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The Highly Skilled Maghrebians “on the move” : A Circular Cross-border Dynamic from the Mediterranean

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Abstract:

Arising from the internationalization of training, when communication conditions have changed and now offer innumerable opportunities, highly skilled graduates manage their careers confident of unlimited possibilities. Following a qualitative study carried out within a research project on Maghrebian graduates educated in French engineering schools, this paper aims at analyzing the migration process of Maghrebian engineers.

It was observed that the migration of these highly skilled individuals is neither irrevocable nor unidirectional. They may be regarded as being permanently “on the move” between their home country, the country where they studied and other destinations. At the cutting edge of IT, their mastery of digital technologies enables them to be almost permanently connected with several worlds – home or (former) host country(ies). They develop new strategies which symbolically question national borders and create multiple identities or hybrids of transcultural values.

Keywords: Circular cross-border dynamic, Highly skilled Maghrebians, Mobility.

Introduction

In the first years of independence, education in a foreign school was considered to be the best route to forming a new ruling elite for the countries of the Maghreb. To begin with, these young graduates returned to their native country to serve their State, which bestowed a familiar, temporary character upon such a distancing. Since then, whereas part of their education is still accomplished abroad, injunctions to the internationalization of their pathway are gradually replacing those to their return. Thus, their distancing is potentially lasting or definitive, which complicates the plotting of individual paths. Whatever its nature, those who choose it or are pushed into it, must evolve in different social,

historical and cultural contexts in which they must establish a position. How do they solve the question of their geographical location and its nature, (temporary, definitive etc)? How do they handle the distancing from their native country and from their host country? What strategies do they develop to manage possible multiple belongings? Questions are raised as to their identification with different lands and cultures and thus representations of space and mobility.

Within the framework of a research project conducted between 2011 and 2014¹, over one hundred semi-directive interviews of Maghrebian student engineers and graduate engineers were carried out. This enquiry, through the analysis of the choices made by these individuals throughout their professional career paths, and a structured analysis of their accounts, enabled an insight into how these career paths were formed, the motivation behind them, and the struggles and stresses experienced. This article deals with their ways of coping with these conflicts, especially between the native and host countries.

The first part of the article shows how in following the international pathway, the highly qualified and skilled Maghrebians become caught in an “in-between” dynamic, with which they will have to cope throughout their existence. The second part presents an up-date on the experience of circulating within the spaces observed through the framework of the enquiry. Via an examination of the diverse explanations, it reveals the importance that this question holds in the discussions and minds of the interviewees. Finally, by questioning their representations of mobility, the third part leads to a debate upon the existence of a new perception of space and borders which could be of future benefit for the countries of the Maghreb, and enable the populations concerned to have a more comfortable experience of their possible multiple belongings.

¹ The Tassili research project on the career paths of Maghrebian student engineers (since 1995) has been led by the Engineer Training and Professionalization team of ENSTA Bretagne, attached to the Training Research Centre (in French, the CRF), in collaboration with the Algerian Ministry for Higher Education and Research, CREAD of Algiers, thanks to the financing of the French Foreign Ministry and the Algerian Ministry for Higher Education and Research (Partnership Hubert Curien Tassili 11 MDU 840).

1. *The existence of an « in-between » dynamic*

Complexification of individual pathways

Whereas until the beginning of the 1970s, immigration of the unskilled male workforce formed the main migratory flow from the Maghreb, the last three decades have seen significant changes in international Maghrebian migration. The feminization of the migratory population, the lowering of its age or even the increased levels of education and qualifications of the candidates upon leaving are all elements representative of these changes. Following their independence, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia saw the first waves of expatriation of their qualified migrants, mostly to France. There were often different motives for leaving, however, the pursuit of higher education, mostly by engineers, remained the main trigger for this so-called “skilled” migration². Although the existence of this phenomenon preceded the period of decolonization, engineer training abroad was still the preferred method through which the technical elite were selected in the countries of the Maghreb (Ben Sedrine & Gobe, 2001). To begin with, engineers who had trained abroad returned to their country immediately upon graduation, to work on industrial development in national companies or in different ministries. When the process of economic liberalization was unleashed in the mid 1980s, more opportunities opened up for them to join the private sector, still on national territory. Thus, in a way, the national borders withheld their career opportunities, which meant that their stays abroad were temporary in nature, and one knew exactly when they would come to an end.

