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## Motives for Turkish return migration from Western Europe: home, sense of belonging, discrimination and transnationalism

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### ABSTRACT



This article explores return migration motivations of different generations of Turkish migrants returning from Germany, the Netherlands and France, using semi-structured face-to-face interviews among 48 informants. The study draws on a qualitative approach and inductive content analysis to get insight into how pre-return, migration and transnational experiences of Turkish migrants influence their decisions to return to Turkey. It was found that an ambition to return to Turkey already present when migrating from Turkey, perceived discrimination in Western Europe and a strong sense of belonging to Turkey play the most important role in return decisions.

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**KEYWORDS** Turkish diaspora; return migration; belonging; transnationalism; discrimination

### Introduction

This article seeks to investigate the motives for Turkish return migration by analyzing pre-return, migration and transnational experiences of Turkish immigrants who lived in Germany, the Netherlands and France. By addressing differences and similarities in generations and countries, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the social and psychological processes that migrants go through in migration and return migration, particularly the complicated nature of migrant identities, adaptation in the receiving countries, sense of belonging and intergroup relations. On the basis of a cross-sectional design, we set out to identify the factors leading to return decisions and reveal social, cultural and linguistic issues in the return process.

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Return migration is described as a 'situation where the migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad.'<sup>1</sup> The word 'return' is often used with inverted commas when the second and subsequent generations are involved, to show the complication of the process where migrants are in fact moving to the country of origin of their parents.<sup>2</sup> In this situation, where homeland may have connotations that differ across generations, we avoid ambiguity by referring to Turkey when we use homeland and refer to the host country as Western Europe.

Turkey is the ethnic origin of one of the largest immigrant communities in Europe. There are currently more than 3.5 million people with Turkish ethnic origin residing in Europe,<sup>3</sup> with a majority of these (more than 2 million) residing in Germany.<sup>4</sup> This migration flow has not always been unidirectional and has not always ended in the destination country. Approximately, 1.5 million emigrants including rejected asylum seekers returned to Turkey between 1980 and 1999.<sup>5</sup> Return migration is still ongoing to date as considerable numbers of migrants return to Turkey for various reasons each year. Around 30,000 migrants of Turkish origin are reported to return to Turkey only from Germany every year<sup>6</sup> and each year between 2006 and 2012 more people moved from Germany to Turkey than in the opposite direction.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, migration is an important phenomenon influencing large numbers of people in contemporary Turkey, which requires close academic attention.

Recently, the issue of return migration has been receiving increasing attention in the migration literature;<sup>8</sup> however, many of the studies focus on the economic contribution of the returnees in the countries of origin, therefore there is a lack of research on the contextual or economic determinants of return migration.<sup>9</sup> Klintall states that although the previous research on labor migration have indicated return rates of more than 50%, there is a lack of systematic investigation on the issue by scholars probably because it may not be perceived differently from the migration process to the host country.<sup>10</sup> However, repatriation is a rather different social process and worthy of separate theoretical and empirical investigation.

Therefore, our research fills a gap in the literature by focusing on determinants of Turkish return migration within existing theories: economic approaches, structuralism and transnationalism. The present research addresses common reasons of Turkish return migration from Germany, France and the Netherlands and aims to identify contextual as well as individual determinants that play a role in the return decision. An overview of the literature on the causes of return migration, economic approaches, structuralism and transnationalism linked to home and belonging are provided in the following section.

### **Return migration motives**

Previous empirical research conducted on the causes of return migration did not always reveal converging findings. In early studies of return migration

conducted on first-generation Irish immigrants, Gmelch stated that the main reasons for return were not economic but rather were connected to family ties.<sup>11</sup> In some later studies conducted on second-generation Greek remigrants from Germany, it was found that they return mostly because of non-economic reasons such as life style, family and life stage,<sup>12</sup> or they return to the social network they had prior to migration.<sup>13</sup> Yet, research done on Caribbean<sup>14</sup> and Indian<sup>15</sup> migrants showed that the return was primarily due to economic reasons such as better job prospects. Tsuda<sup>16</sup> also examined what has caused millions of diasporic migrants to return to their ethnic homelands after living away from their countries for decades in a Japanese context. He stated that even if economic motives are the primary cause of return, ethnic ties and emotional reasons play an important role in the decision as well. Especially in the case of migrants from highly developed, diverse countries returning to their relatively less-developed ethnic homelands, ethnicity and emotional ties are an important driver of return decisions.<sup>17</sup>

Return migration still remains a quite undertheorized field<sup>18</sup> although it has been studied in different disciplines. Most attempts to theorize return involve its incorporation or application to general theories of migration.<sup>19</sup>

Economic approaches attempt to explain migration and return in terms of economic motivations. Neoclassical economics perceive migration as a motivation for maximizing income, and return as failure to keep benefits of migration.<sup>20</sup> Early research on labor migrants, such as former Yugoslavian<sup>21</sup> and Greek immigrants<sup>22</sup> in Germany as well as Algerian immigrants in France,<sup>23</sup> Trebous claimed that return was actualized by less-enterprising people or the ones who could not endure heavy work conditions.

New economics of labor migration perceives return as a result of calculated strategy and a successful achievement of the financial goal.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, remittances are seen to be playing an important role and an important indication of the migrant's attachment to the home country. In a study on immigrant workers in Germany by Constant and Massey<sup>25</sup> from 1984 to 1997, it was found that remitters who have a spouse and have a high rate of employment in the home country are more likely to return.

Structuralism adds a dimension to the economic perspective and claims that the social and institutional context in the home context should also be taken into account in analyzing return decisions.<sup>26</sup> Within the theory of structuralism, Cerase<sup>27</sup> proposed a typology distinguishing four types of return of the first-generation immigrants; return as a result of failure, conservatism, retirement and innovation. *Return due to failure* pertains to the migrants who cannot adapt to host countries due to social and political factors such as discrimination and language issues. *Return due to conservatism* actualized by people migrating with initial return intention after saving some money and returning after realizing initial plans. *Return due to retirement* is realized by returnees who want to spend their retirement period in the home country

after they ended their work life. *Return due to innovation* refers to immigrants who adapted fairly well to the host country, acquired new skills and aims to return to bring new ideas and values or to use them in the home country. Gmelch<sup>28</sup> elaborated on the typologies and explored return migrants' motivations and adjustment patterns. Situational and structural factors, such as the opportunities the migrants expect to find in the home and host countries, lead to remigration. When the social, economic and the political context is not consistent with the expectations of the returnees, readaptation becomes difficult.

