1. Introduction: definitions, typologies and theories of return migration

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INTRODUCTION

More than twenty years ago, one of us wrote: ‘Return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration’ (King, 2000, p.7). Is this bold assertion still true? Almost certainly not. Over the past two decades, return migration has evolved to take its place as a cornerstone in the field of migration studies. There is now a rich and wide-ranging literature covering many types, geographies, temporalities and other nuances of return migration and its effects. The *Handbook of Return Migration* aspires to be both a state-of-the-art and an agenda for opening up new debates and avenues of research, including new theories and conceptualisations of return migration.

Yet, despite significant growth in the scholarship on return migration in recent years, it remains relatively overlooked in much of the mainstream migration studies literature. Given that, according to Azose and Raftery (2019), around a quarter to a third of migrants subsequently return, this lack of proportionate attention to return migration is surprising. If we take a sample of recent textbooks on migration, concentrating on those which take a global view of the phenomenon, we find that none of them have a dedicated chapter on return (see Cohen and Sirkeci, 2011; de Haas et al., 2020; de Lima, 2017; Linhard and Parsons, 2019; Martiniello and Rath, 2012; Mavroudi and Nagel, 2016; Samers and Collyer, 2017). To find out what they say about return, one has to go to the index and trace through the scattered mentions – if indeed there is an index entry on return migration.

On the other side, there has been a recent flurry of books dedicated to return migration, most of them edited collections which follow the earlier volumes edited by King (1986a) and Ghosh (2000). Such studies include those which are mainly historical (Harper, 2005), others which focus on ‘ethnic’ or ‘diasporic’ return (Conway and Potter, 2009; Tsuda, 2009), two which use the trope of ‘homecoming’ (Long and Oxfeld, 2004; Markowitz and Stefansson, 2004) and others which have a more specific geographic or thematic focus – for instance Potter et al. (2005) on the Caribbean, Åkesson and Baaz (2015) on Africa, Nadler et al. (2016) on Europe, Kuschminder (2017) on return and reintegration, Vathi and King (2017) on psychosocial aspects of return and Anghel et al. (2019) on transnational return. Alongside this recent expansion of books on return has been a much larger-scale production of journal articles, far too numerous to reference here; many of them are cited in the various chapters of this Handbook.¹

The *Handbook of Return Migration* is structured into four parts, each comprising several chapters. Part I is on ‘Theorising and Conceptualising Return Migration’ and consists of six chapters which, between them, map the general field of return migration – as both a timespace event and a process – and contribute a range of theoretical and conceptual insights. Return is viewed, in turn, as an economic process with economic impacts (Wahba, Chapter 2), as an important element of transnationalism (Bilgili, Chapter 3) and as an inescapably gendered

phenomenon (King and Lulle, Chapter 4). Erdal and Oeppen (Chapter 5) theorise and question 'voluntariness' in return, setting the scene for Kalir's (Chapter 6) exposé of the inhumanity and violence of forced return, denoted as 'Departheid'. Part I concludes with Miah's (Chapter 7) overview of return visits, which draws on the 'mobilities' framework.

Part II of the Handbook examines the politicisation of return migration and also contains six chapters. Building on Chapters 5 and 6, which exposed the false dichotomy between voluntary and forced migration and the contested terrain of deportation, Lietaert (Chapter 8) critically assesses so-called 'assisted return' programmes as a governance tool of the European Union (EU) to repatriate 'unwanted' migrants such as rejected asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants. This is followed by a sequence of chapters which focus on deportation (Lemberg-Pedersen, Chapter 9), the legal ramifications of the EU's 2008 Return Directive (Desmond, Chapter 10) and the 'return industry' in the Netherlands (van Houte, Chapter 11). In Chapter 12, Marino and Lietaert explore the policy objective of 'sustainable return', tracing an evolution from success being judged on the simple criterion of the absence of re-emigration to more nuanced psychosocial dimensions and the exercise of choice over future (im)mobility plans. Finally, Chapter 13 (Paasche) looks at the under-researched domain of corruption in return migration. Corruption in the home country is a disincentive to return and a battle to be faced for many returnees.

Part III explores the important theme of reintegration, above all questioning two notions: that return to the homeland is the 'natural' thing for migrants to aspire to and that reintegration is a straightforward process for returnees since they are back where they 'truly belong' in familiar surroundings. Eight chapters cover a variety of dimensions and experiences across a range of social and demographic types of return. The part opens with a review of reintegration strategies and processes (Kuschminder, Chapter 14). The succeeding chapter (Bolzman, Chapter 15) looks at labour migrants' options of mobility at the 'retirement–return' nexus: stay put, return for good and intermediate strategies of post-retirement transnational mobility. This is followed by an examination of the psychosocial aspects of return migration (Vathi, Chapter 16). Four chapters then explore the return modalities and reintegration experiences of a variety of socio-demographic groups: school-age children (Grosa, Chapter 17), third-level students (Alves, Chapter 18), older lifestyle migrants (Walsh, Chapter 19) and second-generation 'returnees' (Kılınc, Chapter 20). In the last of these chapters, the protagonists are arguably not true returnees since they are not returning to their country of birth but to an ancestral and imagined 'homeland'. Part III is rounded off by a review of the recent return-and-reintegration experiences of migrants from the post-communist Central and East European countries (White, Chapter 21).

Part IV is about the impact of return migration on development in the migrants' countries of origin; three chapters here. Chapter 22 (King) unpacks the 'return migration and development nexus' and links different development outcomes to different theorisations of (return) migration, as well as surveying existing empirical research on development impacts in various parts of the world. The final two chapters investigate more specific aspects of the return–development nexus: knowledge transfer (Mueller, Chapter 23) and entrepreneurship (Sinatti, Chapter 24). All three chapters show that return impacts are contingent on time and place and on the distinction between 'top-down' programmes organised at state or supra-national level and the 'bottom-up' initiatives of the migrants/returnees themselves.

