

Understanding Moroccan Return Migration and Intermarriage Dynamics : The Case of Moroccan Returnees from Japan

Mohamed Tahar Es siddiki¹, Rachid Touhtou², Fatima Bourass³, Abderrazzak Kabbouri⁴, Dr. Yumiko Nakahara⁵

¹Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco

²Professor at the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (INSEA) in Rabat, Morocco

³French Department, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco

⁴Professor at the Public Law Department, Center for International Studies of Security, Migration and Flows, Faculty of law and Political Sciences, University Ibn Toufai, Kenetra, Morocco

⁵Professor at Kyushu Sangyo University, Faculty of Economics Department of Economics, Japan

DOI: [10.55559/sjahss.v2i01.72](https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i01.72)

Received: 18.01.2023 | Accepted: 30.01.2023 | Published: 07.02.2023

Electronic reference (Cite this article):

ES SIDDIKI, M. T., Toutou, D. R., Bourass, F., Kabbouri, A., & Nakahara, D. Y. (2023). Understanding Moroccan Return Migration and Intermarriage Dynamics : The Case of Moroccan Returnees from Japan. Sprin Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(01), 08–22. <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v2i01.72>

Copyright Notice:

© 2023 Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is twofold: Firstly, it investigates the role of intermarriage or ‘Kokusai kekkon’ with Japanese natives in facilitating Moroccan migration to Japan. Secondly, it aims to understand the factors which have pushed Moroccan migrants to return home. Over the last decade, a growing number of Moroccan migrants have relied on ‘Kokusai kekkon’ or ‘intermarriage’ with Japanese natives as a strategy to migrate to Japan. Nevertheless, many of these migrants return to Morocco after years of residence and work in Japan. The study takes the hypothesis of structural reasons in Japan and Morocco as the causes of this act. Drawing from in-depth interviews with six former Moroccan migrants who have returned to Morocco, quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed to understand some of the reasons behind this return migration. The study showed that intermarriage was strategic to migration for the majority of the informants; however, it was not a sufficient factor to prevent their return to Morocco. It also revealed many structural factors in both Japan and Morocco that have encouraged this return; including the inability to generate savings, the incapability to remit as well as Japan’s restrictive citizenship requirements.

Keywords: Intermarriage, Kokusai kekkon, Moroccan Returnees, Japan’s Migration Policies

Introduction

Due to a large number of developments, including the spreading and availability of communications technologies and the transportation advancements, the possibilities for

human beings to communicate, meet and intermarry have increased. Intermarriages between migrants and native citizens of the host countries happen through crossing boundaries of cultures, classes, races and religions. In the context of Morocco, since its independence in 1956, the country has been transformed to a large immigration exporter. Recent statistics estimate that Moroccan diasporas living abroad are more than 4.2 million, which is approximately 10 % of the Moroccan population (El Hasnaoui, 2021). Due to cultural, colonial, economic and geographic factors, the majority of these movements have chosen the EU countries as a preferable destination. However, since the 1990s, an increasing number of Moroccan labor migrants have moved to Asian countries including South Korea, China and Japan, which have offered these mobility new socio-economic opportunities. Japan is the world's leading economic powers with huge job opportunities. However, in recent years, many of these Moroccan labor immigrants who intermarried with Japanese female natives have decided to voluntarily return back to Morocco and establish their own businesses after having lived and experienced socio-economic life in Japan for more than 10 years.

The issue of voluntary return migration has remained invisible for a long time in the context of international migration and mobility studies (Arowolo, 2000; Weber, 2015 Ndreka, 2019). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), about half of international migrants return annually to their countries of origin. Therefore, the study of return migration, in general, and the study of the Moroccan diaspora's experience of return migration, in particular, is becoming crucially essential. It is well-known that most previous academic studies on Moroccan return migration have dealt solely with these topics in relation to Western European countries. Even though the issue of return migration has been gaining an increasing significance in recent years, it has received an insufficient theoretical and conceptual importance compared to other migration thematic fields. Similarly, reintegration of migrants after returning to their origin countries has been a less tackled topic in international migration studies globally. In this respect, Kuschminde (2017) argued that it is critically important to understand the many interrelated aspects of these migratory dynamics including the causes of return migration, the country's migration policies and these returnees' reintegration strategies.

