3.   Return and transnationalism
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INTRODUCTION

In the early days of the Corona pandemic, I found myself tweeting:

> I am now drafting a book chapter on #return and #transnationalism. Return, not possible. Virtual transnationalism more than ever before. This forced #immobility due to #COVID-19 has shaken how we think about it all …

Indeed, the conditions under which we have been relating to the concepts of return and transnationalism have changed. However, this extreme situation that constrains our mobility will not last forever. The inherent need for movement and our nature will demand the continuation of our movements across borders. With the impossibility of return mobilities and interpersonal contact comes the need to connect through other means, including telephone calls, apps and social media – whether with our friends, family or acquaintances who are living elsewhere. Hence, it would not be unrealistic to argue that these conditions create unprecedented levels of virtual transnationalism, while putting a halt on return.

This chapter will not be able to account for the new perspectives which we will develop over time on return and transnationalism due to the Corona pandemic but will rely on what we already know and have researched as academics. My main objective is to provide a discussion on the ways in which return and transnationalism are interlinked. I do so first by defining the different types of return, including return mobilities, imaginary return and return migration. Second, I lay out the different elements of transnationalism by focusing on the behavioural and emotional dimensions. Next, bringing these two together, I discuss how different types of return can be considered as an element, a determinant and a consequence of transnational (social, economic and political) engagements and belonging. Accordingly, I propose two conceptual models relating to return migration and reintegration processes. Finally, following a review of the existing literature, I point to the the currently missing links between return and transnationalism and highlight ideas for future research.

It should be noted that when using the concept of 'return', I do not refer to a one-time definite return, which is often considered as the end of the migration cycle (Black and Koser, 1999; Sinatti, 2015). Moving away from this deterministic and linear approach to migrants' mobility patterns, I see return as an option considered and experienced by migrants throughout their migration trajectory, a trajectory that is permanently in evolution and subject to changing conditions. I emphasise return not only as an act but also as an option because the 'myth of return' can be equally significant in the lives of migrants. The idea, hope, aspiration, intention or plan to return are all part of the discussion of return as a concept (King and Christou, 2011). The question of return appears and disappears over the lifecourse of migrants and is reconsidered at times as a place of saviour and home, as well as a last resort or even an unwanted destination. It

is within this spectrum of an imaginary and a lived experience that we need to think of return, when relating it to migrants' transnational engagements and identifications.

UNDERSTANDING RETURN AS MIGRATION, MOBILITIES AND IMAGINARY

The theoretical analysis of return migration as we understand it today dates back to nearly half a century ago when Bovenkerk (1974) wrote *The Sociology of Return Migration*. Later, one of the earliest definitions of return migration was proposed by Gmelch (1980). Although Gmelch recognised the analytical difficulty in making a distinction between those who return temporarily and those who go back home only for short-term visits,[1] in the core of his definition return migration refers to a permanent resettlement in the country of origin: 'Return migration is defined as the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle' (1980, p.136). In a way, return is considered as the end of a migration cycle. With the increased prevalence of return in national and international policies, definitions introduced by international organisations have also become commonly used (Sinatti, 2015; see also IOM, 2019; United Nations, 1998).

In the more recent academic literature, one of the most commonly used definitions of return is given by Cassarino (2008) who highlights the significance of time and the voluntariness of return. As much as his definition has its strengths in referring to various dimensions for return migration, it remains limited in a number of ways. It is certainly of great importance to recognise the various time dimensions and the voluntariness of return; however, return is more of a process that takes place within the migration trajectories of people. The fluidity and temporary nature of migratory movements cannot be ignored (Peixoto et al., 2019). Therefore, we need to situate return within the larger discussion on im/mobility patterns in a person's life, which includes multiple reasons for return, the localities of return and the intention to re-migrate when discussing it. Also, as mentioned in the introduction, it is a helpful analytical approach to think of return along the spectrum of both an imaginary and a lived experience. This comes close to how King and Christou (2011, p.452) define return as 'a broader concept which includes return migration and repatriation (where the return is forced) but which can also be imagined or provisional, encompassing various short-term visits such as holidays'. Conceptualising return in these ways is crucial for understanding its different meanings in the lives of migrants (see also Sinatti, 2015). Against this backdrop, the main question I am concerned with in this chapter is: How are return and transnationalism interlinked? Before answering this question, I first define transnationalism and its dimensions, which will help to identify the points of discussion in relation to return.