In the beginning of the 1990s, transnationalism was conceptualized by social scientists based on the common pattern in the experiences of migrants who keep their multi-stranded social relations that link them to their country of origins.<sup>29</sup> So, the transnational approach provides a conceptual framework that does not perceive migration or return necessarily as an endpoint. It describes how migrants develop multi-layered identities not only through the social and economic links sustained within the heritage and host countries, but also through various ways the migrants are attached to one another by their ethnic origins, kinship and in-group solidarity.

In many labor migration flows, it is mostly the first-generation migrants who can sustain their previous social network and pre-existing institutional contacts in their ethnic homelands. However, for descendant generations, the transnational ethnic ties are mostly based on annual summer visits, positive stories and a favorable image of home coming from the stories and memories of parents and grandparents which might lead to a romanticized and idealized home country image.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, most descendants develop a nostalgic identification with their homelands.<sup>31</sup> In a transnational approach, the actions of the migrants are viewed as a direct outcome of their 'belonging' to an ethnic community; in addition, migrants' self-identification as well as the perception of the 'homeland' is illustrated to influence their return decision.<sup>32</sup> Wessendorf emphasized the role of ethnic ties, belonging and emotional reasons in return decision in her research on Italians in Switzerland.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Tiemoko, in his investigation of what caused West African return migrants from the USA and Europe,<sup>34</sup> and Reynold, in her research on return migration of people from the Caribbean from Britain, emphasized the role of family ties in the return decision.<sup>35</sup>

The political and economic context of the country of origin and the country of settlement shape the manner in which migrants conceptualize their experiences and construct their collective identities<sup>36</sup> and have considerable impact in determining the sense of belonging and attachments of immigrants. In a context where the migrants do not feel included, there are no reasons for them to fail to identify with the majority group. In a study on migrant Australians, Noble maintained that incidents of racism towards Arabs and Muslims since 2001 led to discomfort amongst migrants and

their children and undermine the ability of migrants to feel ‘at home.’<sup>37</sup> An exclusionary environment may reinforce the attachment to the heritage country and in-group solidarity. It is documented in the literature that immigrant minorities can develop strong international identities with their heritage countries if they are exposed to discriminatory exclusion in the immigration country<sup>38</sup>, which causes them to feel that they never fully belong to the country of immigration.<sup>39</sup>

Belonging is related to emotional attachment, feeling at home and feeling safe.<sup>40</sup> Falicov asked: ‘If home is where the heart is, and one’s heart is with one’s family, language, and country, what happens when your family, language, and culture occupy two different worlds?’<sup>41</sup> This, in a nutshell, describes the complicated condition of people who live in another country than they were born in or originated from and shows us that belonging is a complex and a multi-layered concept. The approaches to conceptualise ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ vary across disciplines.<sup>42</sup> In this article, our focus is on the possible influence of migrants’ ‘feeling at home’ or ‘not feeling to belong to the destination country’ on their return decision.

In immigration studies, the field of social psychology brings a different perspective to the issues paying more attention to cognitive processes and focusing more on psychological group formation, group identification and intergroup relations. According to social psychological theories; social identity theory<sup>43</sup> and social categorization theory,<sup>44</sup> group membership forms an important component of the social identity and people attempt to achieve a favorable evaluation of the ingroup over respective outgroups. Further, the influence of groups being positioned as different in the identities and the characteristics of minority groups in the host society were demonstrated by extant literature.<sup>45</sup>

Turks are the largest non-European, non-Christian minority group in Europe. Research has revealed that they have been exposed to racist discrimination, prejudice and a lack of opportunities in education, labor and the housing market in Western Europe,<sup>46</sup> and their image has suffered from the Islamophobic and racializing discourse in Western media particularly following 9/11 and other terrorist acts.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, a closer examination of the societal context that Turkish immigrants experience in Western Europe can help to shed light on the reasons of Turkish return migration. In the following section, we provide an overview of Turkish migration to Western Europe and return migration experience as well as discuss previous research conducted on the causes of Turkish return migration from Western European countries.

### **Turkish migration history and return migration research**

Starting from the early 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Turkish workers migrated to European countries. The first huge wave of migration movements

to Europe started with the first bilateral labor agreement that was signed in 1961 with West Germany, and after that with Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1964, with France in 1965, and with Sweden in 1967.<sup>48</sup> As all these agreements were based on rotation; the so-called *Gastarbeiter* (German for guest workers) were expected and mostly expecting to stay for a couple of years and then return to Turkey. However, the rotation principle did not work out for both sides and most Turkish migrants stayed for much longer time periods than they had expected.<sup>49</sup> With the global economic crisis in 1973–1974, increasing petrol prices and the oil embargo, and limitations in granting work permits in the host countries increased the rate of illegal immigration from Turkey.<sup>50</sup> After the 1980 military coup in Turkey, asylum seeking became another reason for emigration from Turkey. With family reunifications and family formation, together with constant labor migration, the number of Turkish citizens living in Europe reached almost two million in the 1980s and 2.9 million in the mid-1990s. The number decreased to 2.7 million in 2000 and remained stable in the 2000s. However, the decrease in numbers is mainly caused by the fact that immigrants of Turkish origin have acquired citizenship in the host countries.<sup>51</sup>

The return pattern of Turkish immigrants differs from the Turkish labor emigration flow in terms of the time periods that the returns took place. In the earlier stages of migration in the pre-1990s, Turks returned in three separate waves. In the first two flows, two large groups of Turkish migrants returned in the 1966–1967 and 1974–1977 recessions. The third large group of people was encouraged to return in 1983–1984 by means of return incentives.<sup>52</sup> From 1985 to 1998, there was a decline in the return rates of the Turkish migrants as many Turkish migrants decided to permanently settle in Europe.<sup>53</sup> According to Adaman and Kaya, qualified middle and upper middle class migrants of Turkish origin have recently started to return to Turkey.<sup>54</sup> Every year 8000 Turkish-origin immigrants and mostly their children who are attracted by the booming economy of Turkey return to Turkey to be employed in different sectors varying from automotive to tourism industries.

