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**Translocational Positionality of Returnee Migrants:  
The New Normal**

**Translokacyjne rozmieszczanie re-emigrantów: Nowa Normalność**

**Abstract**

The globalization and migration processes are typical features of our societies that affect policy, economy and the culture of each country. Migration involves many challenges: identity issues and well-being of migrants in negotiating new roles and values. At the social level, migration involves demographic, educational, sociological and employment aspects. The reasons of migration are numerous, including the economic as the major one. The authors employ a multidisciplinary approach by drawing on the geographical, sociological and anthropological disciplines in disclosing the narrative of returnees. The methodology employed in this study is based on semi structured interviews with seven returnee women. The study focuses on the transcultural and transnational positionality of the Latvian returnee migrants

who are trying to settle down in Latvia, by revealing their hopes and struggles while relocating in a new cultural context. In this study, the authors place a particular focus on the narratives of female returnees. The main question is directed at how the returnees locate themselves at the conjuncture of diverse localities in building their transcultural identity.

**Key words:** *return migration, translocational positionality, hybrid identity, the New Normal.*

### Abstrakt

Procesy globalizacji i migracji należą do typowych cech charakterystycznych dla ludzkości, cech, które mają wpływ na politykę, gospodarkę i kulturę każdego kraju, którego ten proces dotyczy. Migracja pociąga za sobą wiele zmian: pojawiają się problemy z tożsamością i dobrobytem migrantów związane z dostosowywaniem się do nowych ról i wartości. Na płaszczyźnie socjalnej, migracja wiąże się z wyzwaniami natury demograficznej, edukacyjnej, socjalnej oraz z zatrudnieniem. Przyczyn migracji jest wiele, w tym powód natury ekonomicznej jako najważniejszy. Autorzy, stosując podejście interdyscyplinarne, wykorzystują nauki z zakresu geografii, socjologii i antropologii, celem ukazania obrazu re-emigrantów. Metodologię wykorzystaną do celów badań stanowi wywiad skategoryzowany przeprowadzony z siedmioma kobietami. Badania skupują się na określeniu transkulturowego i transnarodowego stanowiska łotewskich re-emigrantów, którzy próbują osiedlić się na Łotwie i ukazują ich oczekiwania oraz działania podejmowane w trakcie adaptacji do nowych warunków kulturowych. W badaniach tych, autorzy szczególnie nacisk kładą na relacje kobiet – re-emigrantek. Kwestią zasadniczą jest ukazanie jak re-emigrantki znajdują siebie w procesie budowania transkulturowej osobowości w zderzeniu z odmiennym od poprzedniego miejscem zamieszkiwania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *migracja powrotna, translokacja, osobowość hybrydowa, Nowa Normalność.*

### Introduction

The research carried out internationally (e. g. Berry, 1997) so far presents a rich picture of migration discourse by revealing different dimensions of migration. The return migration process is a less researched phenomenon and can be defined as a multidimensional process that includes such aspects as cultural orientation, forming new social networking, self-identification in a new cultural context, access to rights and the labor market. Return mi-

gration involves the ability of returnees to bring back new and innovative ideas by implementing them in life. King (2000) defines return migration as: “*the process whereby people return to their country or place of origin after a significant period spent in another country or region*”. (King, 2000, p. 8) The United Nations identify the following types of return migrants: the ones who returned back from their studies or training abroad, those who returned from their employment abroad, and those who have returned after work abroad as international civil servants, repatriating refugees, repatriating asylum-seekers, and citizens deported from abroad. (UN..., 2013) This article focuses on the narratives of women who returned from their training and their employment abroad. There is a very significant distinction between voluntary and forced migration. King (2000) offers a typology of returnees based on the time spend abroad: short term visits to see family, seasonal returns to their careers based on available work activities, temporary return workers with the intention to remigrate, and a permanent return migrants. King (2000) offers one more typology based on the choice of a destination: return from the less developed countries to highly developed countries, return to the less developed and prosperous countries and a return to the country of the same economic status. All the interviewed women made a decision based on the economic consideration to move to highly developed countries. Apart from the economic consideration, they had the aim of self-assertion and self-expression. Cerase’s (1974) typology focuses on the following categories of the returnees: failure to adapt in a host country, return with the financial savings, return with new ideas in order to implement them in their home country, and return with the aim of retirement. Among the interviewed women there were the ones who failed to adapt in the host country as well as the ones who returned back with new and innovative ideas in order to start their life back in the home country. Carling (2004) refers to the following types of returnees: one’s who graduated universities, unsuccessful migrants, successful returnees who earned some capital to restart their life in their home country, and ‘intermediate returnees’ who have not spent lots of time abroad and have not earned enough for their retirement. Lippman and Malik (2004) refer to the 4R model in regards to the returnee’s readaptation that includes “*repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.*” The sustainable return can also be viewed from the long-term perspective by focusing on social and economic rights of returnees and their integration in the community. (Black and Gent, 2006)