Faced with a sharp decline in the public sector and a lack of pulling power in the careers proposed within this burgeoning industry (Gobe, 2004), the situation evolved in the following decade which enabled the internationalization of their careerpaths. Indeed, certain “pioneers” decided

² Despite a marked diversification in recent times, in the number of host countries, (Canada, the United States, England, China, Japan etc), France remains the destination of choice for these Maghrebian students, who figure among the most numerous groups of students in this country. According to the French Ministry for National Education, Higher Education and Research, in 2013-2014, France received 295 084 international students of whom the Moroccans were the most numerous (33 899), followed by Chinese Students (30 176), Algerians (21 936) and Tunisians (11 869).

to play out all or part of their career abroad, which would not fail to stimulate numerous debates, mainly concerning the “brain drain”. This phenomenon, which was widely stigmatized in the 1990s, is less so today. At a time of economic globalization and worldwide exchanges, foreign citizens are considered to be human, scientific and technical capital, not only a factor in the creation of economic wealth and growth, but a guarantee of the skills sought by the companies. In fact, the States seem to have understood the interest this skills mobilization (Meyer 2008) of their scientific and technical diaspora³ (Meyer, 2004) could generate, hence a change of direction in the speeches of politicians toward graduates abroad, especially in Tunisia and Morocco⁴. Thus, today, the injunctions of the internationalization of career paths replace those of the return to the country, and in so doing, offer the opportunity of internationalizing the career path. Moreover, these injunctions to the internationalization of the career path, find themselves reinforced by the norms which currently govern higher education (Elliot *et al.* 2011) be it through promoting student mobility or international careers for example, which can also stimulate new ideas for careers. That is why the situations confronting highly qualified and skilled Maghrebians today are different from those experienced by their predecessors. If the period abroad is henceforth possibly lasting or permanent, one never really knows when it is going to end, nor its true profile, which complicates the plotting of individual careers and migratory paths. The internationalization of the career paths of highly skilled Maghrebians places them in an “in-between” dynamic between their native and host countries, with which they will have to contend throughout their existence.

³ Some countries in Asia, such as India (Varrel, 2008), South Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan (Gaillard & Gaillard, 2002) and Central America, such as Mexico and Colombia (Meyer, 2012, 2008) could be quoted as examples of countries which have reversed the migratory flow of highly trained people. These countries have developed suitable political and institutional arrangements to encourage their expatriates to return and contribute to industrial and economic growth via their professional ability and technological know-how.

⁴ Although Canada and the United States are increasingly fascinating destinations for the qualified migrants, France remains the country which receives the highest number.

The need to establish a position

For the Maghrebian students, arriving abroad leads to a process of socialization in a new environment which is different from their own. They are liable to acquire new and different cultural and social norms. Thus embarking on an international study path leads to a migratory experience which sets off a reconfiguration of their way of life. The students pick up new social practices and adapt those of their native countries. Their immersion in a new socio-cultural environment *de facto* influences the way in which they see themselves (the mirror effect of the experience of alterity), and changes the way they perceive their native and host societies. In so doing, they must establish their position within the different contexts, according to their personal values, their aspirations etc. In the same way, when they graduate, the fact of evolving in potentially multiple socio-cultural contexts leads to added complications. They are faced with numerous questions that they must attempt to answer. What strategies should they develop to adapt to their new socio-cultural environment? What relations should they maintain with their native and host societies? What perception do they have of their career path, their profession as an engineer and their history? How do they solve the question of where they will settle and for how long (temporary, definitive etc)? What are the effects of the distancing from their native, study and host countries on their physical being and sense of identity? What strategies do they develop to cope with possible multiple belongings? Finally, what are the forms and the socio-spatial practices that emerge from their migratory situations? This is a question of their identification with different lands and cultures, and thus representations of space and mobility.