Though there has been a paucity of research on intermarriage in the Japanese context, the issue of intermarriage has been a long-largely debated field of study in sociology and migration studies all over the world. In this regard, Morgan and Hoffman (2007) argued that for many decades, there has been a rich scholarship on global intermarriage across the world. A huge number of these studies have shown that intermarriages can be an indicator of social and economic integration between immigrants and host country citizens (Dribe & Lundh, 2008). The present study aims to address intermarriage in the Japanese context. It aims similarly to understand some of the structural reasons, both in Morocco and in Japan, which have influenced some immigrants' decision to return voluntarily to their original country with their Japanese wives and children. For these reasons, the study aims to provide answers to the following questions:

(I) in what ways can intermarriage with Japanese native females facilitate Moroccan migrants' mobility and integration projects in Japan?

(II) To what extents have Japanese migration polices and other structural factors affected these migrants return decision?

The study field research relied on in-depth interviews with six Moroccan former immigrants who have intermarried with Japanese natives, and who have spent more than six years as labor migrants in Japan. Addressing these topics is of great importance as it will potentially allow both academics and policy makers in Morocco and in Japan to develop more beneficial immigration and integration policies.

A. Intermarriage, ‘Kokusai Kekkon’

Intermarriage or international marriage is a conjugal relationship which happens between different people of different societies and cultures. It could also happen between different people from different tribes, racial groups or ethnicities. It has been noted by (Nottmeyer, 2015, p. 2) that intermarriages can be defined in three types: intercultural, interethnic and interracial. In the Japanese language, intermarriage between people of different nationalities is called ‘kokusai kekkon’ (Takeshita, 2016). In the Japanese context, ‘Kokusai Kekkon’ or international marriage is a cultural category of marriages between Japanese and non-Japanese people. “In recent years, the term ‘intercultural marriage’ is generally used in the intermarriage literature when referring to marriage between spouses of different cultural backgrounds.” (Nitta, 1988, p. 207).

Historically, international residents in Japan from Korean, China, and the Philippines are the three principal groups of foreigners who have intermarried with Japanese natives most frequently. Colonial, cultural and historical interrelated ties in addition to the geographic proximity between Japan and these three countries have made the nationals of these places the most frequented and welcomed migrants in Japan. “Japan’s geographical proximity to other Asian nations (E.g. China and Korea), coupled with its economic virility, rendered it an attractive destination for migrant workers.” (Morgan et al., 2016, p. 5). These historical and cultural ties were going to be destabilized with the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945). The Japanese military defeat by the USA forces and the invasion and occupation of the Japanese lands by these forces (1945-1952) have resulted in thousands of “war-brides”. A large number of these Japanese victims chose to intermarry with American military service men as one of the results of the USA invasion to Japan.

Takeshita (2016) provides some statistical data materials about the development of intermarriages in Japan. Since 1965, post-WWII Japan has witnessed increasing intermarriages rates; the number of intermarriages registered in Japan was approximately 4,156 in the same year. This figure represented about 0.4 percent of the total number of all marriages in the country. However, this figure increased rapidly from the 1980s with the Japanese economy booming and the need for labor migration, especially from China and the Philippines. In the 1990s, intermarriages between Japanese natives and migrants surpassed 30,000. In the year 2006, Japan witnessed its historical highest intermarriages number, registering about 44,701. For the context of Japan, one of the world’s leading economic powers which offers many job opportunities and economic prosperity, international marriages have been an important strategy to be connected to social networks of labor opportunity. It has been noted by (Morgan et al., 2016, p. 3) that “international marriages offer a unique opportunity to examine a segment of the small (but growing) immigrant population living in Japan. In 2013, over 3% of all new marriages in Japan were between foreign spouses and Japanese nationals.”

B. Return migration

According to the Glossary of Migration (2019) of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), voluntary return migration is an independent return based on the voluntary decision of the returnee to return to his/her country of origin, transit or another destination. Similarly, according to a similar definition, “return migration describes a situation where migrants return to their country of origin by their own choice, often after a significant period abroad.” (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007, p. 238).

In the global context, excessive and increasing flows of immigrants from many parts of the world makes the present time an “age of immigration” (Castles and Miller 1998). However, the world is also witnessing an age of return migration as one of the aspects of today’s international migration. Analysis of return migration has been subject to a multiplicity of disciplines, which have been used to explain the reasons behind the acts of this phenomenon. In his attempt to theorize return migration, Cassarino (2004) argues that return migration is a subject of study for a large number of migration theories and approaches. For example, the author argues that the Neoclassical Economics Theory suggests that it occurs when migrants ‘miscalculate’ the costs of the acts of migration. As a result, this miscalculation causes a ‘failed’ migration experience and, consequently, forces migrants to return back to their home countries.

