate in the Netherlands concerning immigration and were alternatively welcomed as a new trend in Dutch literature or criticized as being overhyped and a temporary fashion with no solid literary basis (Merolla 1998). Either way they are acknowledged, sometimes feared, and often welcomed as the fulfilment of a multicultural society, expressing the present *métissage* between 'allochthonous' and 'autochthonous' cultures in Dutch society. Such a position, however, assumes that recent flows of immigrants make European societies multicultural, inferring the existence of distinct ethnic and culturally 'pure' hidden heterogeneity (Amselle 1990/1999).

Interviews with writers such as Bouazza, Benali, Stitou and Al Houbach reveal their rejection of the term 'allochthonous' and the labelling of their writing as such. They are critical of the sociological and anthropological reading of their works, refusing to be grouped together as artists and seen as separate from the Dutch literary field.⁹ Each writer asserts his or her unique position and rejects being considered as a spokesperson for the immigrant group. The uniqueness of the writer is upheld although the texts treat experiences that can be recognized by many immigrants, especially young Dutch Moroccans.

Hafid Bouazza confided that definitional questions about writers and literature were forcing him to rethink his Moroccan roots and to what extent those origins inspire him.¹⁰ For example in an interview about the themes of his work, he explained

Both my feet are in the Dutch culture. By this I do not deny that I was born in Morocco and this fact plays a role in my stories. Childhood is always a good background for stories. (*Volkskrant*, 25 August 1995)

About the term 'allochthonous', he commented:

A French writer writes in French, an Allochthonous writer writes in Allochthons and a Dutch writer writes in Dutch. (NRC, 21 June 1996).

I write in Dutch and I have a Dutch passport. What else can I do to be a Dutch writer? (*De Roskam*, 31 January 1997).

The writer Abdelkader Benali initially dismissed the debate on allochthonous literature. In an interview given in 1996 he said:

Oh, this so-called *hype* concerning allochthonous writers is passing. And what now? Do you know what is going to happen with such a literature? The more it is published, the less it is special or strange. (*Karavan*, August 1996, no. 1).

Yet one year later, amidst the debate surrounding allochthonous literature and his work, Benali hardened his position:

No, I do not feel the allochthonous of my publications. The division allochthonous-autochthonous has no sense at either literary or human levels. What is important is the credit paid to my work, not to my origins. (*Het Parool*, 5 April 1997).

More recently, Benali (2000) gave his own definition of the new generation of writers of Moroccan origin in the Netherlands:

A new literary stream has developed during the last five years. It is not entirely Moroccan, it is not entirely Dutch. Neither. It is something in between, which would be too easy. No, *it* is an *action*.

To me migration means story-telling, telling stories to the world. After all we are Mother Migration's impatient children who could only become quiet thanks to stories.

Questions about the criteria of inclusion/exclusion in the Dutch literature are still unanswered. However, when we look at the history of European literatures, new contributions linked to long-term migration are not a new experience. Dutch literature has never been monolithic. Many enriching intersections have taken place in the past associated with the displacement of peoples within Europe, including the immigration of Jews from Spain and Eastern Europe, and displacements caused by Dutch colonial expansion since the sixteenth century.¹¹ During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, linguistic, literary and social interactions linked to migration opened up the canonical Dutch literature contributing to form

a new space for literary creation that I provisionally call 'Dutch literary space'. In the Dutch literary space, both 'canon' and 'margins' tend to be reconfigured selecting and partially including new contributions linked to recent migrations, as the 'canonization' of the diary of Anna Frank shows and the literary prizes won by Benali and Bouazza seem to confirm.¹²

Significantly, Bouazza's recent novella (1998) and a play by Benali (1999) do not have an immigrant context any more, although elements of their previous works are recognizable in their styles and themes. In his novella, Bouazza treats the delicate story of a child who is different and unique because of his bizarre qualities. Benali's play pivots around the encounter between King Boabdil and Queen Isabelle in Granada during the last hours of Moorish rule in Spain. This work makes room for a post-modern mixing of genres, literary references and historical anachronisms.