Whereas the unskilled male work force of Maghrebian origin has been studied since the first half of the twentieth century (Ray, 1938 ; Sayad, 1999 ; Atouf, 2009), the less numerous studies of the highly qualified and skilled migrants date from the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although mobility for studies is still one of the least studied aspects of international migration (Dia, 2014), it has been the subject of a series of studies and research programs. For the Maghreb, the studies have highlighted the realities of student mobility such as their social background to begin with (Gerard, 2008), pressure experienced (Lanoue, 2008), academic choices and social insertion experienced (Borgogno & al., 1998), what has

really become of the students or the question of their return home after their studies (Geisser, 2000;Gobe, 2001). Whereas other authors could also be quoted, such as Sylvie Mazzella (2009) or Michèle Leclerc-Olive et al. (2011) for example, it should be noted that most research conducted has focused on students and not graduates. Except for Jean-Baptiste Meyer (2004; 2008) and to a lesser extent Gaillard & Gaillard (1998) it is rare that studies are carried out on highly qualified and skilled professionals who originated from the Maghreb. As to the manner in which these specific migrants handle the distancing, several studies of unqualified Maghrebian migrants prove useful. Their practices have brought to light the existence of a new migratory dynamic (Ma Mung, 1998;Tarrus, 2001, 2012),between the countries north and south of the Mediterranean. However, what about highly qualified and skilled migrants? If we can assume that they also exist within this specific population, what exactly is their profile?Do these engineers exhibit circulatory practices or specific mobility profiles? This article attempts to answer such questions.

The engineers that we met within the framework of the study had graduated from different French engineering schools between 1995 and 2013, after having obtained their Baccalaureate (High School Diploma) in their native countries, had followed preparatory classes for French engineering schools in France, or theMaghreb or entered directly via a university. They occupy engineering positions in France, the Maghreb or other countries. To understand how the career path of these highly qualified and skilled migrants was constructed as well as how they handled their multiple belongings, and to obtain their view of their previous paths, their current situation and their projects, questions with an interactionist perspective were asked.

Eighty-five semi-directive interviews were carried out of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian students in training in engineering schools in France⁵ and qualified working engineersin several countries⁶. As for the analytical approach, we carried out a structural analysis of the interviews, so as to up-date the rationale involved. In so doing, we managed to

⁵ They are ENSTA Bretagne, INSA Lyon, Telecom Bretagne, Centrale Lille and Centrale Marseille.

⁶ Among them, 22 work in France, 12 in Morocco and 9 work elsewhere in the world (Canada, Sweden, Dubai, Kuwait, Germany, Switzerland, England, Australia, Poland).

identify, from the different points of view, what sense the interviewee made of the references available concerning his profession, his family, his native culture, his school etc. In the same way, from the conversation, we were able to pinpoint the representation of space and relationships with mobility that the individual employed to construct the rationale of his career path.

2. Circulation at the heart of concerns

Undetermined paths

Although to a certain extent, the views held by the students had to be put into perspective being somewhat « unclear » from time to time, it was still apparent that upon their arrival in France, a large majority of them considered their return to be an obligation, or at least to be a strong probability, according to an initial model of success which consists in studying abroad, often in France, then acquiring a little or a lot of professional experience before returning to their country. If the Maghrebian students adapt to their situation as immigrants with ease (Balac, 2008 : 30), especially in France⁷, several events have already loomed large during this period which have brought about a major movement of transformation in the initial objectives (De Gourcy, 2013 : 337) and brought to light the existence of the perpetual modulation of different migratory projects. This process, far from disappearing, even increases with time in their professional activity, due to the necessity of taking into account the decisions to be made, mostly concerning their family. Thus, the prospects of returning reduce proportionally in relation to the amount of time spent abroad. That is why, despite the initial statements, the migratory projects of certain engineers sometimes take on the form of a long term immigration and lasting socio-economic integration. In reality, the returns or non-returns are explained by a range of variables which depend directly on the individuals themselves and on the weight they give them (view of the

⁷ Mostly originating from towns, they master the French language and are endowed with intercultural awareness obtained in their native countries (attendance of French schools and cultural centers, existence of French radio and television channels in the countries of the Maghreb).

family, professional opportunities, relationship with the original and host countries, acculturation), whilst these variables never discriminate the question in one way or another (Gardelle & Cardona Gil, 2015). They appear to be finally, something eminently personal and unique which is often totally distinct from any considerations linked to the professional activity. Considering themselves to be on a “suspended migratory sentence” for some, in mid stream or permanently settled for others, none of them rule out their return. These engineers for whom all doors seem to be open if they wish, even settled elsewhere, with a family, house and job, for whom the return home is always possible, convey an approach to mobility not based on constraint but on personal aspiration and not definitive but continual adaptation.