DEFINING RETURN MIGRATION

Is return migration a meaningful, valid and unambiguous concept? At first glance, yes. Its common sense meaning would appear to be self-evident and therefore not to need further discussion. Perhaps this is why there have been relatively few attempts to define the phenomenon. It is also the case that many other terms have been used in the literature to connote return, including counterstream migration, reverse migration, U-turn migration, homeward migration and the confusing word ‘re-migration’.²

The apparent straightforwardness of the notion of return migration evaporates when we attempt to pin down a simple, all-encompassing definition. Here is a selection of definitions taken from some of the key literature:

when people return after emigration for the first time to their country (or region) of origin, then and only then we will use the term *return migration*. (Bovenkerk, 1974, p.5, emphasis in the original)

Return migration is defined as the movement of emigrants back to their homeland to resettle. (Gmelch, 1980, p.136)

Return migration is when people return to their country or region of origin after a significant period abroad or in another region. (King, 1986b, p.4; also 2000, p.8)

The return of migrants to their country of origin – sometimes as a fulfilment of original intentions, sometimes as a consequence of revised intentions. (Bartram et al., 2014, p.121)

Return migration ... refers to the movement of migrants back to a country of origin, following an absence of at least one year. (Erdal, 2017, p.104)

A close reading of this sample of definitions, arranged in chronological order, reveals some of the complexities involved. Bovenkerk, whose 1974 extended essay can be seen as the first systematic analysis of the concept of return migration, was railing against the plethora of competing terms for return but his definition reveals a rigid view of migration as a one-time event, an impression reinforced by Gmelch, for whom return means resettlement. Both Bartram et al. and Erdal see return only in terms of international migration, overlooking the relevance of return in internal migration, especially in big countries like China or the United States. King’s definition might be criticised by the vagueness of the phrase ‘significant period abroad’ (cf. Kuschminder, 2017, p.3). Erdal is precise – ‘an absence of at least one year’ – but this would exclude return from a shorter-term migration, for instance from a seasonal job or the case of a rejected asylum-seeker.

This does not exhaust the complexities involved in trying to define return migration. Another issue concerns the precise location of the return. If return is ‘movement in space, a going back to where one started’, then it must be recognised that ‘place of origin is a rather fluid category’ (Pauli, 2021, p.97). An early demographic study of Puerto Rican return migration by Hernández Alvarez (1967) showed that only half of the returnees from the United States returned to their place of origin; the remainder returned to a different location. Typically, these were rural-origin migrants who returned to San Juan, the capital, where their economic and social prospects were better.

To be satisfactory, a definition of return migration must remain broad so as to include the various types and circumstances of return and to encompass the differing perspectives of researchers in different disciplines, as well as policy-makers and practitioners. We endorse the

definition of King (1986a, 2000), above, with the proviso that the ‘significant period abroad’ can be varied according to context. In their field survey of return migration to Southern Italy carried out in the early 1980s, King et al. (1984, 1985, 1986) specified a dual temporal threshold: at least one year spent abroad and at least a year spent back in the home community, in order to exclude temporary return visitors. Kuschminder’s more recent research on return migration and reintegration in Ethiopia considered a minimum of three months for the stay abroad – on the argument that this allowed for short-term contract migration and student migration – and in the belief that this length of time still allows for ‘exposure to another culture and context to have an impact on individuals’ values and behaviours’ (2017, p.5).

TYPOLOGIES OF RETURN

The pioneering essay by Bovenkerk (1974) on the sociology of return migration sets out some basic but important classifications of types of return. Below, we elaborate on these, blending in contributions from subsequent authors who build on his analysis (Gmelch, 1980; King, 1986b; and, more recently, Battistella, 2018; Conway et al., 2009, pp.2–3; Kuschminder, 2017, pp.5–8). These typologies give an insight into the diversity of return migration as an event and a process.

A first typology is by the *level of development of the countries involved* (low, middle or high income) and the *skill level of the migrant*. This creates a diversified matrix of migrations and, hence, returns. Typical cases include low-skilled migrants moving from poor to richer countries, either as a survival strategy to support family members at home or as ‘target’ migrants to accumulate savings and experience prior to return; high-skilled migrants moving in the same direction (brain drain and brain return); professional and business migrants moving between high-income countries for career and lifestyle reasons; or to low-income countries for expat placements, followed by return.

Recognising that all forms of migration and mobility can be regarded as timespace phenomena (Mavroudi et al., 2017), *temporal and geographical* criteria create a series of typologies. *Time* enters the equation regarding the length of the return stay – ranging from short visits to temporary stays of several months, longer stays lasting many years followed by re-migration, to a ‘return for good’. Another aspect of the return matrix is biographical and generational time and the constitution of the returning demographic unit – individuals or families; adults, children or retirees; and first-generation migrants or their descendants (‘diaspora return’, cf. Tsuda, 2009).

Distance is another element contributing to the heterogeneity of forms of return migration. Rural–urban internal migration may lead to a ‘return to the village’ on retirement. With international migration, return moves are more likely where countries are close by, so that transnational contacts are easy to maintain both before and after return. With long-distance, intercontinental migration, the economic, social and psychological separation between host and home countries and long-term residence abroad make return less likely, although not impossible.

The *motivations and circumstances* of return – including varying degrees of voluntariness and forced return – are also fundamental in conceptualising and categorising return. Return can take place for multiple, often combined, reasons relating to family, life-stage, (un)employment, business/investment opportunities, nostalgia, expulsion etc. This leads to more complex

and integrated typologies. Probably the most well known is Cerase's (1974) fourfold typology which links stage of integration in the host society (United States) with the type of development stimulus which returnees can effect in their homeland (Southern Italy). A quick return is the *return of failure*; the migrant failed to adapt to the new life in the United States and hence brought nothing back to Southern Italy. A return after a few years brings the *return of conservatism*: something tangible is brought back, mainly savings, but this is invested in land and housing, seen to confer social prestige in the eyes of the local community. Cerase's *return of innovation* comes after ten or more years abroad: long enough for the migrant to have absorbed the 'modernising' and 'business' values of American society but not too long, so that he or she is able to 'innovate' upon return. The final type, the *return of retirement*, is self-explanatory.