Conversely, when migrant contexts and themes are touched, the literary works by Bouazza and Benali ironically and sometimes sarcastically infer consequences of Dutch multiculturalism. This is the case in the two texts presented below.

Immigrant Families and Deceitful Origins: De verloren zoon¹³

We can look at discourses on the immigrant family, marriage, and their origins in the short story 'De verloren zoon' ('The Lost Son') by Hafid Bouazza (in *De voeten van Abdullah*). As the title forewarns, this short story presents a troubled relationship between the older and younger generations in an immigrant family. The son has fled to Amsterdam and to another kind of life but he decides to come back home. The beginning of this story is *in media res*:

After seven years I was again at my parents' door. It wasn't raining.

Mirianna did not know about it. I had left her lying in bed, after she had wiped off the traces of our rhythmic lovemaking and had wanted to draw herself close to me (one of those bad habits of Dutch women). Yet I had stood up, washed myself, got dressed and told her I was going out to buy cigarettes. As I closed the door behind me I caught a glimpse of her eyes, freckles and breasts in which breathtaking beauty was the canvas for hurtful wounds. (p. 121)

She was not to blame. It had already happened once. Seven years had passed since I fled from my family womb that I never knew well. I now realise this.

Now I find myself going to catch the train to my parents' house. What did I flee from and what am I going back to? I had decided that understanding the past was the only way to accepting the present. My life in Amsterdam has never been free from doubt and trouble, and I needed my parents to expel these two demons. (p. 121)

Bouazza refines and invents the Dutch language with his rich descriptions and the interplay between present time and memory that modify the linear sequence of the narration. The assemblage of sequential adjectives, which gives rhythm and richness to his sentences by creating new words and refreshing old ones, creates a particular literary effect. Readers and reviewers found Bouazza's style excessively baroque or poetic (Anbeek 1999).

Whether their verdict is positive or negative, all reviewers noted his highly refined style, contrasting markedly with the Dutch language of daily life. Language invention has a double effect on the reader, offering both distance and proximity. Proximity because the terms are in Dutch and the reader can usually understand them even if they are new or 'refreshed', but at the same time a distance is created by their novelty. A sense of strangeness is introduced into the language and a 'deterritorialization' is obtained by working on the Dutch language without recourse to the insertion of foreign words. The use of Arabic is restricted.

Human physicality is a central theme and detailed descriptions are given of the characters' sexual encounters. A second relevant theme is that of 'difference', illustrated by the narrator's comments on 'the bad manners of Dutch women', emphasizing the narrator's distance from all that is Dutch. The salience of difference is reflected in the narrator's questioning of his relationship with his parents. Having fled from them, he now returns, troubled by cultural disloyalty and searching for meaning in his life.¹⁴

Elements can be recognized of the classic dilemma of immigrants stretched between two worlds: the world of the Moroccan family and the world of Dutch society, with gender behaviour highlighting the differences. The Dutch world, characterized by unrestrained sexual behaviour, is summarised by the sexual approachability of Dutch women (see p. 124). Yet the story dislocates simple oppositions and distinctions.

This is most evident in the character of the mother, who, as expected, personifies cultural conventions and traditional attitudes. She urges her son to return home and marry into his own group. The words of his mother resound in the thoughts of the narrator as he lives a 'free' life in Amsterdam:

Did you flee to have a good time with women of this misbelieving land? . . . You will only waste your youth with girls who cannot get a man from their own country. If you want a woman so much, we will find you a bride, a girl of your own clay and faith. (p. 122)

I had never been able to chase my mother's words away from my memory as I passed from embrace to embrace during those seven years. (p. 124)

The reader discovers in passing that the mother's call upon ethnic and cultural continuity is ironic. She is in fact a Dutch woman, who became Muslim and married the narrator's father, a Moroccan immigrant. This woman, Moroccan only by marriage, assumes the role of the defender of Moroccan 'roots'. She has acquired not only the most stereotyped traditionalist attitudes of immigrants but also all the outward appearances of Moroccan women: their gesticulation and the use of Arabic words and sayings when speaking Dutch (see p. 122). The narrator takes pains to explain the Arab translation of his mother's Dutch name. 'Maimuna' is said to be the name of a type of primate, which prompts him to criticize her religious faith as a step back in human evolution seeing her as a 'sanctimonious hypocrite as converts are' (p. 123).