## Translocational Identity Defined

Numerous researchers have tried to define the parameters of belonging and identity. (Antheas, 2009; Antheas, 2018; Antonsich, 2010) The concept of identity reveals the core part of self in the process of identification with the Others, as being a part of a collective identity. These are the questions that the returnees pose for themselves “Who am I,” and “Where do I belong?” Numerous studies place its focus on a syncretic and changeable nature of identity rather than the static one. (Bhabha, 1994) Antonsich (2010) describes the term of belonging as both personal, intimate feeling of being “at home” in a place (place-belongingness) and as “*a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion politics of belonging*”. (Antonsich, 2010, p. 644) As Anthias (2018) argues, belonging may involve shared values, networks and resources with others. In terms of one’s experience, belonging might mean shared values, culture, language, ethnicity, and nationhood. Belonging has numerous dimensions, particularly how individuals see their location in the social world and social relations and – as a degree of inclusiveness and exclusion. It relates to a feeling of membership to a bigger whole. This is not a formal belonging to a group or a community but it resonates with the position of the self among others, by signifying social and emotional bonds with others. The narrative of belonging was particularly strong in women’s stories of location and dislocation. Belonging is manifested in experiences and emotional reactions as experienced in social bonds, particularly in women’s narratives of longing for their home, relatives and friends who were left in their homeland. Belonging is also strongly related to the notion of citizenship that can be viewed in terms of inclusion and exclusion and the existing hierarchies. Belonging is also related to boundaries that cannot be viewed as a fixed entity but as a dynamic, ever shifting and expanding term. Women reported about their multiple identities, by defining their belonging to several cultures, contexts, identities, depending on the context, situation and meaning which of those belongings are more distinct. In women’s stories boundaries are usually being assigned to reinforce stronger self-identification, and those boundaries do not necessarily depend on ascriptive criteria. (Anthias, 2018) Forceful belonging describes an attempt to force a different Other to accept the dominant values and a way of life in a host culture. The narratives of forced belonging were more evident in the stories of those women who stayed longer in the host country and were assimilated in the other cultural contexts. They also reported as being identified as strangers upon their arrival to their

home country: *“When I arrived home, my style, way of thinking has differed a lot from the local one and most of the time I felt that I was not understood and was not welcomed back home in Latvia.”* (A woman, 47 years old). In the stories of the interviewed women, those narratives were reflecting their difficulties in accepting values and lifestyles of a host culture. For example, as one of the returnees commented: *“I was not able to become one of them, everything seemed to be so different and strange for me in the host culture even after a longer stay there.”* (A woman, 47 years old).

To understand better various dimensions of returnees’ identity, Anthias (2009) suggests to use the term *“translocational positionality.”* The term refers to a range of social positions and identities, such as gender, a stage in a life cycle and others. Return migration should be viewed from the translocational point of view, not only as located at the interplay of identities in terms of gender, class, and ethnicity, but also as viewed from the point of a broader political and economic framework by considering placement of people within all these complex processes involved. Therefore, the complexity approach is the most useful to define the returnee’s placement and belonging positionalities and narratives. (Anthias, 2013)

## **Research Methodology and Participants**

For the purpose of this research the authors chose qualitative research methodology by conducting in-depth analyses of semi-structured interviews with seven returnee migrant women. The interviews were transcribed and undergone a detailed analysis with the aim to distinguish the key categories that describe return migrant women’s translational positionality, by exploring their narratives of hopes, injustices, and experience of exclusion and belonging. The issue of return migration requires contextual, dynamic and processual analysis, therefore we engaged into a deep and critical analyses of women’s stories by the use of translocational lens and by considering national and international contexts and how they influence the lives of women. The interviews revealed women’ ethnic identity as a primary social marker as it was expressed in relation to a hybridity of one’s identity, cosmopolitanism, and the forms of belonging and cohesiveness. We did not intend to classify these women as a unitary group with a shared experience, since their experiences and time spent abroad and motives differ, though, there are some common traits such as their life at the intersection of several cultures, longing for a stable life, longing for a well-being back home and feeling of rootedness in their home country. McCall refers to an “anti-categorical

and intra-categorical tendency” as “*an enormously effective in challenging the singularity, separateness and wholeness of a wide range of social categories;*” (McCall 2001..., p. 8) Anthias (2012) suggests to use new imaginary “*for studying the complex mobilities and the new emerging forms of power involved within those mobilities*”. (Anthias, 2012, p. 108)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of returnee women