A different fourfold typology is proposed by Battistella (2018). The first type is the *return of achievement*. The migrant returns voluntarily at the end of the migration project having achieved the purpose for which he or she went abroad (which might be a work contract, a period of education or training or a target sum of capital saved). Second, the *return of completion* is rather similar to the first type – after completing a contract or secondment – but the return is not voluntary because the migrant would like to stay abroad longer. Third, the *return of setback* is a hybrid voluntary/forced return. In this type, the migrant faces obstacles such as unemployment, unhappiness, homesickness or family obligations in the home country – such as the illness or death of a close relative – and has to return before the return project is completed. Finally, the *return of crisis* or *forced return* arises due to situations such as political upheaval, environmental disaster, repatriation due to criminal acts or the failure of an asylum application.

THEORISING RETURN MIGRATION

Cassarino's seminal 2004 article remains the key statement on theorising return migration. It offers a concise overview of how return can be re-thought through the application of several of migration's existing theoretical frames – neoclassical economics, the new economics of labour migration, structuralism, transnationalism and social network theory. All of these theories yield valuable insights, albeit some of them from contradictory standpoints. Their value, however, is often speculative rather than empirically proven, due to the lack of reliable data on return.

The *neoclassical approach* rests on wage differentials between sending and receiving areas/countries and the migrant's expectation of significantly higher earnings in the destination, sufficient to trigger the move and to defray the costs of moving (Todaro, 1969). In this view, return migrants are those who somehow miscalculated the balance of costs and benefits or whose migration project failed in some other way. In the rarified world of neoclassical economics, return migration is thus an anomaly.

By contrast, under the *new economics of labour migration* (NELM), return migration is the norm – the expected outcome of a successfully implemented strategy of migrating, earning, remitting, saving and, finally, returning back to a more secure and comfortable life. Unlike the individualised economic calculations of the neoclassical model, the NELM approach conceptualises migration and return as a family-level strategy to both maximise and diversify income and resources and hedge against the failure of one of them (Stark, 1991; Taylor, 1999). It assumes the mutual interdependence of family members, whereby one or more migrates (and

returns) and others stay put; at a later phase of the family/household cycle, another member may migrate to continue the support of the remaining household. Cassarino (2004, p.260) concludes that ‘migrants go abroad for a limited period of time, until they succeed in providing their households with the liquidity and income they expect to earn ... Thus return represents the logical outcome of migration and the achievement of success, not failure.’

Cassarino is arguably less thorough in his coverage of the *structural approach to return migration*, limiting himself to social and institutional factors in the country of origin and falling back on Cerase (1974) and Gmelch (1980) for support. For sure, this context is absolutely important, as it helps to understand how the motivations and expectations of return are matched with opportunities and realities in the home-country setting and therefore whether the return experience can be deemed a success or a failure (Cassarino, 2004, p.258). Although Cassarino makes passing reference to the unequal relationship between the migrant-sending and the migrant-receiving country, there is more to say about the way in which migration and return are embedded in global and regional core-periphery structures and relationships. In a nutshell and following Delgado Wise and Márquez Covarrubias (2009; see also King, Chapter 22), periphery-to-core migration and core-to-periphery return are elements of the reproduction of global spatial inequality and of the subservient dependency of the peripheral, less-developed countries on the economic hegemony of the global North, including the oil-rich states of the Gulf. In this historical-structural framework, returnees are those who are ‘expelled’ by the richer countries because they are no longer useful, for instance due to old age or sickness or during a recession when they become unemployed.

Next up on the list of theoretical frameworks for analysing return is *transnationalism*. According to Cassarino (2004, p.261), transnationalism constitutes a lens to capture and understand better the strong economic, social and cultural links between migrants’ host and home countries, including their return moves. Launched by a series of interventions by Glick Schiller and her colleagues in the early 1990s (see Glick Schiller et al., 1995 for an accessible summary), the transnational paradigm attracted some of the most prominent scholars in migration studies (e.g. Faist, 2000a; Portes, 1999; Portes et al., 1999; Vertovec, 1999) but was not without its critics (notably Mitchell, 1997; Waldinger and Fitzgerald, 2004). As proposed by Glick Schiller et al. (1995, p.48), ‘transmigrants’ are migrants whose lives ‘exhibit multiple and frequent connections across international borders and whose identities are configured in relation to more than one country’. Undoubtedly, return migration is part and parcel of transnationalism’s back-and-forth system of social and economic relationships and exchanges but the surprising thing is that most of the canonical writings on transnationalism make rather scant reference to return migration. The main attempts to systematically analyse what we might call the ‘transnationalism–return nexus’ are by Carling and Erdal (2014) and Bilgili (Chapter 3). For instance, Bilgili points out that return migration is not just about physical return moves but also about myths, ideologies and imaginaries of return. Cassarino (2004, p.262) suggests that migrants use return visits to prepare for their more definitive return and reintegration at home, although this is only one type of link between transnational behaviour and return migration. One might then assume that, once return and reintegration take place, transnationalism ceases but, as King and Christou (2011, 2014) have shown, returnees often engage in ‘reverse transnationalism’ by retaining strong links back to their former host countries.

Carling and Erdal (2014, pp.2–3) write that transnationalism and return migration are, both conceptually and practically, entwined with each other in complex ways, as befits their ‘nexus’ relationship. To give one example: regular return visits, the preferred way of living for

many established migrants, may be a precursor to and a preparation for return; or they may be a substitute for permanent return, which may be seen as problematic or impossible. Or another example: intention to return, born out of ongoing transnational links to the homeland, may not actually result in return, which is constantly deferred. Carling and Erdal also demonstrate how the transnationalism–return nexus is recursive. Thus, if migrants have strong transnational attachments that boost their intention to return, it is also likely that this intention will, in turn, accentuate their transnational practices (2014, pp.3–4).

Much of the above discussion connects the transnational view of return to the *mobilities framework*.³ The transnational approach acknowledges that return to the country of origin is not the end of the story; the door is not closed on future migrations, either of the returnees themselves or perhaps of their returned children who may want to continue their adult lives in the country of their birth and upbringing. Meantime, periodic returns, of varying duration, are part of transnational life for many migrants and, hence, it is often more appropriate to speak of *return mobilities* (King and Christou, 2011). Return visits are a specific – but highly variegated – form of return mobility, analysed by Miah (Chapter 7), alongside the more specific case of diasporic visits for knowledge transfer (Mueller, Chapter 23).