The professional identity of these engineers is built in a multi-dimensional context, which mixes personal aspiration, family injunctions and political and economic contexts. The choices made revealed in the interviews of the graduates generally appear to result from the reflection on precise personal intentions arrived at in a rational way and in rigorously evaluated contexts (Lemaître, Gardelle & Cardona Gil, 2015). All of them describe their path as originating from a series of choices that they made in relation to the priorities that they had fixed and their personal aspirations. Their vision of mobility as much as their relationship to their country of origin, without determining their path were revealed to be at the heart of their concerns. Although they referred to their family background, their native country and/or their culture, the rationale of the students’ discussion revolved around their attachment to the different dimensions of an engineering career. When in the world of work, things evolve. References to the profession diminish and mostly give way to questioning which seems sometimes to no longer revolve around the place (country) of activity of this same profession. The rationale of the discussions becomes mostly of the type “Continue to work in France”, “Return to Morocco”, “Go to Australia” etc. The family, cultural and to a lesser extent, political or even patriotic dimensions, are most often employed to justify their stance and the choices made. By analyzing the rationale expressed by the student and the graduate and how it evolves we can put forward that we are in the presence of a population of Maghrebian engineers who construct their paths autonomously if we compare them to the previous generation which

was tied to the country by the obligation to return. Thus their priorities seem to be based on the personal (forging a career, personal fulfillment) or family spheres rather than a calling to follow an imposed model.

They are different from the others however, in the importance that they give to the opening of possible fields, that is to say the rapport they have with their environment; certain graduates express a continuous desire to broaden it (by being constantly on the lookout for opportunities) or satisfaction with their current situation (by privileging professional stability). In some ways, the models brought to light (Ali Benali & Nafa, 2015) resemble the characterization of the international mobility of executives proposed by Anne-Catherine Wagner (1998; 2005). Indeed, we find “international managers”, extremely internationally mobile professionals who see their career as being in a transnational space, within a spirit of migratory circulation. However, it is not at all a question of individuals who are totally detached from any sense of belonging to a country or national identity, but people who consider themselves to be bi-national or bi-cultural, who mold their paths between two countries, generally their native country and that in which they work or have studied. The Maghrebian graduates whose paths we have studied thus fall within a mindset of space spanning several countries and of perpetual travelling among different spaces which are familiar to them (Jamid, 2015). Whereas some of the engineers interviewed went back to Morocco immediately or several years after having graduated as an engineer and admit that they have little inclination to travel the world, they still maintain more or less solid and regular contact with the country or countries in which they evolved, for example through the media, by professional collaboration or by choice of holiday destination, without necessarily planning to return there to settle. If others appear to be very open to the idea of one more or less far off day returning to France, or elsewhere, and, they do not exclude it, returning again to Morocco, it is a circulation in transnational space in different forms which is envisaged and which falls within a veritable migratory circulation dynamic (Ma Munget *al.*, 1998).

The existence of a circulatory rationale

This part proposes to embark upon specific reflection concerning the migration of the graduates in their socio-spatial dimensions. By analyzing their mobility as well as the fragmentation of their migratory paths, it reveals the existence, whatever the profile of the interviewee, of circulatory practices, and thus an “in-between” stance, taken as much for social and professional promotion as for an objective of personal fulfillment or family stability. Whereas the questions of return or non return of the students at the end of their studies have long been the subject of debate over the “brain drain” problematic, our study showed that the migration of highly-qualified and skilled individuals is not definitive and unidirectional. In reality, many Maghrebian engineers trained abroad can be considered as being in perpetual movement among their native country, host country and others.

Indeed, some of the engineers that we interviewed within the framework of this study seem to have developed true “know-how-to-move” (Tarrius, 1992) which enables them to be mobile within numerous geographical spaces. Thus, some traverse new lands and new destinations, which are sometimes unforeseen “*After an assignment in Algeria in 2004, I did almost two more years, until summer 2006. From there, they were assignments that led to climbing the ladder...after 5 years I had become more or less the equivalent of assignment manager,...Then, I received an offer from a company (in Paris). The company was called REXEL. I was contacted by a head hunter....After two years at REXEL....I went back to ALSTOM...after two years in Paris....they sent me to Dubai....Normally my contract will finish next year and then my objective is to go back to France, or go to another foreign country*” (Khalil, engineer from Algeria, living in Dubai).