Respondent	Age	The level of education	Time spent abroad	Motives to return, examples	Emotional reactions, future perspectives
1.	24	Master degree	3	Forced migration: losing one's work abroad “ <i>I was forced to come back because of the pandemic. I lost my job and if I do not success to find a job in Latvia and will consider to leave as soon as the situation with the pandemic resolves.</i> ”	Cyclical process of migration, Willingness to find some decent work in at home In case of failure, to consider to migrating again.
2.	47	Bachelor degree	4	Forced migration: losing one's job due to the pandemic. “ <i>I was working in a childcare business. When I arrived home, my style, way of thinking has differed a lot from the local ones and most of the time when I felt that I was not understood and not welcomed back home in Latvia.</i> ” “ <i>After earning a decent salary abroad, I cannot survive in the economic situation in Latvia.</i> ”	Discomfort, estrangement from the home culture, hostile environment back home. Looking for new places to migrate. Considering this as a temporary visit home.
3.	38	Master degree	4	Voluntary migration: intention to start business “ <i>I have some saving and I plan to start my small business here in Latvia. I love my country; this is where I belong</i> ” “ <i>How do they plan us to return back? They'll get us there and happen next? We need help to build a good life in Latvia that we have used to have abroad. I don't think they care for us at all</i> ”	Hopeful attempt to settle in one's home country to start one's small business. Still having skepticism about the politics in regards to returnees, relies only on oneself.
4.	59	Doctoral level	6	Voluntary migration: emotional attachment, rootedness in a home country. “ <i>Latvia for me is the most beautiful country. Everything is so dear and precious for me here in Latvia. I want to build my life here</i> ”	Retirement at home, patriotism, willingness to reconnect with the relatives, family

5.	31	Higher education	3	Voluntary migration: inability to integrate in a host culture. <i>"I love my country and this is where I belong. I was always a stranger wherever I go"</i>	Pessimistic vision about the future, encountering obstacles while settling back in the home country
6.	42	Bachelor degree	6	Forced migration: losing a job due to Brexit, but looking for the opportunities to migrate to the economically advanced country. <i>"I love my country, my roots are here, but I cannot survive here economically, I cannot find a job here and I used to earn a decent salary abroad. If I do not get a job here, I will be forced to leave the country."</i>	Pessimistic future perspective in regards settling in one's home country, feelings of estrangement and distancing
7.	29	Higher education	3	Voluntarily a short-term visit to meet relatives, as well as to explore the situation for settling back in Latvia: <i>"After a wave of excitement upon the arrival, I noticed how depressive the situation is, people are quite apathic about the future perspectives ahead and majority of my friends are unemployed and with not vision for the future, without any dreams"</i>	Pessimistic, disappointed about the reality back in Latvia.

## Research Findings

There were several aspects as more expressed in women's narratives, such as dealing with legal issues of reintegration, struggling with their transnational identity, newly obtained values and attitudes that created a dissonance in their home country. The narrative of the returnees discloses the aspects related to their socio-economic well-being and socio-political integration. One of the issues discussed during the interviews were institutional support upon the arrival.

### *Institutional, Legislative Support*

The government has ratified the remigration plan (*Remigration Support Action Plan for 2013-2016*) that has determined specific support measures for those Latvian nationals who live abroad and their family members who consider the possibility to return and work in Latvia or develop business ties with Latvia. The government of Latvia has developed a certain action plan that includes monitoring a situation, improving living conditions of returnees in Latvia, providing support of their business initiative and strengthening information links for those who live abroad.

The development of the remigration plan has started in 2012 and includes specific measures, arranged in accordance with the nine directions of re-emigration support measures. They are reflected in the report with the aim of creation of favorable re-emigration conditions. But, as Akule (2012) reported, this requires interinstitutional collaboration and a willingness of all the societal members to help emigrants to settle back in their home country: "...most of the emigrants *do not plan to return to Latvia in the next five years. This is still difficult for Latvia to compete with countries whose prosperity has been built for many decades. We must ensure that the state, local authorities and the society as a whole are ready to help people who return*". (in EM, 2012) Another documents: *National Identities, Civil Society and Integration policies guidelines for 2012-2018* (KM, 2012) indicates that a specific policy direction is to support Latvians who live abroad by strengthening their sense of belonging to the Latvian cultural space that would motivate them to return back to Latvia. (KM, 2012, p.n. 20) The practical measures that aim to support returnees, are not integrated in this planning document. The analyses of the interview data about the expectations of the returnees that might help them to settle back in Latvia allow to discover several dichotomies. Returnees make a distinction between "us" and "them" by meaning – the policy makers. The meaning assigned to "them" is much broader. With "them" returnees understand the locals and the policy makers in Latvia: *"How do they plan us to return back?" They'll get us there and what happens next? We need a real help to build a good life in Latvia that we have used to have abroad. I don't think they care for us at all* (A women, 38 years old). Almost all the returnees suggested that the plan might be more efficient if it reflects the needs of different groups of population, particularly those with higher qualification that was gained abroad. The respondents who have already formed their families abroad and whose children got used to the educational system abroad and settled down in the new culture found this extremely difficult to relocate themselves in Latvia. In regards to the mechanism of support for the potential returnees who are planning to return home, all respondents have mentioned the economic reasons that could facilitate their return: salary, job stability, opportunity to find a job in large companies, opportunity to develop their business.