Social network theory is another framework proposed by Cassarino (2004, pp.265–8) to deepen our thinking about return migration. Like the transnational approach, social networks encompass migrants and returnees who maintain strong linkages – material, personal, emotional – to both their ‘home’ and their ‘host’ countries and communities. Here the stress is on family and other social networks, which act as conduits for the decision to return, the return move itself and what happens after return. Although there is some similarity with the near-identical notions of transnational social spaces (cf. Faist, 2000b) and transnational social fields (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 1999), social networks are more dependent on links between a defined set of persons who possess the attributes (kinship, social capital, cultural and economic resources, identity etc.) necessary to be part of the given network (Cassarino, 2004, pp.266–7). In other words, networks are *relational*, made up of social actors involved in relational ramifications leading towards return and which may constitute a distinctive ‘returnee identity’.

Our final framework for theorising return migration draws on Cassarino’s (2004, pp.271–5) notion of *return preparedness* and on the *aspiration–ability* model proposed by Carling (2002; also Carling and Schewel, 2018). Combining these perspectives reveals the dynamism, fluidity and uncertainty of return as an evolving process rather than a simple ‘event’.

Setting aside the ‘forced’ or ‘assisted’ return of refugees, failed asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants, the *preparedness* of migrants to return depends on two elements – their *willingness* to do so and their *readiness* to make the move. The distinction here is that migrants may want to return but not be ready to do so. Also critical in Cassarino’s framework is the *mobilisation of resources* for return, which pertains to both tangible resources (financial capital, a place to stay etc.) and intangible resources (contacts, relationships, skills – in other words, human and social capital). Efficient resource mobilisation for return is more likely to result in a ‘successful’ return, one that has the potential to contribute to the development of the country and community of origin.

The aspiration–ability framework, applied by Carling (2002) to the emigration of Cape Verdeans, can easily be applied to return migration. In this scenario, return is a two-step process, not unlike the ‘willingness-readiness’ model of Cassarino. First, then, migrants must have the *aspiration* to return (which in forced or unplanned migration is not there); if this

aspiration is not translated into action, the result is a kind of ‘myth’ or ‘fantasy’ of return (cf. Anwar, 1979; Bolognani, 2016). Aspirations to return may also differ within a family or household along gender and generational lines: typically, the first generation are more likely to want to return than their second-generation children (see Grosa, Chapter 17; but also Kılınç, Chapter 20 for a different view) and men seem more oriented to return than women (King and Lulle, Chapter 4). Second, the *ability* to return relies very much on possessing the resources to do so; hence the connection to Cassarino’s (2004) framework. A somewhat analogous two-stage model is developed by Carling et al. (2015) in a large research project on the *possibilities* and *realities* of return migration.⁴

EVOLUTION OF A GROWING FIELD

The chapters in this Handbook illustrate the rich subfield of return migration within migration studies and across several disciplines including sociology, human geography, anthropology, economics, political science and history. In this section, we explore four ways in which return migration scholarship has expanded over the past two decades. These are (i) the widening geographical range of research on return, (ii) broadening the conceptualisation of return, (iii) the increasing politicisation of return, and (iv) the post-return effects of return migration.

Expanding Geographies of Return

Early studies of return migration were published in a sporadic and geographically scattered way, reflecting the transatlantic and colonial heritages of early mass migrations. Pioneering books of this era were *The Western Educated Man in India* (Useem and Useem, 1955), *They Remember America: The Story of the Repatriated Greek-Americans* (Saloutos, 1956) and *Peasants No More* (Lopreato, 1967), the last of these a study of the remaking of social class in a South Italian village as a result of return migration from the United States and elsewhere.

Looking back, we see the 1960s as the ‘take-off’ period for return migration literature. Two main geographical arenas accounted for the bulk of the studies in this era. The first was the United States, with research on returns to Italy (Cerase, 1967, 1974; Lopreato, 1967) and Puerto Rico (Hernández Alvarez, 1967). The second was the British-Caribbean migration system, with studies on return migration to what was then known as the ‘West Indies’ (Davison, 1969; Patterson, 1968).

Return migration literature swelled in the 1970s, the turning-point being the oil crisis of 1973/74 when countries like West Germany and France stopped recruiting migrant workers and implemented policies to encourage return migration. The result was a plethora of studies on return to Southern European countries, some of them statistical but many of them based on detailed field-survey and ethnographic research (see, inter alia, Abadan-Unat et al., 1976; Baučić, 1972; Brettell, 1979; Kayser, 1972; King, 1977; Lianos, 1975; Rhoades, 1978, 1979). This genre of post-oil crisis research on return migration, associated with industrial restructuring and the decline of the Fordist system but also shaped by other factors such as personal and family considerations, as well as by economic growth in Southern Europe, continued into the 1980s (for examples, see King et al., 1986; Lever-Tracey, 1989; Lewis and Williams, 1986; Papademetriou, 1985; Saraceno, 1986).

The 1990s and, even more, the twenty-first century, have seen the expansion of return migration research to a global range, concomitant with the globalisation of migration – one of Castles and Miller’s key trends in their *The Age of Migration* (2003, pp.7–9), alongside the acceleration, diversification, politicisation and feminisation of migration on a world scale. The Caribbean has continued to attract attention as a theatre for return (Gmelch, 1992; Potter, 2005; Potter et al., 2005; Thomas-Hope, 1999) but much of the more recent focus of research has been on Africa, both North and sub-Saharan, and is cast within a development context – what King (Chapter 22) calls the ‘return–development nexus’. Highlights of this African literature include Åkesson and Baaz’s (2015) edited book on return migration and African development, Ammassari’s (2009) monograph on high-skilled returnees in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire and a series of papers on Morocco (de Haas et al., 2015) and on various West African countries (Diatta and Mbow, 1999; González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Kleist, 2020; Mezger Kveder and Beauchemin, 2015; Sinatti, 2015). A fuller indication of the extent of the ‘new’ return literature sited in the global South is given in Chapter 22 in the Handbook.

Finally, the Central and East European (CEE) region – the ‘global East’ – has also seen a rise in return migration, especially since the post-2008 economic crisis as well as in the light of Brexit and the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. White (Chapter 21) explores the changing nature of return to this region and the differentiated experience across time, space and generations of returnees. Poland has been the main focus of return to CEE countries (Anacka et al., 2013; Cieřlik, 2011; Dzięglewski, 2016; Parutis, 2014), though studies are not lacking on other countries, including Romania and Latvia (Aspitem-Berina et al., 2020), Lithuania (Barcevičius, 2016) and Estonia (Saar and Saar, 2020).