By devising new paths and migratory strategies, they fall into a new circulatory dynamic which is among increasingly numerous countries: “*Let us say that my idea was in another direction. It was that I would do my studies in France, graduate in France....work a little in France and then go abroad. But as I found an internship which led to me being employed in Australia, well I reversed the sequence. It's go abroad a little, come back to France....not long term. For more or less 4 years....and then leave for Canada...more or less settle there, there or the United States...*” (Farid, Moroccan engineer now in Morocco). They have a thirst for knowledge, culture, to discover the world, whilst gaining as much

experience as possible: *“It was to speak English...have a cultural shock...I like doing different things. I hate monotony. What I know, I know already. So why not learn something else, see something else...it was a springboard for my career”*.

Despite this explosion of migratory paths, it is still noticeable that the individuals concerned, eager for things new, never cut the ties which link them to their native culture, and their nearest and dearest. This presents itself as a permanent to and fro movement between the countries of origin and settlement. For example, in a single year, 2012, over which the Algerian engineer was interviewed, he returned at least six times to his native country: *“I return very, very often, as soon as the opportunity arises. Since 2012, I have returned five times, and I will return again in November. My family is there, my friends are there, there...that’s my country...”* Indeed, the most important thing for these engineers is to keep in contact with all the spaces with which they identify, between the two shores of the Mediterranean: *“The answer is simple, I have built my life here, I have my ties here...it is more and more difficult to say that the time to return is near, it is like the day when I said to myself, I came and it is easier to leave. I tell myself that perhaps one day, I will create something there...the thing that I am looking for is to stay between the two shores”* (Youssef, engineer from Morocco, living in France).

This circulatory dynamic is not just exclusive to engineers who have settled abroad. It also concerns those who returned home. To this end, the return is often only a particular stage in the migratory path, and in no way constitutes a permanent settlement: *“After having been away for 6 years, been a foreigner for 6 years, and returning, I said to myself...I think that perhaps I am someone who does not like to stay in one place for too long. I am not speaking about a company, I am speaking about a country. There is this international group and, I am really thinking about it, telling myself that at the end of 3 years...I will think about a little international mobility. I admit, I am not necessarily thinking about France, but aboveall perhaps England or Canada”* (Samira, Moroccan engineer working in Morocco). In any case, this return does not imply cutting the ties with the country or countries traversed by the individuals, quite on the contrary, they are firmly set in an “in-between” rationale: *“When I started to become autonomous, I was autonomous in France, so I would like to see what would happen in Morocco, I would like to test that, I would like to work there to see if it would work, but I would not rule out returning to France...There, I would quite happily go to the Paris region...I sometimes tell myself, my family...they are*

with us....there are relatives there too....why not return to France” (Sanaa, Moroccan engineer living in Morocco).

Finally, if migration appears to be rarely definitive or uni-directional, the impossibility which is widely shared to determine a possible return to their native country, reveals the current existence of a transnational circulatory dynamic for numerous expatriates. This migratory rationale is demonstrated by frequent going and coming between the country of settlement and the native country, on the part of the Maghrebians who hold transcultural values (Rouilleau-Berger, 2011) and who have a multi-identity. In order to try to alleviate the stress caused by the question of this multiple belonging, many of them develop reappropriation of space strategies by updating new practices.

3. Another perception of borders and mobility

From a circulatory rationale to an identity quest

The settlement of highly skilled Maghrebians abroad in no way indicates that they have cut their ties with their native society. To show their attachment to their native countries, most of them demonstrate a rationale of spatial practicality, spanning their country of settlement and their country of origin. Thus, they become transmigrants, touring perpetually between home and home (Tarrus, 1989; 1992 ; 2010 ; 2011). Beyond the question of geographical circulation lies the question of identification with several cultural spaces, which can be seen as a true identity quest. Indeed, thanks to their spatial fluidity, the people interviewed seemed to belong to several lands, countries and/or cultures. They demonstrate a certain attachment to social, cultural and/or professional ways of life of the countries in which they have settled. Some of them progressively share the values, sometimes up to a point where they wish to become a citizen of the country in question: *“I am starting to love France, love certain of its values. [...] And so there is a need, there is a desire which is born within us. [...] I feel France to be a part of me and I would like to be able to be French”* (Tarik, engineer from Morocco, living in France). Some of them, even openly, consider themselves to be a national without having first started administrative procedures: *“I am settled here, I have children, I bought a house. [...]. Today, I*

consider myself to be French”(Kamal, engineer from Morocco, living in France).Some consider that this step towards naturalization is not just a right but a duty *“I think that to ask for the nationality is a strong gesture. [...]I have understood a lot of things in this culture, I did my studies here, I have mixed with the elite, I have mixed with industrialists, and I feel it is quite within my rights and a duty to obtain the nationality”* (Mehdi, engineer from Algeria, living in France).