This revelation about his mother's background and his harsh attitude towards her destabilizes what at first seems a classic discourse on immigration, and casts suspicion on the narrator's desire to return to his parents. The notion that family history is essential in revealing one's 'true' self is a literary frame utilised in European classic literature as in post-colonial parents' mixed marriage. How does it not lead to a sequence of social and emotional problems that the reader would normally expect in a family of mixed cultural backgrounds? Problems of communication and misunderstanding between spouses and negative social reactions from the wider community do not surface. Quite the opposite, the complete assimilation of the mother into Moroccan community norms and her more-royalist-than-the-king attitudes subvert the 'expected'. Labelling his mother as a hypocrite, the narrator discloses a critical appraisal of cultural assimilation. Moreover the mother's character deconstructs the opposition between allochthones and autochthones in terms of an essentialist ethnic difference (see Amselle 1990/1999).

The juxtapositioning of origins resumes when the narrator accepts being married off in Morocco and suddenly realizes:

with a shock of nostalgia I realised what I had left behind and what a deceitful deed is going back to the origins when one does not know what and where those damned origins lie. (p. 127)

The setting of the story changes when the narrator and his parents go to Morocco to arrange for a bride. The text indicates that going to Morocco is not 'coming back' for the young man. He ignores or misunderstands a great deal of what takes place in his father's village and in particular the marriage and sexual practices in the 'land of origins'. The marriage celebrations' exotic features are ambivalently couched in ironic tones, while the bride's name is mocked by slight changes of vowels in the string of three female ancestors' names: Fattúma bint Fátima bint Futayma bint Fattáma. It is at this point that the surrealistic plot of the story emerges. The reader receives an example of the 'mythical injection' that the narrator says 'could give meaning to his life' (p. 124): the bride disappears when the different layers of her dress are stripped off by the wondering bridegroom who remains with only pieces of material in his hands.

In the end I decided to snatch her head veil off and, before I knew it, the rest of the dress fell to the ground. I still held the veil in my hands while the other part of Fattúma bint Fátima bint Futuyama bint Fattáma lay at my feet. (p. 132)

In 'De verloren zoon', the relationship between different generations in the family is presented in terms of a lifestyle conflict. The family conflict affects the self-perception and identification of the son, which can be overcome only when the young man goes back home looking for his 'origins'. However, looking for one's roots is a deceitful deed that ends with the disappearance of the bride. The story concludes on a paradoxical note: the impossible return to Moroccan 'origins' for the narrator and the short-circuiting of the family cycle. Refreshing the links between immigrants and sending branches of the family are as surrealistic as the disappearing bride.

Disappearing origins and the impossible 'return to tradition' are coupled with the ironic position of the narrator towards people, customs and rigid life convictions in the Netherlands as well as in Morocco, setting him apart from any group identity. The narrator does not speak for a group. This non-conventional position of the narrator intertwines the style of writing characterised by subversion and reinvention of the language and by the insertion of fabulous and surrealistic elements.

Immigrant Families and Tenacious Roots: *Bruiloft aan zee*

In the novel by Abdelkader Benali, *Bruiloft aan zee* (*Wedding by the Sea*), the narrator assumes a similar position, keeping his distance, often

assuming the perspective of the central character Lamarat, a first-generation migrant. Lamarat is a young man who goes to the Moroccan Rif together with his family for the wedding of his sister and his uncle. But his young uncle flees to a nearby town and Lamarat is sent by his father to bring the bridegroom back to the house by the sea where the wedding is due to take place. The story is woven around an intricate sequence of events, past and present, narrated during Lamarat's taxi ride from the house by the sea to the town. The complexity of the narrative strategy is coupled with different literary styles, childlike in some episodes and a stream of consciousness in others, that flow from one to the other as the story tellingly shifts from external narrator to a character-bound narrator.¹⁵ Such a post-modernist style allows the Dutch language to be submitted to strange forms of deterritorialization without the introduction of words or sentences from the author's mother tongue, as in the case of Bouazza's writing.