Broadening the Conceptualisation and Theorisation of Return

There has been a significant expansion in approaches to conceptualising return. Prior analysis (Bovenkerk, 1974; Cerase, 1974; Gmelch, 1980) primarily examined the return of labour migrants, including seasonal workers, plus some attention to brain drain and return and the return of retirement. Over the past twenty or so years we observe an increasing diversity of types and forms of return and this variety is fully represented in the following 23 chapters of this Handbook. Seeing return as an increasingly diversified phenomenon leads to more complex and nuanced theorisations.

First, *international student migration*, which has doubled over the past two decades, has attracted increasing scholarly attention as a key element of global mobility, including return (see Findlay et al., 2017; also Alves, Chapter 18 for an original typology of returning students). A second focus for recent research has been the return challenges facing *children* who are taken to their parental homeland within the ambit of family return migration (cf. Vathi and King, 2021). In Chapter 17, Grosa takes a child-centred approach and argues for children to be given greater voice in sharing their specific experiences and challenges of return, especially as regards educational (re)integration and youth wellbeing. Third, the return of the *adult second generation* to the country of origin of their parents is a ‘migration chronotope’ (King and Christou, 2010) which has seen a flourishing of research in recent years (Christou and King, 2014; Conway and Potter, 2009; Teerling, 2014; Wessendorf, 2013; see also Lee, 2018 on the return of the ‘1.5 generation’). Kılınç (Chapter 20) addresses the core paradox of second-generation return: how can we call it ‘return’ when individuals settle in a country that they were not even born and raised in? The answer, for many such ‘returnees’, is that

they experience ontological belonging to an ancestral homeland and thus a pull to ‘return’ there. Post-return outcomes, however, often do not live up to expectations and disillusionment results – a generalisation found to be applicable to many experiences with other types of return migration. Fourth, *lifestyle migration*, which includes international retirement migration, has attracted a lot of scholarly attention in recent years, spearheaded by the research of Benson (see Benson, 2011; Benson and O’Reilly, 2009; Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014). However, lifestyle migrants’ return migration has been overlooked; Walsh (Chapter 19) rectifies this. She demonstrates that, although lifestyle migrants have high levels of agency when they migrate, this may not be the case when they return, driven by ill-health or financial problems, leading often to a difficult reintegration process. Fifth, there has been a reconceptualisation of return migration as a *gendered process* (Kuschminder, 2017). Albeit belatedly, it is now widely recognised that gender dynamics within and beyond families play a pivotal role in return decision-making and in post-return experiences (King and Lulle, Chapter 4). Finally, there has been a ‘*psychosocial turn*’ in the study of return and reintegration, based on an appreciation of the importance of subjective perceptions of wellbeing. Gmelch and Gmelch (1995) were among the first to stress return migrants’ subjectivities. The volume edited by Vathi and King (2017) provides an overall assessment of the psychosocial dimension of return migration, arguing for a migrant-centred approach to wellbeing and mental health on return (also Vathi, Chapter 16).

Certain chapters in the Handbook, especially those in Part I, contribute to ongoing theorisations of return migration which extend the overview provided by us in an earlier section of this chapter. Bilgili (Chapter 3) sees return as ‘migration, mobility and imaginary’ and as an option experienced by migrants differently throughout their migration trajectory and their lifecourse. Interactions between actual return migration, various temporally defined return mobilities and imaginaries of return are analysed by Bilgili to produce a variety of (non-)return processes and outcomes. In Chapter 6, Kalir advances the theoretical notion of ‘*Departheid*’ to capture the hegemonic doctrine present in many ‘so-called liberal democratic states’ which ‘illegalises’ and racialises certain categories of migrants in order to force their return. This politicised theory of return adds considerably to our understanding of how certain types of return take place. Kalir goes on to give examples from Europe, the United States and Australia to demonstrate how the faultlines of global mobility are drawn between the North and the South, representing the protracted coloniality of power exercised often along racialised lines. Hence it is the non-white racialised ‘other’ from poor, ex-colonial countries who is either prevented from entering or forced to return from rich Western states. The role of race and (post-)coloniality in deportation politics is further analysed by Lemberg-Pedersen (Chapter 9), operationalising Foucauldian governmentality and Agambian biopolitics. Theorising reintegration, especially the elusive notion of ‘sustainable reintegration’, is advanced through the combined contributions of several chapters in the Handbook (see, especially, Marino and Lietaert, Chapter 12 and Kuschminder, Chapter 14). Kuschminder’s ‘reintegration strategies’ framework (see also Kuschminder, 2017) highlights the heterogeneity of returnees and return migration processes. This is a framework which has not only theoretical significance but also relevance for policy-makers dealing with return migration.

Collectively, this review of new conceptualisations and theoretical perspectives on return, bolstered by cross-references to selected chapters in the Handbook, widens considerably the scholarly field of return migration studies. We stress the importance of understanding the

needs and experiences of different types of return migrants across gender, age, generation, race, class, education and other intersectionalities.

The Politicisation of Return

There has been a clear policy turn in return migration, stemming from an increased politicisation of return over the past two decades. Part II of the Handbook is devoted to this important aspect.

Increasing returns of migrants without rights to stay have become a central policy objective of the EU. Deportations and so-called assisted voluntary return (AVR) have increased substantially since around 2000 and this has led to new policy ambitions such as ‘sustainable return and reintegration’ (Marino and Lietaert, Chapter 12). This is exemplified by the 2018 Global Compact for Migration wherein states commit to facilitating ‘safe and dignified return ... to create conducive conditions for personal safety, economic empowerment, inclusion and social cohesion in communities, in order to ensure that integration of migrants upon return to their countries of origin is sustainable’.⁵ Despite the increasing prominence of such programmes, there has been a striking lack of evaluation. However, the critical academic research reviewed in this Handbook has increased significantly in recent years, examining political structures and motivations, the various actors and their agency, the experiences of migrants and human-rights aspects.