So as not to cut their ties with the socio-cultural references of their origin in favor of those where they reside, they employ numerous strategies, aiming to stabilize the different components that they consider to be their identity. Some integrate transnational networks, for example (Cesari, 1997, Lacroix, 2004; 2006), which link their countries of origin and residence, enabling them to participate in the social, economic and cultural lives of the two spaces. Others become involved with the ATUGE⁸, AMGE⁹ or REAGE¹⁰, associations, with similar objectives: *“The link[with the country of origin] is my actions, mostly within associations, in favor of a better Algerian economy That is why I am a member of REAGE today, and we try to hold economic colloquiums, such as the one we organized a few days ago, to try to facilitate exchanges between the two countries in terms of people, skills and also industries and partnerships. So that is the least I can do today, it is really to keep in touch...to share what I have learned in France and the United States with the youngsters....It is the return on investment that Algeria granted us... it is really the least we can do for Algeria. To put it simply, because we love our country”* (Amine, Algerian engineer living in France).

If associations remain an inevitable dynamic in this transnational rationale, some are, according to them, involved for personal reasons, such as Jamal, an Algerian engineer who had created a digital platform aiming to promote his country’s image. Thus, they sometimes employ their professional skills to further knowledge of their cultural heritage and their native countries abroad: *“It is true I am[...] in France, but as I told you, I have a site aiming to promote a different image of Algeria to the one that is shown in the media[...]. It’s tourism, heritage and culture that allow people to know a little about Algeria, what the beautifulcountryside looks like, what the traditions and*

⁸ Association of Tunisians at Universities or Grandes Ecoles (graduate schools)

⁹ Association of Moroccans in Grandes Ecoles (graduate schools)

¹⁰ Algerian Graduate School Students' Network

culture are...who the characters are, all of which are the making of Algerian culture, music and art..."We also met people who felt resolutely "bi-national" and who wished to be seen as players in each country where they felt a belonging, without having to make a choice.

This cross-border dynamic, is not just exclusive to engineers who have settled abroad, but also concerns those who have chosen to return, and for whom conservation or the development of ties with the country or countries which they have experienced is essential. This is the case, for example, for Mounir, a Moroccan engineer, convinced that his role as an executive in a training and computer consultancy office for Moroccan and European SMEs wishing to invest and set up in Africa, could have made him an ambassador for the creation of a branch of the CNAM in Morocco: *"I really regret the fact that the executive management of the CNAM did not seek me out as a former CNAM engineer and member of the UNICNAM when the CNAM Morocco opened. I would have liked them to have associated me with this type of action. My role as link and my knowledge of Moroccan institutions would have been an opportunity for CNAM-Morocco to have developed a series of courses targeting Moroccan executive management"*. He was all the more disappointed that such a project, according to him, would have been an opportunity to work on a joint project between the two countries and thus to maintain strong ties with France.

Development of the ICTs and presence in different spaces

With the acceleration of worldwide exchanges, the development of transport means and above all information and communication technologies (ICT), we are seeing a new figure of a migrant emerging, the « connected migrant » (Diminescu, 2002), who « circulates, who makes contact but who does not become detached from his original group » (Hily, 2009). The virtual ties that he maintains with his family back home or most of the people he met in the different countries he has been to, facilitates his presence in the different spaces in which he would like to evolve. The « copresence » (Diminescu, 2002, Nedelcu, 2009), by sometimes going as far as to give an impression of never having left his native country, helps resolve the questions of distancing and multiple belongings. Feeling guilty for not being present at home (Boldassar, 2010) gives way to the opportunity to be in many places at the same time, such as Aziz,