Compared to the number of migration studies of Turkish immigrants in European countries, there is considerably less academic work focusing on ‘return’ migration. Some older studies mainly focused on the effects of Turkish return migration on the Turkish economy.<sup>55</sup> A more recent study by Razum, Hodoglugil and Polit, conducted on first-generation male returnees from Germany, revealed that value-related and emotional reasons, nostalgic ties with the home country and location of the family played a stronger role than purely economic or health factors in the return migration decision.<sup>56</sup> Finally, in a recent study, Aydın focused on the return of subsequent generations and the return of highly qualified Turks and outlined the main causes as disadvantageous career prospects in the host country, not feeling

at home, discrimination, their social network in Turkey, and the high economic growth of Turkey.<sup>57</sup> In the following section, the details of the research design are presented.

## **The present study**

In the present study, we examined the return motivations of Turkish immigrants, who had lived in affluent, multicultural, multiracial, multireligious and multilingual countries for a long time and returned to their less heterogeneous home country. The study aims at deepening our understanding of return migration in the Turkish context by focusing on the narratives of individuals who underwent this experience. In this study, we aimed at unveiling different return decision determinants of the returnees from different generations from three host countries, namely France, Germany and the Netherlands. The selection of the countries was based on the fact that Germany, France and the Netherlands host the largest number of Turkish immigrants in Europe.<sup>58</sup> We examined different variables that play a role in the decision-making process such as initial migration motivation, socio-cultural characteristics of the host country and socioeconomic status of the informants. This study set out to find answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What are the most common reasons of return migration among Turkish return migrants?
- (2) Are there any generation and socioeconomic status-related variations regarding the return decisions of Turkish return migrants?

There are several aspects that render our study novel among Turkish return migration studies. First of all, the informants in our sample consist of a heterogeneous group of returnees from Germany, France and the Netherlands who reside in multiple districts in Turkey. In addition to the heterogeneity of the group, the intergenerational nature of the study enables us to have a wider perspective on the specific causes of Turkish return migration. This research finally provides an insight into the perceived influence of certain variables such as socioeconomic status and the socio-cultural characteristics of the host country on the decision-making and return migration processes.

## **Methodology**

### **Approach**

Given the dynamic and complex nature of return migration, we adopted a qualitative approach for our investigation. Qualitative data were collected by using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This way of data collection allows informants to freely narrate their own individual experiences. The



analysis of the data employed content analysis procedures which allowed us to combine both qualitative and quantitative perspectives on the texts.<sup>59</sup> We adopted an inductive approach for qualitative data analysis as we aimed to ground our results on the experiences of the respondents and attempted to obtain a comprehensive overview of return motives.<sup>60</sup> After the transcription of all the interviews, the coding of the interviews was carried out and the semantic sub-categories, categories, and themes were developed.<sup>61</sup> Afterwards, a statistical program (SPSS version 19) was used to conduct the basic descriptive analysis of sub-categories which were numerically coded based on the results of the qualitative analyses. The process is explained in detail in the data analysis section.

### **Participants**

The study relied on the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with 48 Turkish return migrants from Germany (64%), the Netherlands (27%) and France (9%). The sample consisted of voluntary returnees. There were 13 families consisting of two to five members where the individuals were interviewed separately. Apart from these families, nine people were interviewed without their family members either because the partner refused to participate in the study, or the respondent was single. Out of the 48 respondents, 25 were female and 23 were male. The respondents' average age at the time of migration was 21 years. Their ages ranged from 9 to 72 years. The number of respondents between the age ranges of 9 to 21 was 11 and all those informants lived with their families in the same house. The number of informants between the ages of 22 and 55 was 18 and the number of informants between the ages of 55 and 72 was 19. The informants belonging to the last category did not do paid work in the home country at the time as they were retired or housewives. All informants lived abroad between 4 and 45 years, with an average of 23 years. The sample is differentiated in accordance with the migrants' generations. The number of first-generation migrants who migrated when they were adults is 29, the number of second-generation migrants who are the children of migrants and migrated at an early age or were born in the host country is 10, and the number of third-generation migrants who are the grandchildren of the first generation is 9. The returnees lived in six different cities in three regions of Turkey. The respondents returned to the cities or districts of Aydın, İzmir and Denizli in the Aegean region; to İstanbul, İzmit, and Bursa in the Marmara region and to Sivas, Ankara, and Kırıkkale in the region of Central Anatolia.

### **Data collection and instrumentation**

We approached our informants using a two-step snowball sampling method. In a first round, we asked *muhtars* (elected representatives of town districts), directors of institutions where many return migrants work such as call

centers, heads of social organizations and clubs where regular events are held with returned migrants and owners of popular local restaurants and the markets in towns whether they knew Turkish return migrants. In a second round, we contacted the returnees that we were referred to and asked them for names of return migrants in other cities.

Before starting the interviews, we asked for their informed consent for taping the conversation and using it for research purposes. After having explained the basic aim of the research, the interviewees were informed that their names would not be used and shared with any formal (governmental) institution, as most of them stated their worries about any possible complication in future visa or citizenship procedures of the country of immigration or any problem due to the current sensitive and active political situation of Turkey.

