9. Return migration¹

Julia Pauli

INTRODUCTION

During the last fifteen years, a comparative ethnography of return has taken shape. A substantial number of monographs and edited volumes now trace the lived realities of returning in the age of globalization and transnationalism. Detailed case studies describe Chinese (Achenbach 2017), Cypriot (Teerling 2014), Ethiopian (Kuschminder 2017), Greek (Christou and King 2014), Kazakh (Blum 2016), Kyrgyz (Sagynbekova 2016), Mexican (Rothstein 2016), Puerto Rican (Aranda 2007) and Somali (Galipo 2019) return migration, to name just a few. Edited volumes compare homecomings and return both globally (Hirsch and Miller 2011; Long and Oxfeld 2004; Markowitz and Stefansson 2004) and regionally (Akeson and Baaz 2015a; Conway and Potter 2009; Tsuda 2009b; Tsuda and Song 2019b; Xiang et al. 2013).² Resonating with what interlocutor Eula Grant told anthropologist Carol Stack on her personal experiences of migrating and returning in North America more than two decades ago (1996), these works capture the ambivalences, challenges but also rewards of leaving, going and coming home: “You can go home. But you can’t start from where you left. To fit in, you have to create another place in that place you left behind” (Stack 1996: 199).

This development is even more remarkable when compared to the relative scarcity of work on homecomings and returns until approximately the beginning of the 21st century. In the introduction to one of the first comparative volumes on the topic, Anders H. Stefansson remarks that “return movements across time and space have largely been ignored in anthropology and migration research” (Stefansson 2004: 3). Similarly, in 2000, one of the most influential return migration scholars, Russell King (2000: 7) observed, “return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration” (see also Brettell 2007: 56; Ghosh 2000: 1; King 2000; Percival 2013: 2). Why then is the study of return migration all of a sudden so widespread? Two recent dynamics seem especially relevant for understanding the increased interest in return migration. On the one hand, critical awareness of the political dimensions of return migration has grown. On the other hand, transnational approaches are increasingly expanding to include an interest in locally grounded livelihoods. I will elaborate on both dimensions in a bit more detail.

In all regions of the world, state policies frame human migration by enabling, encouraging, restricting, punishing and hindering movements. Major events like the so-called “European refugee crisis” have made this very visible. Akeson and Baaz highlight the link between state interest in migration and return: “In the discourse of European policy makers, the issue of return also reflects the management and control of migration” (Akeson and Baaz 2015b: 5; see also Cassarino 2004). New policies and programs worldwide aim to encourage migrants to leave their host and destination countries and return to their original communities. For African migrants in Europe, Akeson and Baaz observe that “there is a significant overlap between the latest surge of interest in return and efforts to remove unwanted immigrants from destination countries” (2015b: 5). Very often, these policies build on narratives of “develop-

ment”, with returning migrants presented as agents of change. At the same time, countries of origin like Ghana and Senegal have designed policies to promote the return of highly skilled migrants (Akesson and Baaz 2015b: 1). Tsuda and Song (2019a) underscore the role played by Asian homeland governments in framing return migration. Countries like Vietnam perceive wealthy and well-educated migrants more and more as a resource that needs to be returned home (Tsuda and Song 2019a: 28). Consequently, the growing interest in return migration is also an expression of the heightened scholarly awareness of these state interests, policies and dynamics. Similar to Xiang’s approach to return migration as “a policy subject, as an idea, and as a strategic moment when the intersection between nation-states and transnational mobility is particularly visible” (Xiang 2013: 3) many recently published case studies scrutinize the interplay between power and policies in questions of return.

Parallel to the increased academic interest in how state policies frame return migration, a productive critique of the currently dominant transnational paradigm has commenced. While acknowledging the importance of thinking beyond methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003) and narratives of assimilation and migrant integration, the continuous relevance of the local in both “home” and “host” countries has sometimes been overlooked in transnational migration studies. Stefansson goes so far as to say that narratives of “carefree borderless belongings” and “cultural hybridity” have made any attempt to understand “going home” appear “antiprogressive, illogical, and illusory” (Stefansson 2004: 3). Migration does not automatically lead to a transnational lifestyle. Some migrants emphasize local over multiple or transnational forms of belonging (Dahinden 2009). Others, like the deportees Drotbohm (2016) met in Cape Verde, long for transnational lifestyles that are unavailable to them, only experiencing “frozen cosmopolitanism” in their attempts to hold on to their former mobility and self through forms of consumption. These, and other works of the evolving “ethnography of return migration” (Oxfeld and Long 2004) show that understanding practices and perceptions of return does not have to be essentializing. Quite the contrary, understanding return does not contrast but often complements transnational approaches (Horst 2007).