In a different way, the New Economics of Labor Migration Theory considers the act of migration as a “calculated strategy” in which the decision to return is not made solely by the migrants, but also by their household and family members in their sending countries. In this respect, Cassarino (2004) argues that this migration situation results in transnational and “double” identities and consequently raises the question of adaptation and reintegration of these returnee migrants’ when they return back to their original countries. Additionally, the Structural Approach to return migration argues that the act of return migration cannot be decided by migrants individually or by their families in their origin countries, but there are other factors which influence the act of return migration such as migrants’ sending countries’ and the migrants’ social, economic and political factors (Kunuroglu et al., 2016).

In addition to the above approaches to return migration, transnationalism could be a suitable approach to explain the act of return migration. In this regard, (Schiller et al., 1992, .1) defines transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement.” Transnationalism was defined by (Cassarino, 2004, p.261) as “an attempt to formulate a theoretical and conceptual framework aimed at a better understanding of the strong social and economic links between migrants’ host and origin countries.” Transnational mobility of migrants between their country of origin and their host societies allows them to build, in many situations, double links or double types of relationships. Instead of a definite returning to their home countries, a large number of migrants keep social, economic and cultural links with their destination countries.

C. Japanese Immigration Policies

Historically speaking, traditional Japanese migration policies did not welcome foreign migrants. Japan experienced isolation (*sakoku*) during the Meiji Period (1868-1912). During this time, the country’s social, cultural and economic exchanges with the rest of the world were very limited (Morgan et al., 2016: p.5). One of the basic reasons behind this

refusal to accept foreigners is the fear of losing the ethnic and cultural ‘homogeneity’ that has characterized Japan for centuries. Takeshita (2016) argues that historically, the myth of “racial homogeneity” is profoundly rooted in Japan's culture. For ages, Japanese people used to see their country as a strong “homogenous nation”, where newcomers to Japan used to be considered as different ethnic and cultural communities. Consequently, early Japanese migration and integration policies were built according to the myth of the “homogenous nation”. However, in the 20th century, the US invasion of Japan in World War II and Japan’s economic booming during and after the 1980s were the two important events which pushed the country to slightly change its migration policies and thus open its doors to foreigners. In 1951 Japan issued its post-World War II immigration strategy which was called The Immigration Control Policy (ICP). This policy has allowed permanent residency for migrants from China, Korea and the Philippines.

Due to the ongoing socio-economic changes in Japanese society, Japan has faced crucial demographic challenges, including the country’s population decline, the problem of ageing and a shortage in the labor force (Kim & Streich, 2020). To solve these radical problems, the Japanese government took courageous steps to revive the country’s economy by allowing the entry of highly skilled workers. According to Kodama (2015), the Japanese government approved the Japan Revitalization Strategy (JRS) in 2014. This strategy aims to develop the Japanese economy through allowing acceptance of highly skilled workers in many economic fields and providing training programs for these foreign workers. This policy aimed to create competitiveness among human resources by accepting foreign workers in many Japanese economic and social sectors. Additionally, it has been noted (Morgan et al., 2016, p. 5) that “In more recent years, the ‘Heisei boom, [an economic upturn that Japan experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s] has led to another relatively large migrant flow into the country. Japanese companies were forced to turn to foreign labor because few Japanese workers were willing to work in lower end-sector jobs during this economic boom.” Furthermore, due to the increasing labor force shortages in many economic sectors, as well as the pressure from domestic and international organizations against the Japanese strict immigration and refugee policies, the Japanese government agreed to revise its Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act (ICRRA) in 2021. Consequently, Japan is now able to accept not only highly skilled workers, but low and semi-skilled workers as well (Akimoto, 2021).

D. Moroccan Migrants in Japan

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan (Japan-Morocco Relationships, 2020), the number of Moroccan citizens who are residing in Japan in 2019 is 637 nationals. Other official statistics for Moroccan migrants in Japan, issued by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2021), indicated that out of approximately three million international migrants there are 655 Moroccan migrants living in Japan as of 2021. The same resource shows that in this year, about 105 Moroccan migrants are students in Japan. It also shows that about 184 out of the 215 are permanent residents and are labor migrants married to Japanese spouses at the same time. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan (2020), Japan-Morocco economic relations have witnessed a significant development. For example, in 2018 Morocco imported from Japan about US \$ 259 million. However, in the same year, Morocco exports approximately US \$ 150 million.