Taken together, several chapters in the Handbook make significant contributions not only to the politics and policy of different types of return, including the vexed distinction (in reality, a continuum) between voluntary and forced return (cf. Erdal and Oeppen, Chapter 5) but also to theorising returns which are not actioned by the migrants themselves and thus not ‘explained’ by economic and social network theories. Key terms in this array of theoretical ideas allied to forced and semi-forced migration include *deportability*, the *illegalisation* of migrants, *Departheid* and the misnomer of *assisted voluntary return* (see De Genova, 2002, 2010; Kalir, 2019, also his Chapter 6 in this volume; Lemberg-Pedersen, Chapter 9; Lietaert, Chapter 8).

Within the ‘deportation space’, an important advance is made by De Genova’s (2002, 2010) theory of ‘deportability’, linked to the establishment of a ‘deportation regime’. Both De Genova and Kalir (2019) critically analyse the notion of migrant ‘illegality’ (no migrant, nor any person, is by nature ‘illegal’); this leads on to a discussion of the ‘illegalisation’ of migrants (hence their deportability) which is produced by repressive state policies including bureaucratic rules (often impossible for migrants to understand or comply with), police actions and deportation practices. Making migrants ‘illegal’ creates enduring vulnerability, reproducing the internal borders of the nation state in everyday life (cf. Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012). Vulnerability is often paired with uncertainty and ‘waiting’, which are important emerging concepts in the temporal turn in migration studies, which focuses on the temporalities of migrants and migration regimes (Jacobsen et al., 2021; Mavroudi et al., 2017).

The politicisation of return also has far-reaching implications for returnees post-return. As noted above, the issue of what constitutes a ‘sustainable reintegration’ is politicised in that, for the countries driving the return, this means no further re-migration. A more rights-based or capabilities view would argue that a successful reintegration is more about access to choice, including the option of further mobility. The politics of return and reintegration are also, in many countries, heavily imbued with corruption (Paasche, Chapter 13). Returnees and

returned refugees are often faced with the dilemma: to try to counter the corrupting structures in the society of origin or to reintegrate by ‘playing the game’ in order to survive.

Repatriated asylum-seekers who have had their claims rejected face particular challenges. Not only do they return to the material and social conditions which they sought to escape from but they also bear the stigma of ‘failure’ and may be rejected, even by their own families, who expected them to succeed abroad and to support them. In the Afghan context, Schuster and Majidi (2013) have shown that reintegration is exceptionally difficult for deportees and other forced returnees. Issues of shame have to be faced by those who return empty-handed and the situation is even worse for those who still need to repay debts incurred to fund the asylum trip, as research on forced return from Libya to Ghana has shown (see Kleist, 2017, 2020).

Impacts and Effects of Return Migration

The effects of return migration can be considered under many headings – social, demographic, political, cultural and, above all, economic. The term *return–development nexus*, coined by King in Chapter 22, sets a framework for examining the actual and potential developmental impacts of return migration – through, for instance, the return of skills (human capital gain and ‘brain return’), the incorporation of new ideas (‘return of innovation’ – Cerase, 1974; ‘social remittances’ – Levitt, 1998) and the productive investment of accumulated savings and remittances (see Wahba, Chapter 2).

Following landmark papers by de Haas (2010, 2012) and Gamlen (2014), the relationship between (return) migration and development has been variously viewed through optimistic versus pessimistic lenses, oscillating like a pendulum swing. During the optimistic phase of growth and modernisation in the 1950s and 1960s, returnees were argued to have a positive impact on their countries of origin by bringing back capital and skills. A new phase of optimism arose during the neoliberal era of the 1990s and 2000s, when remittances, savings and entrepreneurship were seen as potential drivers of home-country development. During the intervening decades of the 1970s and 1980s, when global recession and economic restructuring sparked multiple waves of return, migrants returned to face unemployment and depression in their home countries, whilst remittances and savings were seen as ‘wasted’ on unproductive investments and conspicuous consumption. Gamlen (2014) then foresaw an era of neo-pessimism starting in the 2010s and based on critiques of hidden political and economic agendas and neoliberal views of migrant potentialities as ‘buzz and spin’.

The overall conclusion is that, for returnees to have the potential to contribute to development, there must be advantageous conditions in the country of return; above all profitable investment opportunities free of corruption. A favourable economic climate and an open structural and cultural environment give the best chances for returnees to exercise their own capabilities and agency in promoting development-oriented activities, including knowledge transfer (Mueller, Chapter 23) and business development (Sinatti, Chapter 24). Sinatti’s contribution exemplifies the multi-level approach of returnee entrepreneurship, acknowledging the distinction between ‘top-down, state-driven’ development objectives to foster returnee investment versus ‘bottom-up, migrant-centred’ initiatives. This comparison highlights differences in ‘economic growth’ versus ‘human development’ perspectives. Sinatti argues for a combined approach to return migration and development that both incorporates a critical analysis of macro-level structural conditions and acknowledges the potential for change brought by migrants and their transnational economic and social practices.

However, whilst recognising that return migrants can have a positive impact, this should not be demanded of all returnees and migrants should not be made to feel duty-bound to be agents of development – for two reasons. First, not all migrants have the human, social and financial capital required to effect development. Second, placing the responsibility for stimulating development on migrants should not be used as an excuse or a replacement policy for the lack of action from governments.

LOOKING FORWARD: NEW IMPLICATIONS OF RETURN

The contributions in this Handbook stress the need for further research on return migration and articulate some key issues that should be considered, both for research and for policy and practice. We identify four such areas: first, the need to critically assess terminology and, in particular, to bridge several terminological dichotomies; second, the issue of inequality in return migration, as both cause and effect; third, the multiple interfaces between return and economic, social, cultural and political change; and, finally, issues pertaining to gender, age, generations and intersectionality.

Refining Terms and Bridging Dichotomies

One of the recurrent themes in the Handbook is the need to address the shortcomings of terminology, to avoid imprecision, ambiguity, stereotypes and the use of the same term to mean two different things. The confusing word ‘re-migration’ has already been remarked upon earlier in this chapter. For different reasons, we also reject the word ‘illegal’ to describe any migrant. As Kalir (Chapter 6) points out, migrants are labelled thus through state policies of categorisation and exclusion, so that migrants are ‘illegalised’. ‘Reintegration’ is another slippery concept in the context of return migration (Kuschminder, 2017, pp.8–13; also Chapter 14 in the Handbook).