Interrelated themes that organize the narrative discourse are introduced at the beginning of the novel: migration and the return to the 'land of origin', men's fears of marriage, degrading villages, and the spatial-temporal distance of returning migrants represented by the tourist-like Lamarat.

The initial encounter between the young Lamarat and the all-knowing taxi driver Chalid allows a contrast between different points of view. On the one hand, the landscape and people are presented from the perspective of those who are 'ignorant', notably Lamarat, and possibly the reader. Lamarat's distance from his parent's homeland is signalled by his inability to recognize sounds like those of the cicadas, and local customs such as the driving mirror placed in a downward position as a form of respect to one's passengers. Both mark the landscape as southern and foreign. As expected, migration for a son of emigrants implies ignorance of and distance from Morocco. On the other hand, the encounter, seen from Chalid's perspective, poses the question of Lamarat's origins in a more meaningful form, using the metaphor of the tenacious roots of the local horseradish plant.

Lamarat Minar was not an inhabitant of the Iwojen region unlike Chalid, the driver of the white Mercedes cab, who had brown teeth and a reversed rearview mirror, the taxi driver who knew, because of his profession, every hill, hogback ridge and gully in Iwojen; he who knew the source of all those chirring sounds. (p. 5)

Somehow Chalid was able to catch on to what sort of person Minar Lamarat was, the son of the son of the father from that village by the sea, the young man who had not been back to the region since he was ten. (p. 5)

The taxi driver . . . (could have told) that the young man was linked to the region in a certain way, a kind of fat horseradish that oddly enough only got fatter the further it grew up from the root and tenaciously went on growing in a landscape that was otherwise bone-dry. (p. 5)

Nonetheless, cultural and affective roots cannot elude the estrangement of emigration. Migration is a turning point in time since it divides 'before' from 'after' in absolute terms. 'Before' is represented by Lamarat's birth and the social context of the love story between his father and mother, reminiscent of rural folktales and an agrarian context that is long gone, not only from the perspective of the young man but also for the Moroccan population. Spatial and temporal distance is underlined by the ironic tune of the narration and by the initial setting of the parents' love story in the fields where the family went to defecate:

Lamarat . . . had been born one sunny Saturday to a father and mother who, before they were married, had lived in two houses one on the top of the other in the centre of the village of Touarirt on the Mediterranean coast; at a faraway time for the one and only yesterday for the other, but far, far, far away from Thalidomide children and birth control. (p. 7)

The theme of distance created by emigration is further developed in the relationship between parents and son. Unlike in Bouazza's short story, the older and younger migrant generations are not in conflict. Yet a definite gap between generations is conveyed by the narration. This is particularly clear in the description of the encounter between Lamarat's father and a Dutch seller of plastic chairs. This encounter allows the narrator to satirize the Netherlands and Dutch people. But the profusion of stereotypes in the jokes about the Dutch seller is coupled with the portrayal of Lamanat's father as overly naïve in falling for the salesman's patronizing spiel. The son, and the narrator, perceive him as being different from the receiving land and culture, but also removed from the father's attitude:

Salaam mulaykum, keen bak vie dhar! 'What you mean is that I should understand Arabic,' Lamarat said, thinking out aloud, 'but unfortunately I do not understand that language of yours'. 'Well, then, I'll put it another way: *ehlel ye sehlel ouid wewesch e mis n tefkecht* (freely translated from Berber to Dutch: Good morning, go to fetch your father, son of a king-sized portion of spite). Floor knew that you always should treat Berbers somehow insolently, rudely, otherwise you do not get your message across.

'Thanks but no thanks.' Lamarat withdrew from the front door leaving his father to look at one garden chair after another and listen to Floris-Jan's jokes.