In the remainder of the chapter, I will discuss definitions and categorizations of return migration. Next, I will scrutinize different reasons for return. This will be complemented by findings on generation, gender and social class of returnees. Finally, actual experiences of return will be examined. As the literature on return migration is by now quite extensive, my approach will only be exemplary. In the last section of my chapter I will explore some of the more general findings in light of my own ethnographic work on return migration and transnationalism in Mexico.

DEFINING RETURN

Most attempts to define return migration ponder on the at first sight straightforwardness of the term and the rising complexities when giving it a second thought. Unlike other concepts in migration research – transnationalism, hybridization – “return is a category that people themselves use, embellish, and understand” (Oxfeld and Long 2004: 3). This common, often taken for granted understanding of return certainly helps in the ethnographic endeavour. But, Tsuda asks, “what exactly does it mean to return?” (Tsuda 2019: 240). He differentiates three dimensions of return: spatial, temporal and social.

Return is movement in space, a going back to where one started. Yet, place of origin is a rather fluid category. Depending on specific migration trajectories it can mean various things. Place of origin can be a house, a village, an area, a nation state or a whole continent. The temporal dimension is equally challenging. Return is not only a spatial movement; it is also a “going back to a previous time in the past” (Tsuda 2019: 241). Images of the past are projected into future returns. But as Eula Grant warned, and as reported in Stack’s *Call to Home*, “you can’t start from where you left” (1996: 199). A return in time is unattainable and nostalgic longings are very often impossible to satisfy (Stefansson 2004: 11–12). Finally, the social dimension of return touches upon “going back to something that one knows well” (Tsuda 2019: 243). Yet, what during the migratory absence is assumed as familiar and known might become unfamiliar and unknown upon return. The migrant and the place of origin have changed. Ethnographic studies throughout the world describe returnees’ experiences of loss and irritation when coming home: “This anticipation of return to a socially and ethnically familiar (and similar) country of origin is the fundamental reason why diasporic returns are often quite ambivalent and fraught with tension” (Tsuda 2019: 243).

Not surprisingly then, some of the returns that had been intended as permanent become transient. After the return is before the return. The returnee returns again, away from the country of origin and back to the host country. Consequently, recent scholarship has moved away from previous definitions of return characterized by permanent settlement and the termination of migration (Gmelch 1980: 136) and towards more open-ended approaches: “there is no singular diasporic ‘Return’ with a capital R, but only multiple ‘returns’ in the plural” (Tsuda 2019: 239). The permanence of return is also a central way of categorizing return migration. Tsuda (2019: 239), for example, differentiates three kinds of returns: returns as one-time occurrences ending migration trajectories, returns as repeated occurrences, and returns as part of a continuing migratory process. Another typology classifying return migration based on time spent in the home country distinguishes between four types of return: occasional and short-term visits to see kin and friends, seasonal returns, temporary returns of a longer duration and with the intention to remigrate, and finally permanent returns including resettlement (King 2000). The most extreme kind of permanent return is probably the return upon death (Abu-Lughod 2011; Pauli and Bedorf 2018; Stefansson 2004: 3).

Categorizations of return migration and returning migrants are often based on two early publications. The typology suggested by Frank Bovenkerk (1974) in the 1970s was further developed by George Gmelch (1980) who distinguishes four categories: first, intended temporary migration with return; second, intended temporary migration without return; third, intended permanent migration with return; and fourth, intended permanent migration without return. This typology does not consider that intention might, and often does, change during the migration process (Kuschminder 2017: 7). Another set of typologies equally focuses on intentions and motivations, differentiating between voluntary and forced returns (Boehm 2016; Cassarino 2004). Yet, it might be difficult to decide when a return is voluntarily and without any pressure (Akesson and Baaz 2015b; Kuschminder 2017: 6). Tsuda and Song thus suggest that “this dichotomous distinction between forced versus voluntary returns is not always clear and should be conceptualized more as a continuum” (Tsuda and Song 2019a: 23; see also Vathi 2017).