Each interview started with an invitation to inform the interviewer about the migration experiences in detail right from the start when the respondent or the family for the subsequent generations first thought about going to another country. The returnees were asked to describe their immigration and return experiences together as it is of great importance to understand the returnees in relation to their past experiences and within the specific situation they found themselves in. Key areas explored during the interviews were the development of the idea to migrate, reasons for migrating, experiences during settlement including issues encountered and resources and strategies to deal with those issues, influences of socioeconomic conditions in the host country, the development of the idea to return, reasons for return migration, expectations and the worries about return, and ensuing measures taken against possible prospective difficulties. Participants were encouraged to freely express their opinions and feelings, tell anecdotes, and comment on the experiences and opinions. Most interviews took place in the houses of the informants. This was both convenient for them and helped especially children to feel comfortable during the interviews. Occasionally, the interviews were held in the respondents' workplace during or after working hours. In a few cases, the interviews were held in the interviewer's apartment. The average length of the interviews was 50 minutes but it was much shorter for very young third-generation informants.

### *Data analysis procedures*

All conversations were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and the names of interviewees were anonymized for data storage. Since all the conversations were conducted in Turkish, the responses in the quotations have afterwards been translated into English as accurately as possible.

All the transcripts were read thoroughly to fully comprehend the data. Then, the text was segmented into smallest meaningful units that were condensed afterwards. In the first stage, the condensed units were abstracted

and given a code. All codes were compared regarding their similarities and differences and divided into sub-categories and categories. This initial coding helped us to begin to conceptualize the themes and what basic processes occurred in the migration and return periods and settings of our informants. After this initial coding stage, the tentatively created categories were discussed by the first and the second author and revised. After formulating our sub-categories and categories, we merged related categories into themes.

As an illustration, a concrete example is given here. In talking about the host country, the informants mentioned a rich variety of personal experiences about perceived discrimination. Within the distribution of responses, sub-categories were created, such as (1) being perceived as *nouveau riche*/spoiled and (2) 'being exposed to jealousy.' After the initial coding of all experiences and observations, we made categories such as 'reasons of discrimination' and 'the experience of discrimination.' Within the category of reasons of discrimination, we could see a rich distribution of responses, and we created 22 sub-categories such as (1) being Turkish; (2) being Muslim; (3) not being accepted as legitimate co-citizens and (4) historically rooted negative views against Turks. Similarly, within the category of 'experience of discrimination,' we formulated sub-categories as (1) no personal experience of discrimination; (2) observing overall discrimination of Turks; (3) observing general discrimination of Muslims and (4) personally experiencing discrimination. These sub-categories and categories were then merged into the theme of 'discrimination.' The same analytical process was followed for the other domains.

On the basis of this categorizations and sub-categorizations, all the responses of the informants were numerically coded in the SPSS file, which allowed us to conduct a basic descriptive analysis using frequencies.

## Results

The themes reported by our informants were examined under three main clusters as a result of the data analyses: common reasons of return, perceived discrimination and children-related issues.

### *Common reasons of return*

The first research question deals with the most common reasons of return migration among Turkish returnees. Each of the 48 informants had their own reasons and stories regarding the return decision. In [Table 1](#), the reasons of return as expressed by informants are presented in a descending order of frequency.

The 25 reasons reported in [Table 1](#) can be categorized using two major axes: West European context related and Turkish context related. Being close to family members in Turkey, emotional ties with the homeland,

setting up a business in Turkey and so forth can be subsumed under the Turkish context-related factor. Perceived discrimination, fear of racial attacks, negative job prospects in the host country and so forth can be categorized under the West European-related factors.

The most commonly shared reason among the informants (39.6%) is the realization of the wish, already present at the moment of migration from Turkey, to eventually return. Still, many immigrants report to have frequently postponed returning to Turkey, which is reminiscent of the ‘myth of return,’ i.e. the dream of return of migrants, believed to happen in the future, continuously postponed and actually never happening.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the parents’ decision becomes the young informants’ reason to return. Almost all young informants reported that it was their parents’ decision (or imposition) to return to Turkey. For the parents Turkey is a homeland but for the second and third generation, born in the host country, Turkey actually becomes their country of immigration.

In order to further illustrate the reasons presented in Table 1, some of the insights and experiences of the informants are discussed in more depth in the following section. The text below comes from a first generation, highly educated and high economic status migrant who migrated due to family formation. The quotation illustrates the powerful influence of return intention as well as home-related reasons on return decisions for the migrants:

**Table 1.** Reasons for return migration ( $N = 48$ ).

Reasons as reported by the informants	<i>N</i>	%
Initially determined return decision/ambition	19	39.6
Parental decision/demand	13	27.1
To be close to family members living in Turkey	12	25
Retirement	11	22.9
Constant homesickness	9	18.8
Perceived discrimination in the host country	7	14.6
Negative job prospects in the host country	7	14.6
Economic crisis/deterioration in the host country	6	12.5
Emotional ties with Turkey	6	12.5
Difficult socio-cultural circumstances in the host country	5	10.4
Partner’s decision/demand	4	8.3
Children-related factors (education/well-being/isolation)	4	8.3
Feeling more comfortable and peaceful in Turkey	4	8.3
To set up a business in Turkey	4	8.3
Climate and nature-related reasons	4	8.3
Health reasons	3	6.3
Not having language problems in Turkey	3	6.3
Practices of the government adopting and supporting assimilation policy (e.g. abolition of Turkish lessons)	3	6.3
Availability of richer opportunities in Turkey	2	4.2
Increasing job opportunities in Turkey	2	4.2
(Possibility of) a racist party governing the country	2	4.2
Problems with fellow Kurdish-Turkish migrants	2	4.2
Concerns about racial attacks in the host country	1	2.1
Demand of Turkish employer	1	2.1
Improving socioeconomic conditions in Turkey	1	2.1

I wanted to return and return from the very first day we went. I always felt myself away from home and homesick. I just wanted to return whatever happens, to have my family next to me. To me, even the air and water is different in Turkey. I feel pleased even by the things like shopping from the herbalists, listening to Turkish music, sunny days, and having people talking in Turkish around. (Respondent 43; age 42, female, 1st generation, migrated in 1992 to the Netherlands returned in 2008, university graduate)

The informant below was chosen to represent the experiences of second-generation migrants who had no initial return intention. The informant reported to have made his investment in the host country planning a future for his family and stated that he was quite integrated into the culture in the host country. However, conditions in the host country made him decide to return to Turkey:

In 1979, I took the University Entrance Exam in Turkey and was admitted to [name of the program] in [name of the university] in [name of the city] but I could not attend due to political turmoil. I went there, studied English Literature for six years part time and worked as a translator. I got married and my wife came. Recently, I was displeased with the process, especially the politics against foreigners. The attitude of the society towards foreigners started to be very negative and that caused me to think about return seriously. I started to think about whether to return, we returned after a sudden decision. (Respondent 42; age 49, male, migrated in 1980 to the Netherlands and returned in 2008, university graduate)

All the third-generation and the second-generation children returnees who returned before the age of 16 reported to migrate as a consequence of their parents' decision or demand. They all stated that although they were informed by their parents, they could not imagine how the experience would be. In the next interview quote, a third-generation informant describes his experience which represents almost all of the third-generation informants in our interview data. His experience shows that the homeland was a place which they just visited in the holidays for a limited period of time to enjoy good weather, friends, relatives, and good food; they did not have a clear view on life in Turkey. Therefore, even if they felt being part in the decision-making process, or at least not felt being obliged to return, the experience was not like an actual return:

It was a little complicated, we just came here all of a sudden. I was feeling like we were going on a holiday. I found myself here, my sister already wanted it but I did not have an exact idea about what was going to happen. In fact, now I understand it was a big decision in my life but I was not aware of it at that time. (Respondent 20; age 20, male, 3rd generation, born in the Netherlands, returned in 2005, student)

For the first generation, return was a natural ending of the migration cycle. Around 23% of the informants reported that after retirement return was

the only option for them. Nevertheless, for this group of people complete return is never possible as they left children and grandchildren behind in the host country. They seem to live seven to eight months in Turkey and spend the winters next to their children in the host country.

The experience of the informant below was chosen as it illustrates that for most first-generation migrants the return is mostly perceived as an implementation of the original plan rather than a recently taken decision which created another split family and ongoing transnational visits:

Yes, we were there but mentally our minds were here. We could not enjoy our lives and could not get the most out of it. We never planned to stay and live there. We always thought about returning. The biggest mistake was returning without children, if we were able to take them as well we would be very happy. Now it is like we left our arms (a part of our body) there. (Respondent 41; age 61, female 1st generation, migrated to Germany in 1969 and returned in 2009, retired worker)

In the literature on immigration, it is common to analyze migration in terms of pull and push factors, where push factors (such as lack of job prospects, political intolerance) that lead people to leave a country voluntarily and pull factors (such as attachment to the country, social and familial considerations) that attract people to another country are investigated. Push and pull factors make sense in our study as they provide us a general understanding of certain motivations behind return and adds a better understanding of the most visible factors in return decision. They help us to outline the social, economic, political and even environmental factors influencing return decision in different ways and provide us a base to go deeper into the theme.

As seen in the reasons listed in [Table 1](#), the ‘pull’ and ‘push’ division can be applied to return migration to a certain degree as well. The positive aspects of social and cultural life in Turkey seem to be pulling most informants. Important pull factors were being close to the extended family members and relatives, emotional attachment to the homeland, better climate and feeling comfortable in Turkey. Nevertheless, perceived discrimination in the host country, negative job prospects and so forth seem to be ‘push’ factors for the informants.

The text below is a remarkable account of return migration due to pull factors in the home country and the informant throws the spotlight on the booming economy of Turkey and emerging job opportunities. The quotation comes from a second-generation informant returning to open a branch of his family business in Turkey:

Lately, we have invested in Turkey more, the trade opportunities have increased in Turkey, we had to return due to work related reasons and it became an opportunity for us. We all had a desire to return, the life in Turkey is different. It is different in terms of warmth, the view of people, warmer and intimate, more understanding, we have the same culture, same language, there are mosques

here for example. We missed the mosques deeply there. There are one thousand people in a prayer here and it is a different atmosphere and mysticism. Although I was born there, here is different. (Respondent 13; age 41, male, 2nd generation, born in Germany, High school graduate, returned in 2011).

### **Perceived discrimination**

Because racist attacks and perceived discrimination were reported by many informants, the decision was taken during the interviews to further investigate this matter. With each informant the reasons and domains of discrimination were discussed. When the informants were asked whether they experienced any discrimination in the host country themselves, 37.5% reported no such experience personally. They reported observing discrimination directed at other immigrant groups on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Nevertheless, when the topic was further discussed, many became more forthcoming and revealed personal experiences. As seen in [Table 2](#), 41.7% of the informants reported experiencing actual discrimination and 12.5% of the informants reported witnessing discrimination against other Turkish immigrants as well as other foreigners (6.3%).

The first-generation informants mostly stated that in the initial period of their migration, they were not aware that they were discriminated as they did not speak the host language. They mostly mentioned that it occurred to them only after they acquired the basics of the host language that they started to feel being discriminated. However, the second-generation informants who speak the host language fluently, have a wider contact with the host community members and follow the media in the host language, stated to have experienced it all through their lives and in more varied contexts. The quotation below reflects the experience of a first generation, highly educated informant who stated that he became quite integrated into the host country and never had a return intention to Turkey. The quotation is noteworthy in addressing the frustration experienced due to the reported perceived discrimination in different domains in the host country and its influence on the decision to return:

We always felt second class citizens; we felt it in many occasions and contexts, every time when you have an issue with the police, or when you have another issue in another context. Their treatments of the Germans

**Table 2.** Experience of discrimination in the host country ( $N = 48$ ).

Type of experience	<i>N</i>	%
Personally experiencing actual discrimination	20	41.7
No personal experience of discrimination	18	37.5
Observing overall discrimination of Turks	6	12.5
Observing discrimination of all immigrant groups and foreigners	3	6.3
Observing general discrimination of Muslims	1	2.1

and foreigners are different. It affected my decision to return. I thought no matter how hard I tried (*ağzınla kuş tutsan* – literal translation: even if you catch a bird with your mouth) you are not second class, you are even fifth class citizen in the country. (Respondent 36; age 47, male, 1st generation, migrated to Germany in 1991 and returned in 2008, university graduate)

Discrimination on the grounds of religion was not commonly mentioned in the initial discussion; however, when the reasons for discrimination were discussed in more detail, ethnic identity and religion emerged as the most important factors, as can be seen in Table 3.