These examples open up a wider debate on the many dichotomous terms which abound in the field of (return) migration studies.⁶ Resonating through the Handbook are the following dichotomous pairs of return-related terms. The most recurrent is the forced vs voluntary division, which we have already critiqued as inherently problematic with, in reality, many shades in between which descriptors such as semi-forced or semi-voluntary might be used to connote. Even the apparently simply returnee vs non-returnee (or vs non-migrant) comparison is flawed since migrant non-returnees may return at some future point and non-migrants may migrate (and then return) in the future. Analogous to this is the temporary vs permanent return binary; again, this discounts future actions – the intending temporary returnee may end up staying permanently in the home country and the intending permanent returnee may up sticks and move again.

Another important dichotomy rooted in return migration, which comes periodically to the fore in this Handbook, is the politicised framing of returnees as ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’. It appears that there is one contingent of ‘virtuous’ returnees who are expected to contribute something to their origin country or who are classed as deserving of help through accepting a return assistance package. On the other hand, there are those deemed undeserving and who struggle through their return process as somehow ‘unworthy’ and ‘unaccepted’. There is a need for further reflection on this dichotomy. How can return migration research be inclusive

within this polarisation? What does this particular dichotomy mean for typologies of return? How should our research engage with and, where necessary, challenge this and other politicised dichotomies?

Our final dichotomy is this: are returnees successes or failures? Put another way, are they positively or negatively selected from the stock of migrants from which they are drawn? In the Handbook, this issue is analysed by Wahba (Chapter 2) and King (Chapter 22). The answer is far from straightforward. Empirical evidence exists for both positive and negative return selection, depending on the economic and geographical context and also on the distribution of incomes between and within countries. Wahba quotes research (notably by Borjas and Bratsberg, 1996) that suggests that the type of selection in return migration effectively reinforces the selectivity of the initial migration flow. This means that, if the initial migrants were positively selected (i.e. above-average in terms of their education and skills), return migrants will be the lesser-skilled because those who stay in the country are the most able and highly rewarded income-wise. The migrant origin country thus suffers a ‘double whammy’: it loses its higher-skilled migrants but then gets back a negative selection of these migrants. Conversely, if the initial migrants were negatively selected (representing a bias towards below-average education and skills), returnees are likely to be the more highly skilled amongst this group. A more qualitative overview, partially consistent with the above finding, is given in the classic paper on return migration by Gmelch (1980, pp.141–2). According to evidence reviewed by him, returnees are neither the most successful, since that success is best experienced and advanced in the host country, nor abject failures, since failed migrants are reluctant to return to the shame that this entails and want to stay abroad until at least some measure of success in their migration project is achieved.

New Implications of Return

Moving on from the dichotomies discussed above, we now look at some wider implications of return migration within changing global processes. First is the complex relationship between *return migration and inequality*. Taking return out of the equation for a moment, the relationship between migration and inequality is subject to contradictory theoretical interpretations. According to neoclassical equilibrium theory, migration takes place from low-wage, high-unemployment regions and countries to high-wage, low-unemployment destinations. The transfer of surplus labour recalibrates the supply and demand of labour in each location, leading to wage equalisation, when migration stops. However, according to the Marxist-inspired historical-structural model, migration serves only to reproduce the structural inequality between poor, peripheral countries and regions – which are reservoirs of surplus labour – and the destination ‘core’ regions and countries whose growth is further enhanced by supplies of cheap labour (King, 2018). Hence migration drives and exacerbates spatial and social inequality.

How is return factored into these relationships? As is demonstrated in several chapters in the Handbook, certain forms of return migration create systemic vulnerabilities for returnees, thereby exacerbating global and local inequalities. Many deportees and assisted voluntary returnees fit this mould. Schuster and Majidi’s (2013) research on deportees in Afghanistan shows how they are regarded as ‘contaminated’ and are ostracised by the society of return, driving them into isolation and further situations of vulnerability. Lemberg-Pedersen (Chapter 9) stresses the globalising nature of the ‘deportation turn’, reflected in empirical

research in several countries worldwide, including Ethiopia (Kuschminder et al., 2021), Afghanistan (Schuster and Majidi, 2013), Jamaica (Miller, 2008) and the Dominican Republic (Ceciliano-Navarro and Golash-Boza, 2021). In all these studies, returnees are frequently found to be worse off post-return, due to economic failure, sudden forced return or other circumstances. As a result, they are propelled into vulnerability, thereby increasing inequalities and posing further challenges for poverty eradication and the achievement of sustainable development goals. Very different is the experience of retired lifestyle migrants who, at some stage, may be forced to return to their home countries in distressed circumstances following illness, the loss of a partner or financial difficulties (Walsh, Chapter 19).

In other theoretical and empirical scenarios, return migration can have a more socially equalising function. The NELM framework foresees migrants escaping poverty and building up a profile of remittances and savings abroad which can then help to boost the family's economic and social wellbeing upon return. Poverty in the home country – or at least in the regions and communities affected by this migration-and-return process – is therefore reduced. However, in a different subplot to this scenario, other outcomes may result. For instance, when some people are too poor to migrate (since there are inevitable costs attached to migration – getting a passport, paying for travel etc.) and only the better-off can afford to leave, then migration exacerbates inequality, especially when the departing migrants are able to return better-off than when they left.

The second theme which we signal for further research is the role that return migration can play in advancing *cultural globalisation and development*. Bilgili (Chapter 3) demonstrates the important connections between return migration and transnationalism, including the flow of social remittances (new ideas and behaviours; Levitt, 1998) and knowledge transfer (Mueller, Chapter 23). Cultural globalisation can be an important stimulus towards recognising human rights, women's rights and the acceptance of other cultures, religions and lifestyles. This can occur across multiple types of return – labour migrants, brain return, returning students, second-generation return and lifestyle return. Moreover, it should not be assumed that this is a purely North-to-South return flow of cultural change; it has the potential to occur in all of the global 'compass' migrations – North–North, South–South and South–North. Likewise, it is not restricted to any temporal mode of return but can occur across all return mobility types – permanent, temporary, transnational visits, even virtual return (Skype calls, other social media etc.).