DEFINING TRANSNATIONALISM AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Basch and her colleagues (1994, p.7) defined transnationalism as 'the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement'. Transnationalism as an approach is one that aims to observe and understand better the new realities of migrant lives, such as living in the host country while maintaining meaningful relationships with the home country. A variety of terms is used to

define migrants' transnational behaviour and identifications. For instance, the term 'transnationality' introduced by Thomas Faist and his colleagues is defined as 'the degree to which families and individuals are engaged in transactions across borders and this may depend highly on and change over the life course' (Faist et al., 2013). Snel et al. (2006) use the term 'transnational involvement' as the total of the transnational activities and identifications of individuals. Guarnizo (2003, p.670) alternatively discusses transnational ways of living, referring to 'an active, dynamic field of social intercourse that involves and simultaneously affects actors (individuals, groups, institutions) located in different countries'. Vertovec (2004) also considers transnational practices as such to the extent that transformation in the sociocultural, political and economic domains takes place. Additionally, Itzigsohn et al. (1999) highlight the level of institutionalisation, the involvement of people in the transnational field and the movement of people in transnational geographical space, distinguishing between 'narrow' and 'broad' forms of transnationality.[2]

Finally, Levitt (2008) conceptualises the wide range of border-crossing activities as 'transnational ways of being', in contrast to 'transnational ways of belonging', which refers more specifically to migrants' multiple identifications and feelings of attachment. The transnational ways of being, referring to migrants' involvement in activities oriented towards their homeland, encompass different arenas of life. One can generally distinguish between social, economic and civic/political transnational engagements (Table 3.1). In the economic domain, we mainly refer to financial and in-kind remittances, investments in the home country (e.g. house, business, land), the purchase of government bonds or entry to government programmes and charitable donations made either directly to the country of origin or in a community organisation in the country of residence. The political/civic activities oriented towards the home country include participation in elections or membership in political parties there, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, participating in political demonstrations or the mobilisation of political contacts in the host country for affairs related to the home country (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Guarnizo et al., 2003).

Within the social domain, we include social relationships maintained through visits to friends and family in the origin country or contact through telephone calls, letters, e-mails, links with homeland or diaspora organisations and attendance at social gatherings with the ethnic community in the host country (King-O'Riain, 2015). In addition, individuals' participation in cultural events (e.g. concerts, theatre and exhibitions) relating to their country of origin or the consumption of media, art and other cultural products can be included as practices in this domain (Bilgili, 2014).

In addition to these relatively concrete and measurable aspects, there also exists a more subjective and identity-related dimension of transnationalism, namely, 'transnational ways of belonging'. Transnational identities emerge and are recreated as a result of individuals' memories, cultural productions and feelings of belonging. These are conscious demonstrations reflecting individuals' sense of belonging to a certain group or groups (Morawska, 2007). In their definition of 'transnational ways of belonging', Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) refer not only to an awareness of belonging and identification but also to actions that signify these identifications (e.g. wearing a Christian cross or Jewish star, flying a flag). Within transnational social fields, transnational ways of belonging occupy as significant a place as transnational ways of being.

Table 3.1   *Types, categories and dimensions of transnationalism*

Type	Category	Dimension
Transnational ways of being Behavioural aspects, including different forms of engagement and involvement	Social transnationalism	Virtual connections online
		Telephone conversations
		Social-media usage
		Return mobilities
	Economic transnationalism	Sending/receiving financial remittances
		Sending/receiving goods
		Making investments in the home country
	Political transnationalism	Extraterritorial voting
		Engagement in diaspora organisations/hometown associations
Transnational ways of belonging Emotional aspects, including feelings of identification and attachment	Transnational identification	Homeland attachment and feelings of belonging
		Identification with home country
		Feelings of nostalgia and wish to return

Source: Author's own creation based on the work of Levitt (2008) and Al-Ali et al. (2001).

All in all, even though transnational engagements and identifications cannot be considered as new social phenomena, their nature, frequency and meaning for the individuals and society at large have changed. This is primarily due to the often-referred-to changes in communication technologies, fast and cheaper travel and increasing interaction between communities across countries (Vertovec, 2001). In other words, the circumstances attributable to globalisation have contributed to the establishment of transnational social fields. Within these latter, mobilities of return also take on new, diverse and important meanings. The two dimensions of transnationalism that explicitly overlap with the understanding of return as seen above are return mobilities (social transnationalism) and return intentions (transnational identification).[3] These two dimensions are obviously meaningful for those migrants or their descendants who reside primarily in the countries of destination.