The 20 different reasons reported by the informants can be grouped around 5 major axes: ethnicity, religion, host country citizens, Turkish migrants in the immigration country and political factors. Whereas being Turkish is a factor related to ethnic identity, being Muslim and wearing religious ornaments or a headscarf fall into the category of religious identity-related factors. Misrepresentation of Turks by other Turkish immigrants, non-integration of Turks or maladaptation, not speaking the host language well enough and self-isolation of Turks can be subsumed under the factor attributed to Turkish immigrants' inadequacy of adaptation in the host country. Misperception of Turks due to overall prejudice and stereotyping, jealousy of the mainstream members of successful migrants, deeply rooted discriminatory tradition of foreigners and so forth can be categorized under the factors attributed to host country citizens. The causes related to politics refer to factors such as the influence of media, the international developments after 9/11 and so forth.

**Table 3.** Reasons for perceived discrimination in the host country ( $N = 48$ ).

Reported reasons for perceived discrimination	<i>N</i>	%
Being Turkish	28	58.3
Being Muslim	14	29.2
Not being accepted as legitimate co-citizens	11	22.9
Misrepresentation of Turks by other Turkish immigrants	10	20.8
Misperception of Turks due to overall prejudice and stereotyping	10	20.8
Non-integration of Turks/maladaptation	8	16.7
Deeply rooted discriminatory tradition regarding foreigners	8	16.7
Not adapting the dressing code in the MC	7	14.6
Wearing religious ornaments/headscarf	6	12.5
Self-isolation of Turks themselves	5	10.4
Not speaking the host language well enough	5	10.4
Jealousy by the mainstream members of successful migrants	5	10.4
Demographic factors as large inflow of migrants	5	10.4
Historically rooted negative views against Turks	4	8.3
Negative effect of media	4	8.3
The campaign of the USA after September, 11	3	6.3
The campaign of a racist party and its coming to government	2	4.2
Having different norms and values	1	2.1
Physical and phenotypical differences	1	2.1
Turks not leaving their Turkish passports to support integration	1	2.1



During the interviews, it was observed that when the discrimination topic first came up, the informants tended to talk about it as a concept that is experienced by other Turkish migrants rather than by themselves. When they went on talking about the issue, only after the follow-up questions, they started to talk about their own experiences. Further, as mentioned above, most migrants see the other Turkish migrants as one of the reasons for the perceived discrimination in the host country. In view of the fact that most informants were distancing themselves from fellow Turkish migrants, the informants were asked to describe how they perceived other Turkish immigrants in their host country.

As seen in [Table 4](#), although almost all informants tended to distance themselves from other Turkish migrants, they had both similar and contrasting views about them. Some informants perceive immigrants as a group that has failed (poorly integrated, socially isolated, fragmented, unable to solve problems of their children), whereas other informants perceive them as a well-adapted group, actively involved in all kinds of businesses, having high solidarity and so forth. The informants who see fellow migrants as a misfit group attribute the reason for experienced discrimination to the group itself, whereas the informants seeing fellow Turkish immigrants as a well-adapted group attribute the causes of perceived discrimination to other reasons.

### **Children-related issues**

Children-related issues emerged as one of the most prominent return motives for the families. As can be seen in [Table 5](#), 19 different types of responses were reported by the informants that can be categorized along different dimensions. The table below displays the responses from both parents and children.

**Table 4.** Perception of fellow migrants in the host country ( $N = 48$ ).

Perceptions as reported	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Poorly integrated – misfits	10	20.8
Strong solidarity and tight social networks	8	16.7
Almost no contact with host community members – social isolation	8	16.7
Considering 2nd and 3rd generation well adapted and successful	8	16.7
Lowly educated with very low literacy levels	7	14.6
Problem group with asocial behavior	5	10.4
Fragmented along religious lines	4	8.3
Ignorant towards own children's problems	4	8.3
Have serious problems in the host language	4	8.3
Always desiring but failing to return Turkey as the children grew up	4	8.3
Fragmented along political views (polarized)	3	6.3
Having no social solidarity between them	2	4.2
Very well adapted and successful group	2	4.2
Considering the third-generation vagabond	2	4.2
Tight social networks with high social control	1	2.1
Nationalist and stick to Turkish traditions	1	2.1

When we evaluate responses in terms of their influence in return decision, the reasons can be grouped around three major axes, namely the differences between school systems, perceived discrimination and socio-cultural concerns.

Discrimination again emerged as a very prominent issue in the families having children at school age. Almost one-fifth of the informants mentioned child-related discrimination issues directly influencing their return migration decision. Some families wanted to raise their children in Turkey and not let them be exposed to discrimination in the host country. The experience of the informant illustrated in the text below is a remarkable example of migrants who are rather upfront about child-related motivations for return. The informant expresses his mere concern to protect his children from being exposed to discrimination in a host country and worked in two jobs to reach the initial aim of saving enough money before *it is too late to return* (an expression used by many informants referring to a critical period for the children which is discussed further below):

Since I went there I was so determined to return the latest just after my children finished primary school. It was a taboo for me. Whatever happened I was going to return. I worked so hard because of that. The only thing in my mind was to return just before my children finish primary school or start secondary school. I did not want them to go to school there because the Turks in France, although they are French citizens, it is written ‘Turkish origin’ in their IDs. It means you are not one hundred percent French. You are a second class citizen, second class. (Respondent 6; age 57, male, 1st generation, migrated to France in 1973 and returned in 2005, high school graduate)

In most narratives, as seen in the quotations above and below as well, the parents talked about a critical age for their children before which they targeted their return. The definition of the critical age varied among parents as either before starting primary school, before starting secondary school or before finishing secondary school. One reason for that was the belief of the families that