a Moroccan engineer who felt he was just as much in Sweden as in Morocco, in Algeria or even France: *“It is as if I had never left Morocco...I am not really far from Morocco. For example, when the connection worked, I skyped my mother....I watch all the Moroccan and Algerian news....the elections for example, I look at all the countries, I read the news a lot in Arabic. For me, it is as if I live in Morocco, even my parents are surprised, they say “but how do you know that? You haven’t been here for a year, since last year, how do you know that?”* This form of copresence exists as much among engineers who have chosen to return to their native countries. Despite their return, they still use the media and ICTs to keep in permanent contact with their former country of immigration, which led some of them to say that they are tele-immigrants: *“In fact, I am a tele-immigrant. I follow the French news daily”* (Hamid, Moroccan engineer returned for living in Morocco).

Finally, the digital revolution that we are currently experiencing has favored the emergence of new social and communication practices (Rigoni, 2010) at the same time that it has turned relations with space and borders upside down. Thanks to the Internet, social networks and digital platforms, highly qualified and skilled Maghrebians can communicate with their nearest and dearest and share their ideas. Beyond its communicational function, the use of the web has also facilitated their copresence in several places at the same time (Nedelcu, 2009, 2010; Diminescu, 2002, 2010), and become a social support which enables them to maintain and create broadened networks built in distinct temporalities (Marchandise, 2013), and thus preserve their links with their native country as well as those in which they have worked or trained. Thus, they no longer find themselves in a situation of “double absence” (Sayad, 1998), but rather in a logic of “double presence” (Diminescu, 2002; 2010; Nedelcu, 2009; 2010), or multiple presence. Thus the highly qualified and skilled migrants manage to maintain permanent links with the different environments in which they have evolved, just like their fellow Maghrebian expatriates. The impression of distancing gives way gradually to multiple presence mainly thanks to new information and communication technologies. Thus they manage to conciliate their multiple belongings within this circulatory trans-border dynamic.

In the light of globalization of international migratory flows (Wihtol De Wenden, 2010 ; 2009; Simon, 2008) and the internationalization of the job

market, the mobility of highly qualified and skilled migrants has become multilateral and polycentric (Meyer *et al*, 2001 : 341). Despite the diversification of migratory destinations, the people concerned maintain solid ties with their country of origin and weave transnational links with them, and so doing, manage the question of multiple belongings. Through this transnational dynamic, which is often formalized in the form of networks and associations, they form a “diaspora of knowledge” (Meyer, 2008 : 55) which aims to contribute to the development of their countries of settlement and origin. In this transnational perspective, the development of new information and communication technologies plays a leading role, participating in the presence of these highly qualified and skilled migrants in different spaces within which they have evolved.

Conclusion

The research conducted on foreign-trained Maghrebians engineers’ migratory paths confirms the existence of a new circulatory dynamic which, far from being limited to a single geographical settlement dimension, seems to continually adopt new forms. In the current context of the internationalization of higher education and career paths, and also the globalization of communication, this leads us to ask questions over the potential development of this new way of experiencing international mobility and considering borders.

If training abroad and the injunctions of the internationalization of career paths placed highly qualified and skilled Maghrebians in an “in-between” dynamic, this dynamic seems set to accentuate as their career advances, mostly due to the growing awareness of the different, especially family spheres of existence. Thus, the questions of settlement of and identification with different lands often end by becoming central in the views of the interviewees. To try to sooth the tensions associated with the question of distancing brought about by each decision made, these highly qualified and skilled Maghrebians develop reappropriation of space strategies by creating new strategies (constant toing and froing among the native and host countries, the creation of networks, associations,

interconnectivity of individuals etc) which symbolically question national borders and create multiple identities, hybrids of transcultural values.

Whether they return to their native countries immediately upon graduation, after a first experience abroad or whether they chose to stay longer, or even permanently, the highly qualified and skilled Maghrebians manage to conciliate the multiple belongings within this transnational dynamic. Not having the impression that they have made definitive choices, which would suppose that they had abandoned part of themselves, they maintain permanent contacts with the “unoccupied” lands, whatever their geographical location. The impression of a multiple presence replaces in some ways the impression of distancing, for those individuals who feel they are able to act. Would not the States on the two shores of the Mediterranean, if they made the effort, profit from this circulatory dynamic, which seems to bring them ever closer together? This is an element which current debate around the subject of bi-nationality in some of the countries concerned does not seem, for all that, to take into account.

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