Many authors of return migration do not work comparatively but try to understand and describe their specific case (Carling 2004). Their aim is not to build general theories of return migration but to “develop categorizations of returnees that suit their case study” (Kuschminder

2017: 8). Christou and King, for example, place their study of Greek second-generation returnees within diaspora studies, labelling the group they study as “counter-diaspora” (Christou and King 2014). This label qualitatively distinguishes “counter-diasporic return” from “ethnic return migration” (Tsuda 2009b), “roots migration” (Wessendorf 2007) and “ancestral return” (Teerling 2014). Another classificatory approach attempts to understand return migration through the lens of success or failure (Cassarino 2004; Gmelch 1980; Lindstrom 2013; Olwig 2012).

Akesson and Baaz (2015b) warn against reinforcing too sedentary and essentialized notions of migration, identity and belonging when speaking about “return” and “returnees”. They conceptualize return migration as “a partial return to a place where the migrant once lived” (Akesson and Baaz 2015b: 10). They especially emphasize the relationship between migrant/returnees and “stayers”. Relationships with “stayers”, often kin, are a central motivation for migrants to return.

REASONS FOR RETURN

To order the multiple reasons for return migration a distinction between macro- and micro-oriented research might be helpful. More macro-oriented research emphasizes the role of the nation state in configuring and framing reasons for return. Research working on the micro and meso levels pays attention to how the individual, the household, the wider (kin) networks and the community perceive and influence return. Xiang (2013), as an example of a more macro-oriented approach, scrutinizes how the treatment of returnees by state policies and their representation in public media has grouped returnees into three groups. They have either returned because they are “victims” – refugees or victims of human trafficking; or they are “the desirable” – highly skilled or investors; or finally they are what Xiang calls “the ambiguous” – economically needed but socially undesired, unskilled and irregular migrants (Xiang 2013: 11). Governments might deliberately encourage what is being perceived as “desirable” returnees. For example, instead of recruiting migrant workers from China, a Japanese law in 1990 allowed and encouraged the return of Japanese-Brazilian migrants up to the third generation and including their spouses and children (Tsuda 2004). Vietnamese residing in the Global North were initially viewed as hostile and antagonistic by the Vietnamese government. This view has substantially changed. Now, the government actively facilitates the return of overseas Vietnamese, hoping to profit from their professional, technological and business expertise (Tsuda and Song 2019a: 27). Similar state policies have been described for the Caribbean (Conway and Potter 2009) and a few African countries (Akesson and Baaz 2015b).

More micro- and meso-level-oriented approaches towards return often emphasize the importance of notions of belonging to understand return (Bedorf 2018). Tsuda and Song (2019a: 24) stress that it is not “primordial attachment and an inherent sense of ethnic affinity to and longing for a country of origin” that motivates return. Instead, they highlight what they describe as instrumental and practical reasons.

Most migrants are confronted with racisms in their host countries. Gmelch (1980; 2004), for example, notes that Puerto Ricans leave the US because of discrimination and stigmatization. Similar negative experiences also motivate African migrants to leave Europe (Akesson and Baaz 2015a) or Mexicans to leave the US (Rothstein 2016). Gmelch (1980; 2004) further mentions economic difficulties and troubles to cope with cold climate as motives for Puerto

Ricans to return to Puerto Rico. Other reasons mentioned in the literature are homesickness and health problems while in the host country (Duncan 2014; Percival 2013). All of the above factors are related to the migrant's situation in the host country. Gmelch (1980; 2004) summarizes these motives as push factors and distinguishes them from pull factors relating to the country of origin.

Very significant pull factors concern the obligations and connections migrants have towards kin in the country of origin. Kin support each other within transnational spaces and upon return. Reynolds (2010) writes that British-born Jamaicans are motivated to return to Jamaica because they can expect help of elder relatives with childcare. Care networks and expectations of care also frame the wish of many migrants worldwide to return home upon retirement (Bedorf 2018; Coe 2016; Pauli and Bedorf 2018; Percival 2013). Such expectations can result in despair and frustration as Ferguson (1999) has vividly described for returning migrants in the Zambian Copperbelt. To prepare for their return upon retirement, migrants globally build houses in their country of origin (Aguilar 2009; Coe 2016; Cohen 2004; Dalakoglou 2010; Lopez 2015; Olwig 2012; Pauli 2008; Pauli and Bedorf 2018). Despite the many efforts and costs that go into migratory housebuilding and staying connected, many migrants who entertain the idea of return, never return. This form of imagination has been described as the "myth of return" (Anwar 1979). Another pull factor can be related to education. Research from Pakistan, Nigeria and Germany shows that some middle- and upper-class migrant parents send their children "back home" to provide them with a good education (Erdal et al. 2015; Kea in press; Knörr 2005). Class, along with gender and generation, thus crucially frame motivations for return.