It is, however, important to mention that transnationalism may be part of returnees' lives as well. Returnees may use their transnational social networks as well as their cultural capital upon return for various purposes, as we will see in the next section. In this regard, there is possibly a continuity in the transnational engagements and belongings of migrants wherever they may be located. In the following section, I discuss how return mobilities, imaginaries of return and return migration are all affected by but also become elements of transnational belonging and being. It is these inherent linkages between transnationalism and return that make the topic such a compelling one.

EXISTING RESEARCH ON RETURN AND TRANSNATIONALISM

Even though transnationalism has been one of the dominant approaches within migration studies in the past couple of decades and the term return frequently appears in empirical studies with a transnational approach, there is a lack of systematic discussion about the linkages between the two. Carling and Erdal (2014) have started the conversation on this topic by looking at how transnationalism interacts with return intentions, actual plans for return migration, post-return experiences and future re-migration. This is, indeed, in line with how

return migration and transnationalism are interlinked in much of the literature and is one way to think about how return and transnationalism are linked.

In addition, the increasing research linking return and transnationalism helps us to understand how these associations change over the lifecourse of migrants and depend on diverse conditions across time and space. These include the legal, political, economic and sociocultural conditions in both countries of origin and of destination as well as the characteristics of the migrant communities of which migrants are a part, as this influences the depth and rootedness of transnational social fields in a given context (Duval, 2004). Looking at the existing literature that intersects return and transnationalism, we observe that there is a variety of attention points and discussions around these factors.

Some research focuses on migrants who are abroad and discusses what return means for them. These include earlier works on imaginaries of return (al-Rasheed, 1994; Chavez, 1994; Ramji, 2006; Wessendorf, 2007), decisions of older migrants, retirement and return migration (Bolzman et al., 2006; de Bree et al., 2010; de Coulon and Wolff, 2005; de Haas and Serow, 1997; Hunter, 2011), return mobilities among second-generation immigrants (Fokkema, 2011; King and Christou, 2008, 2011; Reynolds, 2008; Vathi and King, 2011; Wang, 2016), return and repatriation in the context of forced migration (Brees, 2010; Ruben et al., 2009; van Meeteren, 2012; Wahlbeck, 1998) and other work generally on return mobilities (Ali and Holden, 2006; Duval, 2004; Ley and Kobayashi, 2005; Oeppen, 2013; O'Flaherty et al., 2007). More recent research has discussed the ways in which the return mobilities of both first- and second-generation immigrants can be seen as preparation for return (Erdal et al., 2016; Grasmuck and Hinze, 2016; Hunter, 2015; Kunuroglu et al., 2018; Pelliccia, 2017; Wahlbeck, 2015). The return literature has also often been linked to homemaking and belonging in the past few years (Bell and Erdal, 2015; Botterill, 2016; Buffel, 2017; Čapo, 2015; Fábos, 2015; Koh, 2015; Tharmalingam, 2016; Zontini, 2015). Other researchers have focused on the experiences of migrants in the post-return period and reintegration (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2015; Lietaert et al., 2017; Setrana and Tonah, 2016). In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss what these different lines of research tell us and reflect on how transnationalism supports a better understanding of return.

INVESTIGATING RETURN THROUGH A TRANSNATIONAL LENS

I propose mapping out how different types of return, including the post-return period, relate to transnational engagements and belonging (Table 3.2). Briefly, different types of return can be considered as an element, a determinant or a consequence of transnational engagements and belonging. I make a distinction between return mobilities, the imaginary of return, and return migration and the post-return period. The last of these is indicated separately as it refers to the distinct process of the reintegration of returnees. Following Table 3.2, in the remainder of this section I focus on the description of different types of return and reintegration as elements, determinants and consequences of transnational engagement and belonging.

Table 3.2   *Linking return and transnationalism*

|	Type of return	Link with transnational engagement	Link with transnational belonging
Return mobilities	Return visits (holidays, business trips, ancestral visits) Return as temporary relocation	Element of transnational (social) engagement	Determinant of transnational belonging
Imaginary return	Intention and plan to return Aspiration, hope, wish to return	Determinant of transnational engagement	Element of transnational belonging
Return migration	Long-term return Ancestral return	Consequence of transnational engagement	Consequence of transnational belonging
Post-return	Reintegration process	Consequence of transnational engagement	Consequence of transnational belonging

Note: Author's own creation.