'Call me Floor, and I'll call you Abu Baker, you don't mind if I address you on first-name terms, do you?' (p. 65)

Father, completely bewildered and impressed by the clever young man with the Donald Dutch tie and wing-tip shoes who so easily 'assimilated to him', bought the plastic chairs. Back in the living room . . . he called his wife: 'Darling, darling, what an experience! The perfect Dutchman was at the door!' (p. 66)

Generational distance and the distance between emigrants and non-emigrants are reinforced in this encounter when the reader remembers the novel's opening scene in which the all-knowing taxi driver Chalid remarks that garden chairs are for weak people (p. 5).

The ambiguous relationship between those who leave and those who stay in Morocco is another recurrent theme in the novel. The term 'strangers' is used in Morocco for the immigrants who come back during the summer or re-immigrate and who are liked and disliked at the same time by those who have stayed. Social and economic links between emigrants and those who stay behind are consummated in the construction of houses and their children's marriages to one another. The name of the town Nadorp is a play on words. Nadorp is a town favoured by migrants for house building whereas Nadorp actually means 'after the village' in Dutch.

There is a note of ironical distance in the narrative voice, as in the reference to the emigrant 'model', the gender opposition in leaving or staying at home, and the construction and demolition of houses:

If you go somehow further or you come from there, there is Nadorp, a migrant boomtown with tight rows of houses . . . As could be expected in this town, Lamarat's father, as behoves a model emigrant, has ordered the building of a house. (p. 6)

And yet local residents in Nadorp 'loved the foreigners' (the emigrants). They brought in hard cash (*doukou*), held weddings, facilitated young men's emigration and encouraged young women to stay at home for the rest of their lives, ordered houses to be built and tore them down again. (p. 44)

The central event of the narrative, the marriage-to-be between niece and young uncle is framed in the context of the construction of a durable house and the fragile links between migrant and 'sender' family. The prestige-laden wedding is the tangible realization of links between the two branches of the family and epitomises the social formula *do ut des*, a

reciprocal exchange that the character/narrator Lamarat only begins to understand during the course of the narrative:

It was during that holiday that father began to talk about houses being built in cities . . . And the uncle said, 'Let me make you a proposition, my dear brother . . . I will do whatever your house needs, brother, if you will help me with something afterwards . . . something that helps me to get ahead too. (pp. 92-3)

Lamarat did not understand what it was all about. But the one who understood him very well was his brother . . . actually, and I do not know why it has taken me so long to get it since it was so simple to think of: This was the beginning of the wedding. He (the uncle) would provide supervision for the work and in return the father would help in sailing him to Europe with a wife as his oar. A simple trade, but it benefited the house. (p. 93)

Marriage is a risky enterprise, however, as revealed by Chalid who is afraid of marrying and the young uncle's escape from marriage. Whatever reasons men may have for their fears, the bridegroom's choice of taking temporary refuge in the local bordello touches the bride, irreparably wounding the pride of Rebekka and leading to the story's paradoxical end.

Rebekka seems better integrated into the family than Lamarat. It is through her marriage that the bride's and groom's parents can renew family relationships and links with Morocco. Rebekka acknowledges her crucial role and agrees to marry her uncle (p. 95). Moreover, she speaks Berber while Lamarat finds himself linguistically handicapped when he wants to communicate with his grandmother in the Moroccan Rif.¹⁶ However, it is Rebekka who, symbolically and literally, cuts the links between emigrant and sending branches of the family: her wedding night ends with the emasculation of the bridegroom. Rebekka becomes the pivot of delinking in the face of the traditional gender division that accords responsibility for cultural and family continuity to women. By contrast, Lamarat increasingly becomes a passive witness and narrator of events.

After the paradoxical conclusion to the wedding, Lamarat, his sister and his parents go back to the Netherlands and refuse to speak about what happened.

Together they stood in the shallow sea. Rebekka turned and tugged at her bridegroom, who, together with his blood, was losing his honour, his strength, his everything that makes a man a man. (p. 155)

Everyone has gone home. Lamarat went back to Holland with his dear sister. She had come through the crash, but it was too terrible for words, thus she preferred to remain silent and she did so longer than her mother. (p. 159)

From the beginning of the novel the house that the father constructed in his Moroccan village is intended to cement the family's links to the land of origin. However, the house's deterioration is a thread throughout the novel, symbolizing the impossibility of recovery from the consuming consequences of emigration/immigration processes.¹⁷ The house's final fall coincides with the failure of the wedding. The 'return to the origins' and 'refreshing' relationships between different branches of the family have failed: the uncle dies and the village is abandoned. Morocco becomes the place for the young man's summer holiday.