GENDER, GENERATION AND SOCIAL CLASS

How gender, generation, social class and their intersections shape return migration is receiving more attention in recent years. Teerling (2014: 6) observes that "as to what happens to gender relations upon the actual return, literature appears to be scarce". Nevertheless, some literature on gender and return indicates that often women are confronted with patriarchal gender norms and practices upon their return (Christou and King 2014: 248; Dahinden 2010; Pessar and Mahler 2003). Correspondingly, some female migrants want to stay in the host society or return to it because there they feel less restricted by patriarchal gender norms (Constable 2004: 109; Hirsch 1999). Additionally, migrant women tend to build long-term relations in the host society, making it less likely that they want to return. In case children are born in their host country, mothers prefer to stay close to their children and often do not want to return (Bedorf 2018). In contrast, men more frequently engage in transnational strategies such as political involvement in the community of origin, increasing the likelihood of return (Teerling 2014: 6). However, these tendencies intersect with class issues. For women with less economic means a return to the country of origin can be perceived as an advantage. There, funds might last longer. Wealthier women in contrast have more possibilities to take advantage of the opportunities the host country might offer (Teerling 2014).

The transnational dimension of social class is a relatively new topic in migration research (Coe and Pauli in press; Nieswand 2011; Van Hear 2014). Long-term research shows how dynamic class is being re-configured in transnational communities. While a substantial flow of migration is directed towards the so called "developed" countries, in the course of time,

countries of origin that were previously classified as “less developed” might change, offering attractive economic opportunities for returnees. A well-documented case is the return migration to the Caribbean, especially Barbados. Potter and Phillips’ (2006a, b) work scrutinizes the intersection between class and generation upon return from the UK (see also Reynolds 2010). Since the migration of what they classify as the first generation of migrants in the 1950s and 1960s and the increased return to Barbados since the 1990s, Barbados has economically prospered. Potter and Phillips distinguish the “retirement return” of first-generation migrants from the return of second-generation migrants, often their children. After many years of absence, first-generation migrants tend to find it difficult to adjust upon return. Contrary to this, second-generation migrants do not come to Barbados for retirement but for business and employment. Potter and Phillips describe them as well-educated and belonging to the middle class.

A rather different experience of class and return migration is described by de Carvalho (2003) for Japanese-Brazilians returning to Japan (see also Tsuda 2004). While many Japanese-Brazilians belong to the middle class in Brazil, upon return to Japan they often find jobs as low-status factory workers. This experience of downward mobility upon return motivates many Japanese-Brazilians to return a second time, back to Brazil (de Carvalho 2003: 109). Interestingly, class status of different Japanese-Brazilian generations seems to not vary as much as in the Caribbean case described by Potter and Phillips (2006a, b). While many middle-aged and well-educated Barbadians returning to Barbados often climb the social ladder even further, both younger and older Japanese-Brazilians tend to lose their middle-class status upon return to Japan.

Like gender and social class, generation is a relatively new focus of return migration research. By now, a number of case studies (Christou and King 2014; Teerling 2014) and edited volumes (Conway and Potter 2009; King et al. 2014) have been published. Nevertheless, “past and ongoing research on migration concentrates almost exclusively on first-generation migrants” (Christou and King 2014: 8). Christou and King (2014: 15) emphasize that the return of the second generation is not a return in the statistical sense. Demographically speaking, it is an emigration to another country. Nevertheless, the second generation often feels a strong bond of ethnicity and kinship to their parental country of origin, often fostered by an “ideology of return” (2014: 15). It seems that the second generation is even more involved in transnational ties and practices of return if the parental country of origin is geographically close. This is the case for Mexican-Americans (2014: 14). The Greek-American and Greek-German second-generation returnees studied by Christou and King (2014) are very ambivalent about the meaning of home (see also Markowitz 2004). Their “counter-diasporic return” to Greece does not resolve these troubles in belonging. They hold some rather negative views of Greece but also do not want to return to Germany or the US (Christou and King 2014: 244). Consequently, questions of place-making in Greece are of central importance to them. Many of them do not return to the place their parents once left. Instead they settle in towns or cities that were not home to their parents. These experiences of return of second-generation returnees vary substantially from those of migrants returning to places where they once lived.