Return Mobilities and Imaginary Return as Elements of Transnational Engagement and Belonging

Within return mobilities I consider short return visits – such as holidays, business trips and ancestral visits for the children of migrants – and temporary relocations, which include, for example, the longer stays of retirees for part of the year in their communities of origin (King and Christou, 2011; see also Miah, Chapter 7). These activities can be considered as elements of transnational engagement (see Table 3.2, column 2). For imaginary return, I make a distinction between the more objective and emotional aspects of return ideas. I refer to intentions and plans to return as part of the migratory plan, ideals and objectives of the individual. For example, for a student migrant, investing in education abroad can be ideal for finding a job upon return and is a natural part of the migration plan (Gu and Schweisfurth, 2015). With aspiration, hope and a wish to return, I aim to encompass the more emotional and affective dimensions of the return idea. Both types of imaginary return, in fact, have a close association with how transnational belonging is understood and measured and therefore I place them as elements of it (see Table 3.2, column 3).

Imaginary Return as a Determinant of Return Mobilities (Transnational Engagement)

What does transnationalism mean for different types of return? In the first instance, I propose an association between imaginary return and return mobilities (see left side of Figure 3.1). Namely, *the intention and aspiration to return among migrants and their descendants may be positively or negatively related to their return mobilities*. To explain, primarily, we can argue that, if a migrant has a plan to go back to the origin country after a certain period of time, she or he may want to keep the social contacts close and active (see Bell and Erdal, 2015). This may result in more frequent return visits but also engagement in more intense and regular social, economic and political activities oriented towards the origin country. Perhaps less likely, imaginary return may also have no or a negative relation with return mobilities. If the migration project is temporary and has a very independent goal, migrants may refrain from return mobility. For example, if a lifestyle migrant is looking for new experiences elsewhere, their interest in return mobilities may be non-existent or even negative (see Hayes, 2015). They may prefer not to have much contact with home or deliberately avoid maintaining strong

connections. Independent of the ability to do so, a similar argument can be made for student migrants who plan to be abroad for a short period and choose not to go back to the country of origin for visits.
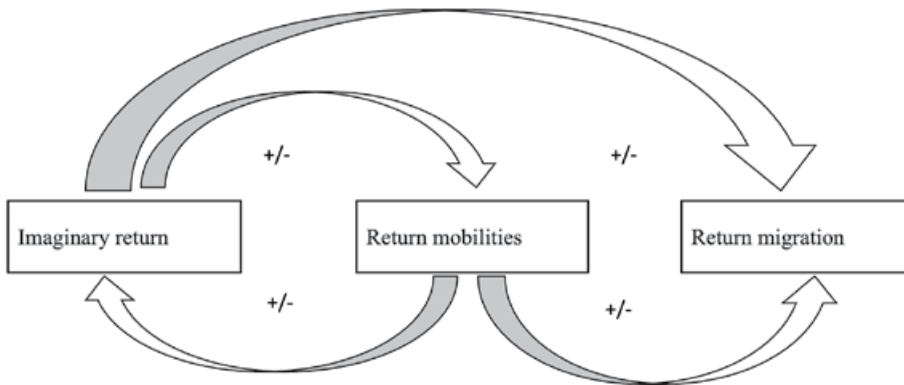
Note: Author's own figure.

Figure 3.1   *Manifold associations between imaginary return, return mobilities and return migration*

Return Mobilities as a Determinant of Imaginary Return (Transnational Belonging)

Following the first proposal and the highlighting of a bidirectional approach, I suggest that *return mobilities may be positively or negatively related to the intention and aspiration to return among migrants and their descendants* (see left side of Figure 3.1). For example, Duval (2004) conceptualises return mobility as a process of identity negotiation between origin and destination societies which both allows migrants to position themselves in relation to the two contexts and influences their desire and incentives to remain connected. In some instances, this effect of return mobilities can be positive and increase migrants' intentions of and aspiration to return back to the origin country. However, the effect of these visits may also function in a different way and could confront migrants with the idea that they would rather remain 'visitors' than become returnees in the future. For instance, in their study among Polish migrants, Bell and Erdal (2015) suggest that, for those migrants who engage in return visits, these visits reconfirm that life carries on and that their permanent return may simply be an illusion (see also Bell, 2016).