**Table 5.** Children-related issues in return decisions ( $N = 48$ ).

Reported issues about children	<i>N</i>	%
Discrimination at school	9	18.8
Enjoying childhood more as the school system is not demanding	9	18.8
A more flexible school system (e.g. no attendance obligation)	8	16.7
Adaptation problems – problems of well-being	6	12.5
Children separated from parents/sent back to homeland	6	12.5
Low academic success due to issues at school	6	12.5
Language and communication problems	5	10.4
Student-centered approach in teaching	2	4.2
Children not being able to join parents due to legal restrictions	1	2.1
School choice issues – ethnic populated schools	1	2.1
Encountering bullying at school due to ethnic, religious and linguistic factors	1	2.1
Feeling uncomfortable as there are no other Turks in the classroom	1	2.1
Having discipline and behavior problems at school	1	2.1

the older the child gets, the more difficult it becomes to adapt to Turkey. Five respondents stated that their grown up children who reside in Europe could no longer return to Turkey due to concerns in socio-cultural adaptation to Turkey. One other reason was to return before the adolescence period of the children or to be able to have enough time to prepare for and take the critical exams in the Turkish education system.

Informants referred to the differences in the school systems in Turkey and the countries of immigration. They stated that the school systems in the host countries are more flexible and give the children more free time after school to socialize and join extracurricular activities. However, the awareness level of the families seemed to cause the parents to perceive the situation in diverse ways. Although some parents perceived the student-centered school system in the host country as positive, other informants tended to value the traditional and competitive education system based on exams in Turkey. Most families reported that they wanted their children to attend schools in Turkey as they believe the Turkish education system is better, being more demanding and preparing the children better for life. Further, due to the differences in the schooling systems, some families, especially the first-generation parents who did not complete the schools in the host country, stated that they were worried about not being able to adequately support and guide their children in a system they are not familiar with. Their level of host language proficiency became another concern for the parents as they feel their level of the host language, which is quite sufficient to survive in daily conversations and informal settings, would not suffice for the academic needs of the children. Therefore, those families felt that they could help their children better in their education in Turkey, as they are more familiar with the system or as they do not have language problems in Turkey. The text below belongs to a first-generation informant who migrated for family formation. The quotation reflects the significance of the parental role, as a guide and a supporter, in return migration decisions and points to the issue that parents questioned their adequacy for their children to be in an environment which is not felt familiar:

I do not know, we just thought it would have been better for the children. The reason is that my German now is good but it is just for street conversations but what my daughter needs is the education at school. To what extent could I help her there? Here it is our own language; we can do everything by ourselves. If not, there are private courses, we have a large network and neighbours. Everything is good here in that sense. Therefore, we wanted to return more because of our children. We wanted to raise them here. (Respondent 47; age 36, female, 1st generation, migrated to Germany in 2001 returned in 2011, high school graduate)

Concerns about socio-cultural issues regarding the children mostly emerged in the narratives of the less educated migrants. Those migrants mostly

believe that it is hardly possible for a Turkish migrant child to pursue a successful academic career in the host country and they are all worried about undesirable cultural changes their children could go through. They reported that they do not want their children to be like the Turkish migrants' children in the host country whom they perceive as social outcasts. The narrative below calls attention to an important commonality among the migrants of low socioeconomic status perceiving the Turkish migrant children as socially undesirable. The text also illustrates how the migrants idealize the socio-cultural environment in Turkey and desire to take their children to Turkey before a critical age to avoid the perceived stereotype of Turkish youth:

We even wanted our children to start primary school in Turkey. The reason was that there was not a good model in the environment in which we lived. That's why I wanted my children to pursue their education in Turkey. The network here always seemed different to me. For instance, there are many good role models that I can show to my children like you, or I have my nephews. I can show them as examples and say things like 'look at them, how successful they became entering good universities. Why should not you also be like them?' However, we would not show such role models like these there. (Respondent 28; age 41, female, 1st generation, migrated to Germany in 1994, returned in 2009, high school graduate)

## Discussion and conclusion

The experiences of the informants regarding migration, adaptation and return processes touched on numerous themes regarding the motives for Turkish return migration. The themes recurring on factors causing the decision to return were found to be rather varied, yet clustered as they ranged from economic reasons, such as the deteriorated economic conditions in the host country or recent improvements in the economy of Turkey, to personal ones, such as wanting the children to pursue education in Turkey. We found that return migration is a multi-layered and multi-causal process: some migrants reported to have been quite adapted in the host country, others did not feel adapted; some stated they experienced discrimination, others did not; some had reached their financial aims and others had not – they however have all returned. The findings are consistent with the claim of transnationalism; settling abroad does not imply the break with the home country and maintaining the ties does not mean a lack of integration in the host country.<sup>63</sup> Besides, previous research has shown a complementary perspective on how negative and positive aspects of each country shape return migration flows.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, our findings reveal that voluntary return should not be perceived as an individual decision triggered by just one factor, as it is mostly a consequence of many factors that show considerable individual differences.

Beyond all these factors, the return was commonly described by participants as a very natural, expected and inevitable part of their migration

story and their life in general. This naturalness is commonly attributed to their strong sense of belonging, ethnic identity and loyalty to their family and 'home.' The return to Turkey, where the participants emotionally and ethnically felt they belonged to, was commonly longed for. The findings shed light on the influence of transnationalism; that is, the consequences of the ties to the country of origin. As well as shedding light on how immigrants keep ties, it also highlights how a sense of homeland attachment is transmitted to the second and third generations. The findings are also in line with the findings of previous research that immigrants, who have a pre-existing sense of belonging to the home society and people, may idealize life in the ethnic homeland, at least at the pre-migration stage (e.g. Tartakovsky 2008).<sup>65</sup> Wessendorf also states that the dream of returning 'home' is a prominent characteristic of sojourners' identities.<sup>66</sup> It was noticeable that the return was never described as a 'new start' or an 'adventure' in the lives of families but rather was commonly described as a natural part of a life using metaphors such as returning back to their 'roots' or a branch of a river reuniting with its 'spring.'