EXPERIENCING RETURN

Expectations and experiences of return seldom seem to match. Returning is a socially and emotionally challenging endeavour, fraught with ambivalences and frustrations (Christou and King 2014; Long and Oxfeld 2004; Markowitz and Stefansson 2004; Teerling 2014; Tsuda 2009a). Not surprisingly then, questions of success and failure of return often shape returnees' experience. Much of the literature paints a rather dark picture, with some exceptions (Olwig 2012). However, one has to keep in mind that in-depth treatments of the actual experiences of return are still comparatively rare: "While there is an extensive literature on how African migrants contribute to 'development at home' through remittances, the experiences of African return migrants have received only scanty attention" (Akeson and Baaz 2015b: 2). While this is certainly true for African migrants, lived experiences of returning have been documented in other regions of the world in more detail, especially the Caribbean (Conway and Potter 2009; Gmelch 1980, 2004; Goulbourne et al. 2010; Horst 2007; Olwig 2012; Potter and Phillips 2006a, b; Reynolds 2010). Nevertheless, it is likely that more research on the lived realities of diverse groups of migrants will lead to a more nuanced picture of how return is experienced.

Expectations and experiences of return vary between those who return and those who stay. Many returnees are confronted with what can seem at times to be exaggerated demands from kin or neighbours. Remittances play a crucial role in framing these expectations. In many regions worldwide, remittances are a key economic element (Cohen 2011; Delpierre and Verheyden 2014; Sana and Massey 2005). Non-migrating kin folks often depend on the economic support of their migrating kin. Delpierre and Verheyden (2014) show that migrants who are confronted with larger wage risks in the host country are more likely to remit. Their investment into remittances is a practice of securing their future. This again increases the likelihood of their return. But it can also lead to a status paradox (Nieswand 2011). For Ghanaian migrants Nieswand (2011) shows that through migration status is often gained in the country of origin while at the same time status is lost or low in the receiving country of migration. The newly achieved status of migrants in their home community is very often expressed through forms of conspicuous consumption like extravagant house constructions or costly life cycle celebrations (Pauli in press). Consequently, those who stayed perceive the returnees as a "remittance bourgeoisie" (Smith 2006) or an "elite" (Pauli 2018). But upon their return not all migrants can live up to these expectations. For Barbados, Potter and Phillips (2006a, b) describe that some returnees felt that their kin perceived them as wealthier than they really are. This impression was not only built on the sending of remittances but also on the culture of generously giving presents upon short-term holiday visits. Discourses of differences between those who stayed and the returnees did not only concentrate on class issues. Returnees interviewed by Potter and Phillips (2006a, b) said that they were perceived as "mad". On the one hand, first-generation returnees had a rather high rate of mental illnesses (2006b: 592). On the other hand, middle-class and well-educated returnees of the second generation were viewed as too "English" in their behaviour. This "Englishness" was found in their assumed obsession with punctuality, their going out in the rain or their walking in the hot sun and not staying in the shade. Differences and expectations such as these are very challenging for returnees. Some returnees decide to not return to their place of origin but instead settle somewhere else, often cities or towns, in their country of origin (Çağlar 2002; Christou and King 2014).

Although most research emphasizes the difficulties of returning, a few studies also describe positive experiences. In his long-term research on Caribbean return migration, Gmelch (2004:

212) observes that the longer a returnee has stayed after return, the higher the chances that he or she is satisfied with the situation. Gmelch found that 53 percent of the Barbadian returnees said that their situation had been better before the return and in the host society when interviewed within the first year of their arrival to the island. Conflicts with kin and neighbours and difficulties to adapt to the local lifestyle led to their dissatisfaction. However, had a return lasted for longer than a year, only 17 percent were still dissatisfied. Thus, the longer the return lasted the higher the chances that the returnees experienced their return as positive. The importance of this kind of adaptation is probably also linked to the level of “preparedness” before the return. In his overview of different return migration theories Cassarino concludes that the level of “preparedness” of returnees strongly shapes how a return is experienced: “Preparedness is far away from being a vague notion; it puts emphasis on the returnees’ ability to gather tangible and intangible resources when return takes place autonomously” (2004: 275). In her study of highly skilled male migrants returning to Ghana, Kleist (2015) finds that the returnees managed to establish successful social and political positions for themselves after their return. Their preparedness related to their social class. Back in Ghana, they matched the image of returnees as “upper-class citizens” and “big men”, making their experience of return a comparably positive one. Class thus does not only shape return motivations but also actual returns.