But ten years later, when Lamarat came back to the region . . . he was told by everyone that after his house had fallen down many others had followed: everything is empty, the houses are in ruins and everybody is busy in the town (which is much more enjoyable, with all those casual contacts etc.). (p. 160)

In *Bruiloft aan zee*, extensive attention is paid to the spatial, temporal and affective estrangement and distance caused by emigration. There are socio-economic links and even deeper 'horseradish' roots that counter migration estrangement, but what these roots are or mean in Lamarat's life remains unclear. The narrator keeps his distance from both sending and receiving lands and cultures, and the wedding's failure and the final abandonment of the village assert the impossibility of 'going back' to Morocco except as an occasional tourist.

Conclusion

The author's works cited in this chapter highlight the social and literary context of Dutch productions by writers from the Moroccan immigrant community in the Netherlands and literary perspectives on immigrant family relationships and the question of 'roots'.

Elements of 'information' in novels such as these are not and cannot be considered as social and anthropological data. However, the literary discourses point out intellectual trends and dissident voices when the discourses are set within their social context of production. The discourse on immigrant families in texts is embedded in a field in which writers and readers (public, literary critics, and anthropologists) interact, generating substantial anthropological insights into the migrant condition.

Examining the literary and social context of production, it is clear that Dutch writers from the Moroccan community in the Netherlands refuse the distinction between allochthonous and autochthonous and reject the role of intellectual mediators between these groups whatever social and ethnic boundaries these groups are attributed institutionally or in literary debates. Their texts treat experiences that are recognizable to many young Dutch Moroccans, but in interviews and public debates they assert their autochthonous position. Whether this position can be related to the social and cultural position of the writers themselves, and what the social and literary impacts are of the positions assumed by these young writers towards immigration and multicultural society, are aspects still to be studied.

Turning to Bouazza's (1996) and Benali's (1996) literary perspectives on immigrant families in the two texts considered, both main characters are the sons of Moroccan families who immigrated to the Netherlands. These 'sons', however, keep their distance from their immigrant parents and from their land of origin. This is linked to the disruption of the opposition between autochthonous and allochthonous. In Bouazza's story, the mother displaces discourses on origins in essentialist, ethnic, being and belonging terms, playfully stretching the implications of Dutch multiculturalism. In Benali's novel, the Moroccan families living in the Netherlands become the 'autochthonous immigrants in Morocco', reversing the equation.

The chosen perspective in these novels is that of young people who take their family as a cultural reference point but are not able to fit into the expected family pattern. The family conflict affects the self-perception and identification of the sons, which can apparently be overcome by looking for one's origins. However, it is unclear what these mean in the young men's lives. Conversely, it is readily apparent in both texts that parental attempts to strengthen family links between immigrant and sending branches of the family are not a viable option. Their efforts bring paradoxical and surrealistic results. There is no going back to whatever roots the young men imagined or hoped to find.

The literary strategies in these narratives allow the reader a glimpse of how individuals attempt to 'locate' themselves within the processes of migration and a new setting. The way out of family conflicts and cultural paradoxes in these narratives is through the use of linguistic deterritorialization and irony. Irony, affording critical distance from the cultural traditions of both sending and receiving lands, is entwined with the literary effect of a deterritorialized Dutch language created by highly refined style and reinvented language in Bouazza's story or by the mixing of styles