Return Migration as a Consequence of Return Mobilities and Imaginary Return

Duval (2004, p.54) asked, almost two decades ago, 'Can the return visit, as a transnational exercise bridging identities and facilitating the maintenance of social networks and fields, indeed facilitate return migration?' I argue that *return mobilities and imaginary return may positively or negatively affect the voluntariness and preparedness of migrants and may or may not lead to return migration* (see right side of Figure 3.1). In this proposition, I see return migration as an outcome of return mobilities and the intentions and aspirations for return.

Given the oft-argued mismatch between imaginaries of return and return migration (Bilgili and Siegel, 2017) and because return intentions do not necessarily translate into actual return migration, one has to bear in mind both the positive, the negative or the absence of a relationship between them.

On the one hand, those who engage more in return visits and who have higher levels of intentions and aspirations for return migration may be more prepared for it. Aspirations for return may function as an emotional resource and the plan to return may help migrants to seek out resources and conditions that help them to execute their return migration. Moreover, temporary return visits may help migrants to sustain the necessary social bonds with family and friends in the origin country and increase the wishes, aspirations and hopes to one day return long-term. Zontini (2015) argues that annual visits are important in strengthening connections and fostering a sense of belonging among Italian migrants who are compelled to consider the idea of return at some point and saw the close contact with families and friends back home as a preparation for their future return (see also Baldassar, 2007; Bolzman et al., 2006). Bell and Erdal (2015) similarly suggest that return visits are important because they help to maintain and gain more shared experiences and memories (see again Miah, Chapter 7).

Some also see return mobilities as 'testing grounds' for more permanent return or a form of ancestral return. As Duval (2004) puts it, migrants get a chance to observe the changes in their origin country during their visits and relate to these accordingly. Sometimes the visits may allow them to assess their career prospects upon return or help them to see how they would be able to position themselves within the wider social context. In short, return visits help migrants to reaffirm social ties, rebuild relationships and reacquaint themselves with the place of return. In this way, return visits not only increase the wish to return but also help to realise the plan (Duval, 2004).

Return mobilities, however, may also substitute for return migration and, therefore, may also have no or a negative relation to return migration. Return visits may make it possible to exercise a life simultaneously embedded in both the origin and the destination country, without having to return permanently. Particularly if the migrants' legal status allows them to easily make trips to the community of origin, these return mobilities may take away the deeper need to return and enable migrants to sustain a transnational life which excludes the option of a long-term or permanent return. In her study among older Turkish immigrants living in Brussels, Buffel (2017) has shown that migrants were entangled between living in Brussels and Turkey but primarily preferred to 'age in place'. They believed that Brussels provided better healthcare and social-security support yet they still had opportunities to maintain ties through back-and-forth travel or regular phone calls. Even though the longing to return to the homeland as an idea persisted among these migrants, they opted for growing older in their Belgian neighbourhood which they transformed into a transnational social space.

As the evidence suggests, the association between return mobilities, imaginaries of return and return migration can be complex and multi-layered. Moreover, the strength and the direction of these associations may change over the lifecourse as, for many migrants, mobility and sedentarism intersect at different points of their lives (Ralph and Staeheli, 2011). Botterill (2016) also argues that these associations depend on differentiated (classed, gendered and familial) opportunities and limitations that emerge in time. Furthermore, beyond the individual-level conditions across time and space, community, national and international-level circumstances are also crucial. Duval (2004) argues that the relationship between return visits and return migration depends on the transnational nature of the migrant communities within

which the individuals are situated. The research on return and transnationalism needs to do more digging into these kinds of mechanism and create a more comprehensive overview of the dynamics and also the factors that come into play when thinking about return mobilities, imaginaries of return and return migration.
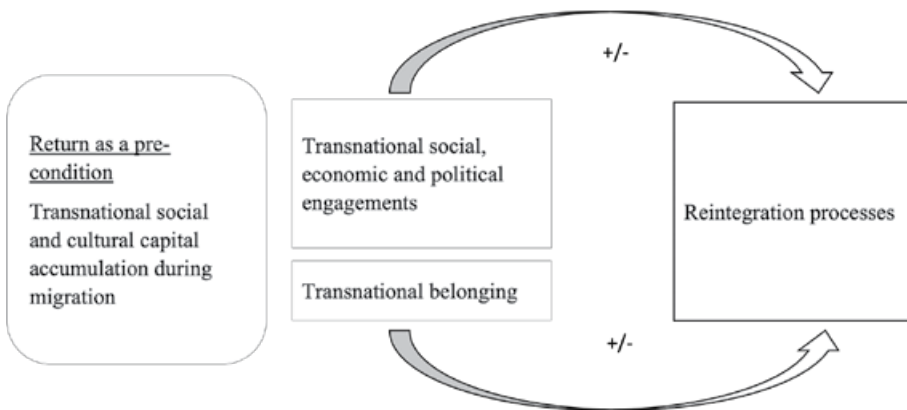
POST-RETURN: REINTEGRATION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND BELONGING