MEXICAN RETURNS

In the final part of the chapter, some of the more general findings described above will be briefly discussed for Mexican return migration. Although return migration is a central feature of the movement between Mexico and the US, “research on Mexico–US migration has neglected return migration” (Masferrer and Roberts 2012: 466; 2016). Compared to other regions of the world, especially the Caribbean, research on Mexican return migration is still in its infancy. I nevertheless focus on Mexico–US migration and return. Mobility between Mexico and the US defines one of the largest migration movements in the world. Additionally, my empirical work has been on Mexican migration, transnationalism and return (Pauli 2008, 2013; Pauli and Bedorf 2016, 2018) and I am most familiar with this region.

Lindstrom emphasizes that although migration from Mexico to the United States dates back to the 19th century, its current shape has to be linked to the Bracero guest worker program initiated by the United States in 1942 and maintained until 1964 (Lindstrom 2013: 177). During that time, a total of 4.6 million Mexicans received temporary work visas. Douglas Massey and his research group have documented in detail that the end of the Bracero program did not end migration (Massey et al. 1987, 2002). Rather, a system of circular migration evolved, including a “culture of migration” as Cohen (2004) has aptly called it. Before the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, mainly undocumented men migrated, staying for only a few years and then returning to Mexico. For millions of undocumented immigrants, the 1986 act provided an avenue into legalization, leading to more family reunification and settlement in the United States. At the same time, an increasingly severe border regime was established, making unauthorized crossing ever more difficult and dangerous. Recently, due to further militarization of the shared border and changes in Mexican and US economies and laws, the number of border crossings from Mexicans into the US is declining (Arenas et al. 2015), the number of deportations from the US to Mexico is substantially rising (Masferrer and Roberts 2012: 470) and the number of Mexicans entering on temporary work visas is also rising (Lindstrom

2013). Massey and his colleagues have argued that the militarization of the border and associated policies have created a bifurcated system (Massey et al. 2015). As re-entry into the US is much more dangerous than in the past, undocumented migrants in the US are now less likely to return to Mexico, while documented migrants are more likely to cross the border.

One often used typology to classify Mexican return migrants has been proposed by Durand (2006). He differentiates voluntary return from, on the one hand, “failed migration”, meaning the inability to survive in the host country due to, for example, illness or unemployment, and, on the other hand, forced repatriation through deportation. When compared to the typologies mentioned above, this typology combines the differentiation into forced versus voluntary return (Cassarino 2004) and an evaluation of success and failure of return migration (Gmelch 1980). Deportations and forced repatriation have strongly increased during the last two decades (Boehm 2016; Masferrer and Roberts 2016). However, what Durand classifies as “voluntary return” is still the most common form of return migration to Mexico (Arenas et al. 2015). Nevertheless, Masferrer and Roberts caution that some survey data indicate that “return migration is becoming a forced decision, or at least unplanned or with no preparedness” (2012: 470). They relate their findings to Cassarino’s (2004) concept of “preparedness”, encouraging future research to work on a better understanding of what forced return means for returning migrants. The recent increase in deportations notwithstanding, much research stresses that voluntary returns continue to be part of a circular migration system with the transnational household as its base (Cohen 2004, 2011; Massey et al. 1987, 2002).

Similar to the more general findings discussed above, return migration also differs by gender, with women being less likely to return (Feliciano 2008; Rothstein 2016: 52). Those with homes, children, marriages or relationships in the US are also less likely to return (Massey et al. 2015). Many of them, nevertheless, hold on to the “myth of return” (Anwar 1979), often investing in house construction in their place of origin (Lopez 2010; Pauli 2008; Pauli and Bedorf 2018; Sandoval-Cervantes 2017). Housebuilding can be a continuous act of “doing kinship” (Pauli 2008, 2013). Through the planning and building of remittance houses the transnationally dispersed family stays connected. But remittance-related housebuilding has also substantially reconfigured gender and generational relations (Magazine and Ramírez Sánchez 2007; Pauli 2015; Pauli and Bedorf 2018; Ramírez 2008). Wives with absent husbands often have more freedom in their decision-making and movements. This enhanced agency questions and re-configures existing gender norms (González de la Rocha 1993; Pauli 2008). Younger couples with income and remittances challenge the rural gerontocracy. Today, younger couples involved in migration hardly ever live patrilocal. Instead and based on the *migradoláres* earned through migration they build their own conspicuous houses. Care obligations between the younger and the older generation have become negotiable. Inheritance as a central way to own a house in exchange for the care of the parental generation has lost its relevance. In sum, these migration-related practices have shaken the very foundation of the Mesoamerican Household System (Robichaux 1997). Consequently, returnees going back to rural Mexico are often confronted with ongoing struggles over questions of kinship, residence, care, normativity, obligation and support. This can substantially clash with fantasies of return held while away. Imaginations of an idle and peaceful return to the rural countryside can become the very opposite when experienced (Pauli 2015). These challenges of return are even more troublesome when returnees are physically or mentally ill. Research shows that some migrants return because of serious health problems (Arenas et al. 2015; Duncan 2014). In a large-scale survey research, Arenas et al. (2015) found that compared to those remaining