and narrators in Benali's novel. Irony and linguistic deterritorialization become the main devices by which the narrators/sons attain their autochthonous 'location' in telling and acting. The narrative discourse on migration is embedded in these literary devices, providing an alternative to an essentialist and static approach to identity and origins. Immigrant families remain central to the narrative discourses of these texts, but their origins magically disappear or are neatly excised despite tenacious roots.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank Dr Deborah Bryceson for her editorial work. I am grateful for the comments of colleagues present at the conference 'Migrant Families and Human Capital Formation in Europe: Home Areas and Economic Vistas' and Frans Willem Korsten.
2. There is indeed a plurality of definitions depending on different points of view and research interests.
3. Gramsci's observations on hegemony, subordination and resistance in language and society have been particularly influential, although often indirectly, on the studies concerned with the relationships between literature and society.
4. See Bhabha (1990), Braidotti (1994), Gilroy (1993), Haraway (1991), Hargreaves (1997), Jameson (1986), Spivak (1990).
5. See for example the plays by Amhali, plays by the young theatre group Stichting Amazigh (i.s.m. Stout Jeugdtheater) under the direction of Massaoudi, and the theatre pieces by writers such as Al Houbach, Bouazza, and Benali. Several Moroccan semi-professional bands are also active in the Netherlands.
6. Authors such as Benali, Bouazza, El Bezaz, El Barakat, and Sahar who experienced social marginality.
7. See Mustafa Stitou and Mohammed Chacha who writes poems and short stories in Berber.
8. Hafid Bouazza won the Belgian E. Du Perron Prize in 1996 for his collection of short stories *De voeten van Abdullah (Abdullah's Feet)*. Abdelkader Benali

won the Geertjan Lubberhuizen Prize in 1997 for this novel *Bruiloft aan zee* (*Wedding by the Sea*). Naima El-Bezaz (1996) won the International Board of Books for Young People prize for her *De weg naar het noorden* (*The Way to the North*) and recently Aziza El Barakat won the El Hizira Prize for 1999 for her story 'Acht zakken meel' (in *Smurfen en shadada*) and Rachid Novaire's collection of short stories *Reigers in Cairo* was shortlisted for the NPS Prize in 2000. The works by other authors such as Hans Sahar (1995, 1996), the poet Mustafa Stitou (1994, 1998), the journalist and writer Malika Al Houbach (1996), and Said El Haji (2000) have also been well received by the public and critics alike.

9. It can also be debated whether this position can be related to the social and cultural position of the writers: Benali and Bouazza are university graduates and work at highly specialized professional levels in the artistic circuit, but also in university institutions and in the media.
10. 'I am forced to think about my Moroccan origin and how far it is a source of inspiration for me' (*De Roskam* 31 January 1997).
11. 'Classic' Dutch literature also includes the diary of Anne Frank who was from a German Jewish immigrant family, the works by Conrad Busken Huet (1826–86) who was born into a family of French refugees, the works by Isaac da Costa (1798–1860) from an old Portuguese Jewish family, and by Jan Janszoon Starter (1594–1626) who was born in London, lived in Amsterdam and Friesland, and died in Hungary. Even the works by a 'father' of Dutch literature, Joost van de Vondel (1587–1679), could paradoxically be considered as written by an 'allochthone' as he was born in Keulen, although his family came from Brabant, and he lived and worked in Amsterdam.
12. On migration, literary trends and criticism in the Dutch language, see articles by different authors in *Literatuur*, November and December 1999.
13. My translation agrees with the English translation by I. Rilke in H. Bouazza, *Abdullah's Feet*, London, *Review*, 2000.
14. 'I wanted to believe that I could turn back into the underworld of my youth and decide whether the salty pillars of my disobedience were not worth more than the reward for absolute submission. I was young and thought a mythic injection could give meaning to my life.' (p.124)
15. By 'external narrator' I refer to what is defined as a third-person narration in classic literary terminology. 'Character-bound narrator' refers to the 'I' character who narrates the story. As to these terms and their differences in classic literary terminology, see Bal 1985, Rimmon-Kenan 1989.
16. 'Lamarat was thinking that he was the illiterate one of the family and indeed he was at the moment' (p. 90).
17. 'In this town Lamarat's father . . . had ordered a house to be built, a house with five pillars and a water pipe that soon became clogged up with cockroaches and crumbling mortar' (p. 86). 'The whole thing was eroding, crumbling at high-speed' (p. 6).