The experiences in the host country, especially perceived discrimination, were reported by participants as a major issue that caused them not to feel to fully belong to the host country they lived in. Failure to feel belongingness to the host country and not feeling connected to members of the host society were described as a major reason causing them to have serious concerns for the future of their children. Return was commonly an action taken not to let their children experience being negatively stereotyped or not to let them experience any kind of discrimination in society. Therefore, the participants kept on sustaining the social and economic links with the homeland or parental homeland through summer visits or buying properties like summer houses. It was described by the participants that they perceived the transnational visits as a strategy to prepare themselves and their family for a prospective return as well as to increase the familiarity and sense of belonging for themselves and their children with the people, language and culture in Turkey.

It was remarkable that the returnees were distancing themselves from other immigrants in the host countries. The finding is quite important to understand the complex identities, and the 'in-betweenness' experienced by Turkish immigrants. According to social identity theory<sup>67</sup> and social categorization theory,<sup>68</sup> people, placing the self in the center, categorize the group containing the self as 'ingroup' and other groups as 'outgroup.' Turkish return migrants, who share the same ethnicity, religion and language as other Turkish immigrants in Western Europe also realize that they have adapted to different cultural characteristics of Western cultures such as being punctual, direct, or observing the rules of the system, which they see as a reason for the perceived distance with other Turkish fellow immigrants

who were not adapted to the host country to the same degree. Therefore, on the one hand, return migrants perceive other Turkish immigrants as an ingroup sharing the same history, language and religion but at the same time they perceive them as a culturally different group having different norms, values and orientations. On the other hand, although they have adapted to certain cultural characteristics of Western culture, they are still discursively positioned as different and seen as an outgroup within the host society. Therefore, many migrants describe their position as being in 'araf' (a religious term referring to a place separating heaven and hell) and they perceive their return as reaching to the source.

These reasons influencing the return decision were analyzed in terms of generational and social status differences of Turkish return migrants. For the first generation, the group can be divided into two; the first one, the typical first-generation group of migrants, includes the labor migrants and their spouses whose initial plans were to stay up to five years and return after having saved an adequate amount of money to buy some property such as a house or shop or to start a business in Turkey as also pointed out in many studies in the literature.<sup>69</sup> The first-generation interviewees expressed similar motivations in their narratives. Therefore, the first-generation respondents include the type of returnees who both made good savings and decided that they could lead a comfortable life in Turkey. It is a group containing people returning after or before retirement and tending to invest in the locations where they were planning to return. Therefore, returns were strategic decisions for the whole family rather than individually taken decisions. They also tended to keep strong links with the social network and the family members in Turkey, and buy properties which were taken care of by the extended family members. Although return had been planned in advance, the marriages abroad of the children or their decision of not returning to Turkey caused the families to be split up and to travel back and forth on a regular basis. In brief, many first-generation migrants tend to display a typical pattern. They mostly perceive return as a resting and rehabilitation period having reached the predetermined return motivations of improved living standards after all this migration process which was perceived as years of struggle or as a kind of military service.

Other and less characteristic first-generation returnees, migrated in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, constitute a group of people with a higher educational level and socioeconomic status moving with different motivations than the typical first-generation migrant. Some got motivated by searching for better prospects in terms of education or social rights while others moved abroad to work in professional jobs. In this group, some migrants reported to move with the encouragement of prior immigrants or relatives perceiving the migration process as an adventure or life time experience in addition to the prospects they were looking for. This group is the returnees who

shaped their decisions to return throughout the migration process due to personal reasons or the changing conditions in the host or home country. This less characteristic first-generation returnee is either younger or has a higher social status compared to typical first-generation returnees. The decision to return was more shaped through the migration period. They reported to put more effort in social integration as well as their economic integration either through learning the host country's language or engaging in more relationships with the host country's citizens.

For the second generation, especially those who led their lives within the Turkish community isolated from host country citizens mostly reported that they always lived with the dream of return. This finding is in line with previous research proposing that subsequent generations have an idealized and nostalgic home image transferred from parents and grandparents through nostalgic experiences.<sup>70</sup> Those who migrated at a very young age reported to have lived with the happy childhood memories experienced in Turkey and they almost always had a return intention but waited for the right moment. Although they were economically well integrated and proficient speakers of the host country language, they did not engage in social interaction with the majority group and most of them reported that they were having a life which they compared to living within a Turkish migrant community just as they lived in Turkey. For informants younger than the age of 16, the return was an informed decision of the parents and more often experienced as a migration to the country of origin rather than a return. In the families where the parents psychologically prepared the children to the return starting from the initial stages of the decision-making process, the children seemed to feel part of the decision-making but still they stated that they could not really foresee how the return experience would be.

The study had some limitations. Due to the nature of data collection process, the research is based on self-reports and the self-reported data can contain several potential sources of bias such as selective memory. In addition, due to the sensitivity of the topic under investigation, some respondents were initially hesitant to participate. They had to be reassured that their contribution would not have any influence on the maintenance of certain rights in the European context (such as traveling without visa). Finally, the comparatively small sample size of our study could have an influence on the generalizability of the findings. The sample was not random. It was more of a purposive sampling using snowballing. Still, the sample allowed us to obtain a good insight into return motivation. At the end of the interviews we reached saturation, meaning that new interviews were unlikely to yield new information. Over the interviews the incremental information regarding return migration dropped considerably, even if each life story was unique.

In our research, different from the approaches trying to explain return decisions merely through certain social or economic factors, we found return migration to be a multi-layered process involving different intersected relationships. To illustrate, the socioeconomic level of the informants, the characteristics of both the home and the host country as well as the initial return intention of the migrants have influenced their integration process and the sense of belonging in the host country. In return, the sense of belonging as well as the characteristics of both the host country and the country of origin influenced the return decision of the informants.

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15. Jain, "For Love and Money," 896.
16. Tsuda, "Why Does the Diaspora Return Home?" 21–43.
17. Cassarino, "Theorising Return Migration."
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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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