This section discusses what role there is for transnational engagements and belonging in the post-return period that involves the reintegration process (see final row of Table 3.2). Most research with a transnational lens focuses on the ties which migrants have with their country of origin while being abroad. This emphasis overshadows the idea that the linkages with the previous country of settlement do not need to be resolved after return.[4] As a matter of fact, many returnees, including repatriated refugees and rejected asylum-seekers, maintain transnational connections (Weima, 2017). During their migration experience, they make new social contacts and acquire knowledge, know-how and experiences which they take back with them upon return. When transnational connections become part of the daily activities and relationships of migrants when they are abroad, they are more likely to continue after return. The more institutionally embedded these connections are (e.g. hometown associations, religious groups), the easier it is to sustain them (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). Moreover, legal advantages such as having dual citizenship may make it easier for migrants to maintain strong contacts with the previous host society even after return migration (Levitt and Nyberg Sørensen, 2004). Some research has used Boccagni's (2012) conceptualisation of everyday transnationalism by focusing on interpersonal, institutional and emotional ties with past life experiences abroad to see how transnational connections also continue after return migration. For example, Lietaert et al. (2017) have taken into account personal relationships with a significant other abroad (through cross-border communication), interactions with institutions – for example, (diasporic) civil-society organisations – abroad that are relevant for their life upon return and symbolic ties that help them to reproduce a part of their identity (e.g. certain consumption patterns or ways of dressing).

It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail how transnational engagements and belonging relate to different dimensions of the reintegration process.[5] However, I briefly highlight that reintegration as a concept is one that is often questioned and lacks a universally accepted definition (see Kuschminder, Chapter 14). It is often discussed in combination with 'sustainable return' and has the underlying assumption that individuals who are reintegrated do not re-migrate (Bilgili and Fransen, 2019). I strongly object to this definition, which is closely interlinked with political objectives; instead I prefer to see reintegration rather as a process that has a multi-dimensional character. Similar to long-lasting discussions on immigrant integration and inclusion, I think this term also calls for a holistic approach that takes into account structural and sociocultural dimensions (Arowolo, 2000; Bilgili and Fransen, 2019). As can be seen in Figure 3.2, I propose that transnational engagements and belonging may have an impact on returnees' reintegration processes: *reintegration may be hindered or facilitated by returnees' sustained transnational engagements or belonging*, depending on which dimension of reintegration we are focusing on and under what conditions. However, there is,

thus far, very limited research that systematically looks at how transnational engagements and belonging relate to these dimensions.

There is some research that links transnational engagements and belonging with reintegration processes. For example, Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) discuss how, through transnational education, Chinese students accumulate social and cultural capital that translates into a diasporic consciousness characterised by multiple identities and fosters their social and economic advantage within Chinese society. Their transnational connectedness should not be understood merely by the relations they have with those who are in the former country of settlement but also those they have with other returnees who have similar experiences. The authors state that, with other alumni with similar experiences, they become part of a transnational imaginary that keeps them connected across a range of networks. They refer to these as 'transnational bubbles' within a wider local and national context. The returnee students reintegrate in China not despite but through the help of these networks of which they are proud members and which give a meaning to the interpersonal and intercultural relationships in their daily lives.

Note: Author's own figure.

Figure 3.2   Reintegration as a consequence of transnational engagement and belonging

In their study among Ghanaian returnees, Setrana and Tonah (2016) also illustrate that the returnees utilise their connections in the prior host country for developing businesses and other benefits which may not be readily available in Ghana. It is important to note, though, that this is, in many instances, in line with 'migrant projects' as a livelihood strategy. For instance, Asiedu (2005) and Mazzucato (2005) have both shown how a considerable share of migrants send remittances to invest in businesses in Accra and Kumasi. Upon return, too, they utilise not only financial resources but also their transnational social networks for these businesses. Grant (2009) considers many returnees as 'transnational entrepreneurs' who are involved in the import–export trade upon return and utilise their connections abroad to both develop and sustain their businesses.