E. Methodology of the Study

The fieldwork of this study was carried out from October 2021 to May 2022. Due to COVID-19 pandemic confinement and travel restrictions, it was impossible to interview the sample face-to-face. Instead of that, the researcher relied on digital tools (a cellphone and a digital voice recorder) to interview and record the respondents. Regarding basic information about the respondents of this study, there are six male Moroccan former migrants in Japan who returned to Morocco more than four years ago. The participants are between 45 years and 55 years old. They were labor migrants in Japan in major cities. (Three participants were in Tokyo, two in Osaka and one in Yokohama). At present, all the participants are living in Morocco in different cities: two participants in Casablanca, one in Fez, one in Marrakesh, one in Chefchaouen and one in Merzouga. Each participant was interviewed for about 40 minutes and recorded. The mean instrument used to collect data was qualitative semi-structured interviews; in which the participants were asked some predetermined questions; however, the rest of the questions arose during the free flowing of the conversations. Depending on the participants' availability and time schedule, they were repeatedly interviewed over several sessions. They were also given freedom to talk largely about their experience in Japan, return migration and strategies of integration and reintegration. The respondents showed no fear of being recorded and they assured that it would be a pleasure to share their migratory experience. The conversations were in Moroccan Arabic (Darija) and with the occasional use of Japanese and English languages. At the end, the interviews were fully translated into English.

The participants were asked about the following key points: The reasons behind choosing Japan as an immigration destination. They were also asked about the strategies they have used to migrate to Japan. In addition to that, the participants were asked about the role of intermarriage with Japanese females in their migratory experience. The interviewed people were similarly asked to explain the integration strategies that they have used to deal with Japan's culture and society. More than that, the interview also includes these migrants' employment opportunities in Japan, their income, their savings and their remittances. The participants also answered questions about the difficulties they have encountered in Japan and other questions about the reasons behind their return to Morocco. Finally, the participants were asked about their strategies of reintegration in Morocco.

F. Findings of the Study

Table 1: The participants' year of migration to Japan and year of return to Morocco.

Participants	Year of migration to Japan	Year of return to Morocco
Ali. B	2004	2014
Mustapha. F	1997	2015

Said. M	1996	2011
Mohamed. D	2006	2017
Khalid. M	2006	2017
Mohamed. C	2004	2014

As far as the participants' year of migration to Japan and year of return to Morocco is concerned, Table 1 indicates that one of the six participants spent 18 years in Japan and returned in 2015, and one participant spent 15 years and returned home in 2011. The same table indicates that two of the participants spent 10 years and returned in 2014, whereas the other two participants spent 11 years in this migration destination and returned to Morocco in 2017. The following table illustrates the six participants' marital statuses and number of their children.

Table 2: Participants' intermarriage with Japanese spouse and number of children.

Participants	Married to a Japanese spouse	Number of children
Ali. B	Yes	2
Mustapha. F	Yes, but divorced	1
Said. M	Yes	0
Mohamed. D	Yes	3
Khalid. M	Yes	2
Mohamed. C	Yes	2

As for as the participants' familial and marital status is concerned, Table 2 indicates that all the six participants intermarried with Japanese women. Five out of the six participants have children and are currently living with their Japanese wives in Morocco. However, only one participant is divorced from his Japanese wife and his daughter is residing currently in Japan. Additionally the study findings show that all the six participants had known their Japanese partners before they migrated to Japan. Five participants reported that they met their Japanese partners in Morocco while these females were visiting the country in organized touristic tours. One participant claimed that he met his Japanese partner when he was working in Spain, and she was on a tourist tour. All the six participants stated that they were invited to Japan by these Japanese females, the fact which allowed them to obtain Japanese visas. They also reported that intermarriage with these Japanese women was the first step to establish their migration project in Japan.

Table 3: The participants' occupations in Japan and in Morocco after returning home.

Participants	Occupation in Japan (before return)	Occupation in Morocco (at present)
Ali. B	Manufacturing	Travel agency manager
Mustapha. F	Manufacturing	Tourism
Said. M	Office worker	Restaurant manager
Mohamed. D	Production company	Tourism
Khalid. M	Office worker	Touristic transportation
Mohamed. C	Production company	Company production presenter

Concerning the participants' occupation in Japan before their return migration, Table 3 shows that the participants were not jobless in Japan, but they were employed in different occupations such as manufacturing, office working and production companies. However, when they returned back to Morocco their employment specialty changed completely. The same table indicates that two of the six participants are currently working in Morocco in tourism. One participant is working as a driver with a tourist transportation company, whereas one participant is working as a production presenter in a pottery company. One participant has a travel agency, and one participant runs a restaurant as manager.

a. Drivers of Moroccan Migration to Japan

Five of the total numbers of participants confessed that socio-economic motives had been the major push factors which encouraged their migration journey to Japan. These participants declared that migrating to Japan was a good opportunity for them to achieve the following targets: Finding good jobs, saving enough money, enjoying good living conditions in Japan and sending remittances to their families left behind in Morocco (parents and siblings).