### ***Life at the Intersectionality***

By intersectionality, we disclose intersections between a number of different social structures and processes, including the transnational ones (Anthias, 2008) in which the interviewed women have found themselves to be

located. We took into account the context, the situated nature of women's claims in the complex and shifting localities and the contradictory processes, as well as practices of subordination and power relations in which women found themselves located. The women reported as being in a position of dominance and subordination simultaneously or at different times or spaces on the other position. The interviewed women brought along certain predispositions to a new locality about the patterns of power relationships and interaction at home and at their work environment that may be not in line with the patterns of relations that they used to in the host country with the different cultural traditional and political structures. As one of the returnees reported: *"when I came back to Latvia, all was so different: different attitude to life and leisure activities, different culture of work. I needed to readjust to the local norms that seemed to be so different from those I used to be"* (A woman, 31 years old).

The return to the country of origin can be considered as a transnational practice and experience. The short term returns as a rule alleviated feeling of belonging to their home of origin and sometimes were preparatory for the permanent return. Sometimes these short visits were accompanied by the disappointment about the current economic situation in the country and a lack of perspective for the future. As one of the returnees commented, *"after a wave of excitement upon the arrival, I noticed how depressive the situation is, people are quite apathic about the future perspectives and the majority of my friends are unemployed with no vision for the future, without any dreams"* (A woman, 29 years old).

As Olivier-Mensah and Scholl-Schneider (2016) observed, during the migration, returnees have developed new life style, undertook new roles, and belongings. Therefore, the reintegration process at home can be described as a more difficult process as compared with life abroad. (Long & Oxfeld, 2004) Social and cultural boundaries were crossed and shifted and defined anew. As one of the women reported: *"This was extremely difficult to come back. After the first wave of excitement of a reunion I felt as a stranger at home. My perception about life and work has changed a lot, I developed new friends, the former kinships at home become loose, my friends back home developed their new kinships"* (A woman, 38 years old). Almost all the women reported about the hostility and jealousy they have received from the local population. The locals are hostile not only towards international migrants but to the returnees, as well. The returnee's narratives highlight the patterns of estrangement and distancing that they all have experienced upon their arrival home.

As Mortensen (2014) reports, formal attachment in the home country, like maintaining citizenship, can facilitate the return in case of an unsuccessful career abroad. This was a case with one of the returnees who was forced to return due to Brexit after an unsuccessful career abroad. Return migration is influenced by many factors: economic, political, socio cultural, as well by a length of stay and the age of returnees. In the returnees' narratives we have encountered the following motives: a split household, economic migration with the aim to earn a startup money for one's own business, and a recreational transnationalism as a part of women's migration trajectories, as reflected in women's stories of movement between locations and relations with people. This was extremely difficult for their children to return since they did not have much of memories of belonging and rootedness to their country as compared with their parents who had a sort of nostalgia to return home.

## Conclusions

The traditional understanding of moving out and coming back to the home country by migrants is losing its meaning in a globalized economy. Returnees processes can be described by hybrid movements and various forms of transnational mobilities and hybrid identity constructions. Geographical space more often is not the main reason for the return; the return is mainly determined by the kinship ties in which returnees are engaged and rootedness. The term "return" does not necessarily mean returning to the place of origin; neither does it show the length of stay.

Return migration is not only coming back to a familiar location, it is related to a number of challenges because of changed behaviors, values and norms and a different meaning of home. The very fact of return is not only signified by a physical change of a location but also involves changed roles, meanings, cultural, ethnic, and generational border-crossing and expectations from the local inhabitants of their country of origin. Returnees become very *transnational and plurilocal*. (Olivier-Mensah & Scholl-Schneider, 2016)

The permanent location of the Latvian returnees in their home country can be influenced by the improvement of the economic situation, the increase of the general welfare level of the country rather than by undertaking individual measures that were aiming at a specific short-term solution to the problem. There are no widespread tendencies of the returnees to come back home. The women's stories reveal narratives of adaptation and readjustment and implication to their countries, like, introducing new business ideas and skills and making an investment in their home country. The women reported about

the number of difficulties upon the arrival, such as access to resources, work, socio economic well-being, as well as aspects of socio-political integration.

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