My review of the literature in this field has shown that much of the research focuses on those who are more easily involved in the transnational social field and who place themselves more on the voluntary side of the voluntary and forced return spectrum (Sinatti, 2015, 2019). There

is much less research on the transnational connections of those who return under more disadvantaged conditions and what it means for them (Weima, 2017). Lietaert and her colleagues (2017) have addressed this topic by studying the experiences of Georgian and Armenian migrants who returned back from Belgium through a voluntary assistance and reintegration programme. They have shown that, for voluntary assisted-return migrants in Armenia and Georgia, transnational connections have been crucial for their emotional well-being. These connections may function as a coping strategy both emotionally and financially. At the same time, reliance on these connections is found to remind the returnees of their hardship and dependence on external support, which gives an ambivalent meaning to transnational connections (see also Chapter 8 by Lietaert and Chapter 12 by Marino and Lietaert). In this regard, it is important to consider the potentially negative impact of sustained transnational links for reintegration, especially on the more emotional and affective side.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided some conceptually valid associations between return and transnationalism and referred to the already existing literature in the field. By conceptualising return as return mobilities, imaginaries of return and return migration, I aimed to show the complete picture by acknowledging the more latent and intangible aspects of return and its meanings for individuals (see Table 3.1). This approach mirrored adequately the behavioural and emotional aspects of transnationalism. By considering return mobilities and imaginaries of return as elements of transnationalism, I wanted to highlight the inherent linkages between the two. Moreover, by suggesting a relationship between the two as the determinants and consequences of each other, I nurtured the idea that we cannot think of the links between the two as unidirectional and that we can carve out potentially diverse meanings and bidirectional associations between them. It was also important to make consequential links not only to return migration but also to reintegration processes in the post-return period in order to illustrate the continuity in transnational linkages for returnees. As Weima (2017, p.116) argues, 'Returnee transnationalisms contribute to a less state-centric and non-sedentarist understanding of returnee lives and shed new light into the links between return, reintegration and transnationalism.'

All in all, I conclude by emphasising that, in the past couple of decades, there has been a vast amount of research which, in one way or another, has linked return and transnationalism. Yet, the empirical evidence is complex and hard to summarise in a simple manner. This is an inevitable consequence of the varied experiences of migrants and their equally diverse and changing contexts. What I believe lies in the future of research that studies return through a transnational lens is an understanding and further theorisation of the mechanisms through which the associations I proposed (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2) come about. Doing this should challenge some of the troubling sedentary binaries in migration research such as origin/destination, temporary/permanent and forced/voluntary migration. Especially at a time when return is reduced to being a solution to unwanted migration among policy-makers, situating and understanding return as part of the mobilities of individuals with a transnational lens is imperative.

NOTES

1. According to Gmelch (1980, p.136), 'Migrants returning for a vacation or an extended visit without the intention of remaining at home are generally not defined as return migrants, though in some settings it is difficult to distinguish analytically the migrants returning home for a short visit or seasonally from those who have returned permanently.'
2. See also Portes et al. (1999) for a discussion on transnationalism 'from above' – associated with multinationals or nation-state institutions – and 'from below' – associated with migrants and grass-roots organisations.
3. When thinking of the extent to which migrants develop and maintain a sense of belonging to their home country, researchers often refer to feelings of nostalgia and a wish to return as a proxy for attachment (see Itzigsohn and Saucedo, 2002).
4. Return does not necessarily happen back to the community of origin but perhaps to another place in the region where the migrant may consider returning in the wider sense (Duval, 2004).
5. I follow Cassarino's (2004) definition; he made a distinction between economic, social, legal and cultural reintegration. In his view, economic reintegration refers to successful participation in the labour market, access to employment and the ability to create a sustainable livelihood. Social reintegration encompasses participation in organisations, engaging in social interactions with other society members and acceptance among family and friends. Legal reintegration denotes the establishment of citizenship and rights in the country of return, including the ability to participate in local elections and judicial processes. Finally, cultural reintegration refers to participation in local cultural events and an acceptance of the norms and values of the society.

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