However, the spread of new values, ideas and behaviours through return migration is not automatic and is subject to certain conditions, which include the ability of migrants to absorb some elements of cultural change in the host country and to transmit such change to their home society. Returnees should be able to translate international and global ideas into locally meaningful concepts that can be understood and accepted (see Kuschminder, Chapter 14).

The final theme we wish to signpost for future research springs out of Chapter 4 on gendering return migration, where King and Lulle point to the need for developing an intersectional approach to combinations of socio-demographic variables – gender, age, generation, class, race, health status, education/skill, disability and sexual orientation – which shape the return migration experience. Whilst some of these variables are dealt with in individual chapters (King and Lulle, Chapter 4, on gender; Bolzman, Chapter 15, on retirement migration; Grosa, Chapter 17, on returning children; Alves, Chapter 18, on returning university students; Walsh, Chapter 19, on the later-life return of lifestyle migrants; Kılınç, Chapter 20, on second-generation return), what is missing is the intersectionality of these and other returnee

characteristics. Amelina and Lutz (2019) have recently pushed for an intersectional approach to transnational migration; this optic now needs to be turned more specifically towards return migration as an embodied and complex experience.

The intersectionally related return-migrant characteristics listed above are felt and experienced by the returnees themselves as part of their evolving personal and group identity, but are also part of how they are perceived by the society of return. In research terms, this is a work still in progress but there are several indications that this work is moving in interesting directions. For instance, Potter and Phillips (2006) describe returnees from Britain to Barbados as ‘both black and symbolically white’, a hybrid ethno-racial returnee identity which refers not to their skin colour but to acquired cultural attributes such as their ‘British’ accents, reputation for professionalism and punctuality, and enhanced social status. Another example: issues of sexual identity are brought out as part of Christou and King’s (2014) research on second-generation Greek-American and Greek-German ‘return’ to Greece. Specifically, they highlight the case of gay men who, perhaps counter-intuitively, have relocated to Athens to escape the homophobia of the more closed ethnic ‘Greektown’ communities of the host societies where they were brought up (2014, pp.80–1, 156–7).

CONCLUSION: A ‘RETURN TURN’?

Recent years have seen increased attention paid to return migration, so that we can detect a ‘return turn’ in literature and policy. As Åkesson and Baaz (2015, p.5) have pointed out in the context of return to Africa, this policy attention is politically charged: the issue of return reflects the management and control of migration by governments and their anti-immigration electorates. Policies worldwide encourage migrants to return to their home countries: this has been especially the case in Trump’s USA and in Europe in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015–16.

Policy and politics apart and thanks to the combined research efforts of anthropologists, sociologists and human geographers, ‘a comparative ethnography of return has taken shape’ (Pauli, 2021, p.95). Drawing on many hundreds of studies, this Handbook has attempted to portray the richness and diversity of this comparative ethnography across the globe. However, it has to be acknowledged that most studies of return migration are not comparative but based on single case studies (Carling, 2004; Kuschminder, 2017, p.8). The work of synthesis and theorisation in which we and our authors have engaged is built both from the bottom up – by detailed comparison of case studies – and from top-down a priori theorisations. Both approaches are amply evidenced in the Handbook.

Many chapters warn against deploying sedentary, essentialised and teleological assumptions when discussing return. In short, there is no return to the situation as it once was: the place has changed, along with the people who live there; and so have the migrants themselves. Everyone is older than before and many have moved on with their lives. The challenges of reintegration are therefore considerable and perhaps greater than the obstacles which migrants faced in adapting to the host society. Yet, return migration does not necessarily close the migration cycle – far from it. Pauli (2021, p.104) writes that return is always a new beginning; a special kind of beginning ‘permeated with memories, hopes, desires, anxieties and longings’. These memories and hopes are both about what has been left behind and in anticipation of the future.

NOTES

1. As part of the PREMIG project ('Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration') based at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Carling et al. (2011) surveyed more than 1,100 publications on return migration, the vast majority of them journal articles. Whilst acknowledging gaps and omissions, the compilers justifiably claim that their literature survey 'constitute[s] a reasonable representation of the literature on return migration' (2011, p.4). Literature on 'the return decision' and on 'reintegration post-return' constitutes the bulk of the items referenced. Now ten years out of date, this remarkable survey has not been repeated: one can only guess the scale of growth in the return migration literature since then. If we take literally the statement by Carling et al. (2011, p.4) that 'a handful of publications [on return migration] are coming out every week', we might estimate the addition of at least another thousand items by 2021.
2. 'Re-migration' is confusing because it has been used in the literature to mean different types of movement. Especially those writing in German or Dutch, who also transpose this term when writing in English (e.g. Davids and van Houte, 2008; Unger, 1981), use re-migration to mean return migration. For others, re-migration means re-migration, that is, a new migration following an earlier migration episode. The chapters in this Handbook avoid the word re-migration and carefully distinguish between return migration and re-migration (or re-emigration). Actually, the story does not end there since some return migrants who re-migrate 'return' to their former host country. As Pauli (2021, p.97) writes, 'the returnee returns again, away from the country of origin and back to the host country'. White (2014; also Chapter 21 in this volume) calls this 'double return migration'; an alternative term would be 're-return' but, at this stage, the directionality of the move becomes unclear.
3. The mobilities framework was not mentioned by Cassarino (2004), largely because its main protagonists published slightly later (see Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2007). Having said that, 'return' mobilities did not feature prominently in the writings of the mobilities school.
4. This was the PREMIG project, whose final report (Carling et al., 2015) and annotated bibliography (Carling et al., 2011) are useful resources for scholars of return migration.
5. See Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, 2018. Available from: Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration to Be Adopted at High-Level Conference in Marrakech, Morocco, 10–11 December | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases (un.org).
6. In earlier writings, Cohen (1995, pp.5–7) called them 'migration dyads', whilst King (2002, pp.91–4) used the term 'migration binaries'. Cohen nominated six dyads: internal vs international migration, forced vs free migration, settler vs labour migration, temporary vs permanent migration, legal vs illegal migration and planned vs flight migration. King discussed these further and added two more: the act of migration and its subsequent effects; and the notion of whether migration should be regarded as 'exceptional' or 'the norm' in societal terms. Many of these binaries can be applied to return migration but here, too, they need to be questioned, blurred and deconstructed.

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