in the US the health of return migrants in Mexico is much worse. Their findings are based on self-reported measures of health and measures of mental health.

Questions of success and failure of return are thus complex and multidimensional. Social, political, normative, but also physical and psychic dimensions must be complemented with the so far little researched question “whether return migrants are able to successfully incorporate themselves into home country labor markets” (Lindstrom 2013: 178). Based on household survey data from 88 Mexican communities collected between 1987 and 2002 as part of the Princeton-based Mexican Migration Project, Lindstrom finds no effect of US working experiences on upward occupational mobility upon return to Mexico (Lindstrom 2013: 199). There is a high likelihood of investment into farmland and self-employment which is also an expression of the lack of employment opportunities for return migrants in Mexico. Overall, Lindstrom concludes that return of temporary migrants works best when there is complementarity between work done in the US and in Mexico. This is most often the case for farm workers.

I conclude with two substantial changes in return migration and illustrate them with my ongoing work in Mexico. While until recently most migrants went back to their place of origin, mainly small rural communities in the so-called sending states of the Center-West of Mexico, Masferrer and Roberts (2012, 2016) show that since approximately the first decade of the new millennium the geography and demography of Mexican return migration is changing. As shown in research from other regions of the world (Christou and King 2014), returnees do not necessarily return to their place of origin any more but often prefer economically more dynamic cities or metropolitan areas. Additionally, new groups of migrants outside of the long-term Mexican sending states are also migrating to the US: “Regions and places, such as the larger cities, that in the past had little international migration experience have now become major sources of migrants to the US” (Masferrer and Roberts 2012: 466). Masferrer and Roberts emphasize that the troubling increase in deportations and the rise in families of mixed documented status will result in new social and economic inequalities throughout Mexico. This warning is also connected to the second major change in Mexican return migration Masferrer and her colleagues describe. In the last ten years, alongside adult returnees, a very high number of more than half a million US-born minors have gone back to Mexico (Masferrer et al. 2019). Most of them are of primary school age, often living with their Mexican-born parents in Mexico. However, one-third of these children are separated from one or both parents, some of them residing with grandparents. The meaning and impact of these recent changes is substantial and calls for further research.

CONCLUSION

Returning is always beginning. Returns are special kinds of beginnings, permeated with memories, hopes, desires, anxieties and longings about what has been left. The emerging global ethnography of return follows the traces of the past in the re-making of home(s) and belongings upon return. It can build on a few long-term research sites where returns and return migration have been studied for decades, especially the Caribbean. The *longue durée* of returns that becomes visible in these long-term research sites has to be combined with comparative and theoretical approaches on return migration. Concepts like Cassarino’s (2004) “preparedness” can be used to better understand different kinds of return and their consequences for returnees,

their kin and their communities. Cassarino emphasizes the varying degrees of “preparedness” of returnees. The concept can be extended, including those who have stayed. One might ask how prepared they are for living with return and returnees. Like the returnees they must create a new place in the old place.

State policies are crucial forces in shaping returns, leading to cruel and devastating practices of deportations and forced repatriations of those who are not wanted. At the same time, state policies can also enable and encourage returns of those who are wanted and perceived as valuable. Much more research is needed to comprehend how state policies interact with other dimensions of return, especially gender, generation and social class. Returning and returns, imagined or real, are central features of our time. A comparative understanding of this fundamental moment in most movements is now taking shape.

NOTES

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2. A very helpful systematic bibliography of return migration has been compiled by the research group headed by Jørgen Carling from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (Carling et al. 2011).

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