Said is a 49 years old. He was a former labor migrant in Japan. Said migrated to Japan in 1996 and returned to Morocco in 2011. He is currently a restaurant manager in Chefchaouen city in the northwest of Morocco. Finding a good economic opportunity was Said's main push factor to leave Morocco. Said Acknowledged:

'Similar to thousands of Moroccan people who migrate to Europe annually for economic reasons, I succeeded to migrate to Japan with an objective to find a good job, build my future and help my family in Morocco. At the beginning, it was hard for me to find work, but thanks to my Japanese wife, who helped me to migrate to Japan, I was able to find many job opportunities.'

However, one participant confessed that in addition to these economic and social reasons, he migrated to Japan to acquire the Japanese language and learn about Japanese culture and history.

b. Intermarriage and Immigration Project

In regard to intermarriage with Japanese women and the participants' migration project, all the six informants reported that, it is similar to a large number of young Moroccans, migrating abroad was a dream for them. This is a common dream among many young Moroccans. The six respondents confessed that they had never thought they could migrate to Japan. They also declared that their migratory journey to Japan started by chance when they met their future Japanese partners. They also explained that intermarriage with foreigners can be a major step to achieve their migration dream. They thought that intermarriage with Japanese women could help them achieve many targets including migrating to Japan and finding jobs easily through knowing Japanese and Moroccan job social networks. They also admitted that intermarriage could help them acquire the Japanese language ability and the Japanese nationality. As labour migrants, all the six respondents believe that intermarriage was a key factor for them to improve their economic situation, achieve personal satisfaction and assist their families in need in Morocco.

Khalid is 50 years old. He was a former labor migrant in Japan. He migrated to Japan in 2006 and returned back to Morocco with his Japanese spouse and two children in 2017. Khalid is currently a driver with a tourist company in Morocco. Khalid confessed:

‘The idea to migrate has always been a dream for me. Working as a driver for a travel agency in Morocco has allowed me to meet foreign people from different cultural backgrounds. I have never thought that I could go to Japan. During a tourist tour, I met a Japanese woman who is going to be my future wife and thanks to her I could move and live in Japan for many years.’

Khalid continued:

‘It is hard to live in Japan as a Moroccan, but my Japanese spouse helped me to acquire basic Japanese language and find job opportunities. However, this does not mean that I was able to have Japanese citizenship unfortunately’.

Finding a good economic opportunity was Said's main push factor to leave Morocco. Said Acknowledged:

G. Drivers of Return Migration

The participants declared that at the beginning of their migration journey to Japan they had no intention of returning to Morocco. However, they had facing a number of challenges in Japan, they started thinking to return home. These are the most important reasons behind these migrants' decisions to return to Morocco with their families and children after more than a decade of residence and work in Japan.

a. Japan's Vacation System and Integration

In answering the question about the reasons behind their return migration, all the six participants admitted that Japan's vacation system was the major reason for their return to Morocco. The study findings revealed that the Japanese labor vacation system is a major push factor for Moroccan migrants to leave Japan. It is well known that Japanese labor laws guarantee 10 days annual paid vacation for full time workers in addition to time off for Japanese national holidays such as: Golden Week and New Year holidays. However, the respondents reported that Japanese companies refuse to allow extended vacation for foreign workers.

Ali is one of the six informants in this study. He is a 42 years old former migrant in Japan. He is now a travel agency manager in Morocco. Ali currently lives in Marrakesh with his Japanese spouse and two children. Ali admitted:

'I still remember having worked for more than two years in a Japanese company and I wanted to ask for more than 10 days' vacation to visit my family in Morocco, as I had not seen them for five years. However, the company manager told me it is impossible to have more vacation days. The manager told me If I do so, I will lose my job and I have to find another one. After that, every time when I visited my family in Morocco, I had to find another job the fact which negatively influenced my work curriculum vitae in Japan.'

Ali continued:

'The Japanese vacation system was not suitable for me as a Moroccan. I am used to long summer holidays where I can visit my country and see my family and friends.'

b. Poor Savings and Inability to Send Remittances

As far as savings and remittances are concerned, five out of the six informants reported that in order to have more job opportunities, save some money and send funds remittances to their families in Morocco (parents and siblings), they spent most of their migration period in big cities (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Yokohama). These locations are famous for their international businesses and foreign communities. One of the participants named Mohamed. He is 47 years old. He is currently working with a production presenter in a pottery company in Fes city, Morocco. Mohamed told his story about his inability to make savings or send remittances to Morocco. The informant admitted:

'I was living with my Japanese wife and two children in the outskirts of Osaka, and I had to commute to the city center to work. I could earn about 250.000 Japanese ¥ monthly (about 2000 €) in addition to my Japanese wife's income. However, the cost of living is very high. We used to spend most of our income on food, renting, transportation and clothes. It was impossible for me to save money and remit to my parents in Morocco. I was not able to send any remittances for four years.'

H. Findings and Data Analysis

The present study addresses some of the personal and structural factors, both in the country of destination (Japan) and in the home country (Morocco), affecting Moroccan migrants' decision to return to Morocco despite being intermarried with Japanese female natives. Through conducting in-depth interviews with six Moroccan male former migrants who have recently returned with their Japanese families to Morocco, qualitative research data was collected and analyzed to understand those related factors behind their return decision. Much data was collected from interviewing the sample and the following is some of the most significant outcomes of the study.

a. Intermarriage or “Kokusai kekkon”: A Strategy of Migration and Integration.

As labor migrants, all the six participants reported that it was due to knowing and intermarrying Japanese female natives that they could immigrate to Japan and become permanent residents there. Furthermore, they explained that “kokusai kekkon” or (intermarriage) was a major factor which did not only facilitate their migration aspiration projects, but it facilitated their socio-economic integration as well”. It has been noted (Nottmeyer, 2015, p. 9) that “Intermarriage can serve as an indicator of social proximity and as a driving factor for the economic success of immigrants. It could thus shed some light on the mechanisms that enable successful integration.”

These research results are in line with the findings of a study conducted by Furtado and Theodor Poulos (2010) on the role of intermarriages on immigrants' employment opportunities in the United States. This study used instrumental variables to analyze the effects of intermarriages on migrant employment. It showed that intermarriages help to connect migrants in host societies to social networks, which then enable them to find easily many work opportunities. Additionally, the present study findings are supported by the outcomes of a study conducted by Dribe & Lundh (2008) who used cross-sectional data collected from 39 groups of immigrants, including a Moroccan group intermarried with Swedish natives in 2003. The study concluded that intermarriage with natives is more likely to facilitate migrants' economic integration. The authors also argue that intermarriage with the host society's natives is likely to foster immigrants' employment opportunities and increase household income. However, it is critically significant to note that although intermarriage largely helped these Moroccans migrants to achieve the migration dream and enabled them consequently to enjoy temporarily socio-economic integration into the Japanese society; it was insufficient to deter their return decisions.

b. Inability to Send Remittances and Return Migration

The participants reported that being socio-economically integrated into Japanese society did not mean that they were able to make good savings or send remittances to support their families left behind in Morocco. In order to clarify more this point, it is important to refer to De Haas et al. (2015) who argue that the New Economics of Labor Migration theory (NELM) claims that migration is a project of the migrants' households and families in the origin countries. In this respect, migrants tend to keep strong social and economic relationships with their families in home countries as they have to work, make savings and send remittances to their families in their countries of origin. The present study reveals that

these Moroccan migrants' individual decisions to migrate stay abroad or return home is not the most determinative factor. However, the study reveals that these migrants' families in Morocco tend to influence their decision to stay in Japan or return home.

The research findings resemble to some extent what De Haas et al. (2015) found in a study which aimed to understand the factors that influence migrants' decisions to return home. The authors relied on face-to-face interviews with a group of Moroccan migrants living in Europe. The authors concluded that the socio- economic and cultural integration of these migrants in host countries are not significant factors behind the decision to return home. However, it is due to the economic and social ties which link these migrants to their home country, and influence these migrants' decisions to return or stay abroad. However, in the above case of the Moroccan migrants in Europe, the interviewed group decided to return home after saving money, sending remittances and establishing economic projects in Morocco. In the case of Moroccan returnees from Japan, these former migrants decided to return home because they were unable to generate savings or send remittances to their families in Morocco. It is clear from the above studies that keeping strong social and economic relations to families in home countries can also influence migrants' decision to return home after a successful or an unsuccessful migration experience abroad.

c. Japanese Citizenship Requirements and Return Migration

Japanese citizenship requirements are some of the most discouraging reasons that have pushed these migrants to return to Morocco. Five of the six informants reported that it was basically due to the restrictiveness of the Japanese migration and integration policy, specifically which lies in the citizenship requirements. Even though the respondents spent more than 10 years in Japan and have intermarried with Japanese native wives they were not able to acquire the Japanese citizenship. According to the Japan Ministry of Justice, in Japan foreigners who desire to acquire naturalization have to meet fundamental requirements which include but not limited to:

- Being resident in Japan for at least five years.
- Showing enough ability to speak and write the Japanese language.
- Showing evidence of good conduct and no criminal history.
- Willingness to give up one's nationality to acquire the Japanese nationality.

Although Japan has recently lessened some of its restrictive migration and integration policies due to its need to welcome foreign labor and combat low fertility rates. However, the Japanese government has not worked hard to change the restrictive Japanese naturalization requirements, which still affects migrants' rights and social integration (Tsuda 2008).

Generally, Japanese migration policies do not welcome foreign migrants. One of the major differences between the Japanese economy and other western economies is that while European and American economies have attracted millions of labor migrants from developing countries after World War II, the Japanese economy has flourished without relying on foreign workers. One of the basic reasons behind this resistance is the fear of losing the Japanese ethnic and cultural homogeneity. In this regard, Takeshita (2016) argues

that historically, 'racial homogeneity, as myth, is profoundly rooted in Japan's culture. Since the Japanese people have been accustomed to seeing their country as a strong homogenous nation in which newcomers have been seen as different ethnicities and cultures. It is worth noting here that all the six informants of this study explained that acquiring the Japanese citizenship was one of the aims of their migration project; however, giving up their Moroccan nationality to acquire a the Japanese one was the most restrictive requirement which has influenced their naturalization dream.

It is clear from the data obtained that these migrants were not only motivated by their personal or individual needs and desires to transform their migration project into a success in Japan, but they were also influenced by their families' needs and expectations in the origin country. These migrants' family calculations of the costs and benefits of the migration project have really played a significant role in the return decision. In this respect, it is important to note that historical structural approaches to migration portray migrants as those 'passive' agents which are prone to other macro forces in the global scales. The act of return migration cannot be decided solely by migrants individually or by their families in their original countries, but there are other political, economic and cultural factors which may influence the act of return migration in both migration sending and receiving countries.

Conclusion

Although return migration of the Moroccan diasporas from many Asian immigration destinations is a promising field of research, it has been largely neglected by Moroccan academia and policy makers. The present study is a modest contribution which attempted to shed light on the return migration of some Moroccan former labor migrants from Japan. The study aims to understand that in migratory contexts, intermarriage, '*kokusai kekkon*' (intermarriage with Japanese natives in this case), is not always sufficient to deter the return decision of labor migrants from a very developed country (Japan). Qualitative research was conducted through in-depth interviews with six Moroccan male former migrants who have returned to Morocco with their families after more than a decade of residency and work in Japan. This latter is a country that has been known as an unwelcoming society for foreign labor migrants due to the myth of "racial homogeneity" which is historically rooted in the society and culture.

The study's collected data revealed that many interrelated structural factors have enhanced the return decision of these Moroccan migrants. The study also revealed that intermarriage was used as a strategic channel for these migrants to immigrate and integrate into Japanese host society. '*Kokusai Kekkō*' strategy helped the informants to overcome many of the linguistic, cultural and social boundaries of the Japanese society. Notwithstanding this achievement, many structural factors, both in the country of destination (Japan) and in the home country (Morocco) have urged these Moroccan labor migrants to take the decision to return to Morocco although being intermarried with their Japanese spouses and have children with Japanese nationalities. Additionally, this research revealed that these migrants' families (parents and siblings, etc.) who are in their origin country, have influenced their migratory experience. The study showed that the migratory project is not an individual or personal project of the migrant, but it is a family 'cost and benefit' project. Since economic reasons are powerful factors that shape the migratory journey, these labor migrants' inability to send sufficient remittances to their Moroccan families has negatively

influenced their migration experience in Japan. More than that, this research revealed that structural factors of the receiving country (Japan) influenced the return decision of these labor migrants. All the interviewed participants admitted that Japan's citizenship requirements were very restrictive and were the major reasons behind their decision to return home.

Return migration of the Moroccan diasporas, from Asian destinations in general and from Japan in particular, is an academic promising but understudied field of research. For this reason, this study hopes that the following implications will be considered in both Morocco and in Japan. Moroccan academic studies should provide much more space to debate return migration of the Moroccan diaspora from Asian countries. Moroccan academic scholarship should deal with the issues of migration, integration and normalization in the Asian receiving countries. The Moroccan government should make more efforts to facilitate the reintegration of Moroccan returnees and try to benefit from their migration experience. The government of Japan should significantly modify its migration and integration policies to welcome and integrate fully more and more labor migration in order to keep its global economic ranking and its socio-cultural existence.

References

- Akimoto, D. (2021). "Japan's changing immigration and refugee policy: Tokyo has long been criticized for restrictive immigration policy. Can it change?" *The Diplomat*. Retrieved on January 20, 2022.
<https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/japans-changing-immigration-and-refugee-policy/>
- Arowolo, O. O. (2000). "Return migration and the problem of reintegration". *International migration*, 38(5), 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00128>
- Cassarino, J. P. (2004). Theorising return migration: The conceptual approach to return migrants revisited. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, 6(2), 253-279. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1730637>
- Castles, S., & Miller, M. J. (1998). *The Age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. (2nd edition). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan
- De Haas, H., Fokkema, T., & Fihri, M.F. (2015). Return migration as failure or success?. *Int. Migration & Integration* 16, 415-429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0344-6>
- Dribe, M., & Christer, L. (2008). Intermarriage and immigrant integration in Sweden: An exploratory analysis." *Acta Sociologica*, 51(4): 329-354.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699308097377>
- Dustmann, C., & Yoram, W. (2007). Return migration: theory and empirical evidence from the UK." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 45(2), 236-256.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8543.2007.00613>
- El Hasnaoui, A. (2021). "The Moroccan diaspora: What are the modes of political participation?" *Arab Reform Initiative, Bawader*. Retrieved on February 17, 2022.
<https://www.arab-reform.net/pdf/?pid=20442&plang=en>
- Furtado, D., & Theodoropoulos, N. (2010). Why does intermarriage increase immigrant employment? The role of networks. *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 10(1). <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.2202/1935-1682.2527/html>

- Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2021) Retrieved from:
https://www.isa.go.jp/en/policies/statistics/toukei_ichiran_touroku.html
- International Organization for Migration (IOM), Glossary on migration (2019). Available at:
<file:///C:/Users/DELL/Desktop/Glossary%20on%20Migration.pdf> (accessed 12 January 2022)
- Kim, V., & Streich, P. (2020). Tabunka Kyōsei without immigration policy: The role of centers for international exchange and their challenges. *Contemporary Japan*, 32(2), 174-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18692729.2020.1770477>
- Kodama, T. (2015). Japan's Immigration Problem. *Daiwa Institute of Research*, 29. https://www.dir.co.jp/english/research/report/others/20150529_009776.pdf
- Kunuroglu, F., van de Vijver, F., & Yagmur, K. (2016). Return Migration. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1143>
- Kuschminder, K. (2017). Reintegration strategies: conceptualizing how return migrants reintegrate, London: Palgrave Macmillan,
Retrieved from Cadmus, EUI Research Repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/47704>
- Morgan, C. V., Hoffmann, J. P., & Hoffman, J. P. (2007). "International marriages in Japan: A prefecture-level analysis". *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 157-182.
- Morgan, C. V., Trieu, M. M., Stephens, A., & Nemoto, R. (2016). "A grounded typology of foreign-born spouses in Japan: The motivations behind migration to Japan". *Ethnicities*, 16(4), 589-609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796816638401>
- Ndreka, A. (2019). "Return migration and re-integration of returnees challenges in the origin country." *Research in Social Change* 11(3): 4-24.
<https://doi.org/10.2478/rsc-2019-0012>
- Nitta, F. (1988). "Kokusai kekkon: Trends in intercultural marriage in Japan". *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12(3), 205-232. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(88\)90016-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(88)90016-8)
- Nottmeyer, O. (2015). "Intermarriage and the economic success of immigrants". *IZA World of Labor*. 160 doi: 10.15185/izawol.160
- Rodríguez-García, D. (2015). Intermarriage and integration revisited: International experiences and cross-disciplinary approaches. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 662(1), 8-36.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716215601397>
- Schiller, N. G., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). "Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration." *Annals of the New York academy of sciences*, 645(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.1992.tb33484.x>
- Takeshita, S. (2016). "Intermarriage and Japanese identity." *In Creating Social Cohesion in an Interdependent World*, pp. 175-187. Palgrave Macmillan, New York., DOI: 10.1057/9781137520227_10
- Tsuda, T. (2008). "Local citizenship and foreign workers in Japan." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 6(5), 1-21. (Accessed 10 December 2021). <https://apjpf.org/-Takeyuki-Tsuda/2762/article.html>
- Weber, R. (2015). "Does intermarriage change migrants' preferences for the home country?". *IZA Journal of Migration*, 4(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40176-015-0032-0>