Moving Back or Moving Forward? Return Migration, Development and Peace-Building

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Abstract

This article addresses under which circumstances migrants returning from European to (post-)conflict countries are willing and able to contribute to development and peace-building in their countries of origin. Based on comparative research in six countries world-wide and an in-depth study in Afghanistan, we explore (1) the heterogeneity of the post-return experience, (2) the complex meanings and motivations of return migration, and (3) the expectations of the characteristics of migrants, on which the link between return migration, development and peace-building is based. Based on these findings, we (4) explore return migrants' potential to be agents of change. We find that while the expectations on which migration and development policies are based only count for a small minority of returnees, this is not the group that is targeted by policy. In order to formulate adequate policies that do address the needs and potential of returnees, we propose two modifications to current policy: First, de facto voluntary and involuntary return should be redefined into more relevant terms that cover the matter. Second, we propose to re-evaluate and disentangle the different goals that inform migration and development policies.

Keywords: return migration, migration and development policies, return motivation, embeddedness

Introduction: The Rise of Return Migration as a Multi-Tool for Policy

'When migrants return to their country of origin, they will contribute to development and peace building'. This optimistic mantra in current European national policies (ICMPD and ECDPM 2013) is the result of a changing political discourse over the past 25 years with regard to migration. In this globalizing world, the interdependency of development, security and mobility has become common ground. As a result, industrialized host states have started to see modern migration movements as instruments for policy, which (1) need to be managed, controlled and regulated in order to (2) defend domestic security and welfare and (3) promote international development and peace-building (Skeldon 2008; Raghuram 2009).

Efforts by host states to manage these three overlapping goals have led to the formulation of migration and development policies (see Figure 1). Within this policy domain, return migration evolved from being 'the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration' (King 2000: 7) to a multi-tool to encompass all these goals at once (see Skeldon 2008). Gradually, return migration came to be considered as both a movement *back* to normal that restores pre-conflict natural and social order as well as a movement *forward* to change in which returnees contribute to development and peace-building (Koser and Black 1999; Faist 2008).

Although discussions on the link between migration and development globally have focused on successful economic migrants, countries throughout the European Union[1] have expanded this link to also encompass the return of refugees, failed asylum seekers and undocumented migrants (ICMPD and ECDPM 2013). In these European countries, asylum and immigration policies and so-called 'Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration' (AVRR) programmes have now taken up a substantial part, if not the bulk of, migration and development policies and budgets. These programmes are financed by, on average, three to nine per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) (ibid). Other programmes that promote the link between return and development facilitate the temporary or circular return of high skilled migrants[2] (ibid).

Although allowed by the ODA reporting system managed by the OECD, several scholars argue that 'Assisted Voluntary Return' programmes are heavily motivated by an interest to manage and control migration movements in a way that is financially and politically less costly than enforced removal. (Black and Gent 2006; Faist 2008; Zimmermann 2012; ICMPD and ECDPM 2013; Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014). Scholars wonder why and how some of the world's most exploited people should contribute to development where official aid programmes have failed (Castles and Miller 2009: 58).

This article explores return migration within the migration-development-peace-building nexus. We explore (1) the heterogeneity of the post-return experience, (2) the complex meanings and motivations of return migration, and based on that, (3) interrogate the expectations of the characteristics of migrants, on which the link between return migration, development and peace building is based. Based on these findings, we (4) explore return migrants' potential to be agents of change. This exploration centres on the question of under which circumstances migrants returning from industrialized countries are willing and able to contribute to change with regard to development and peace-building in the (post-) conflict country of origin.

We explore these questions by focusing on the life courses of return migrants, while building on two methodologically complementary research phases. The first phase is a comparative study of 178 returnees from industrialized countries to six countries across the world (Sierra Leone, Togo, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan and Vietnam) conducted in 2007-08. In each country, data was gathered through a structured survey, semi-structured interviews with returnees and key informants, and participatory observation. The study shows remarkable trends as well as context-specific differences. The second phase builds on the first with an in-depth case study from 2012 among 35 Afghan return migrants who returned to their countries of origin. They mainly returned from Western Europe, and particularly from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany and Scandinavia. The autobiographical narrative was the core of the data collected, which helped to obtain a holistic understanding of the role of migration in individuals' life courses. In addition, group discussions and key informants helped to understand the complexities of return migration (Van Houte 2014).

After providing a brief historical background of the changes in political and social discourse during the past 25 years with regard to migration in general and return migration in particular, we present the main findings from these studies. They highlight that return neither is a movement back to normal, nor is it easily a movement forward to change. We find that the only returnees who could potentially contribute to change are voluntary returnees, which questions the adequacy of migration and development policies.

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[1] Notably Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain. See ICMPD and ECDPM (2013) for a systematic analysis of 11 European countries' Migration and Development policies and how it often includes Assisted Voluntary Return programs.

[2] Notably Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands (ICMPD and ECDPM 2013).
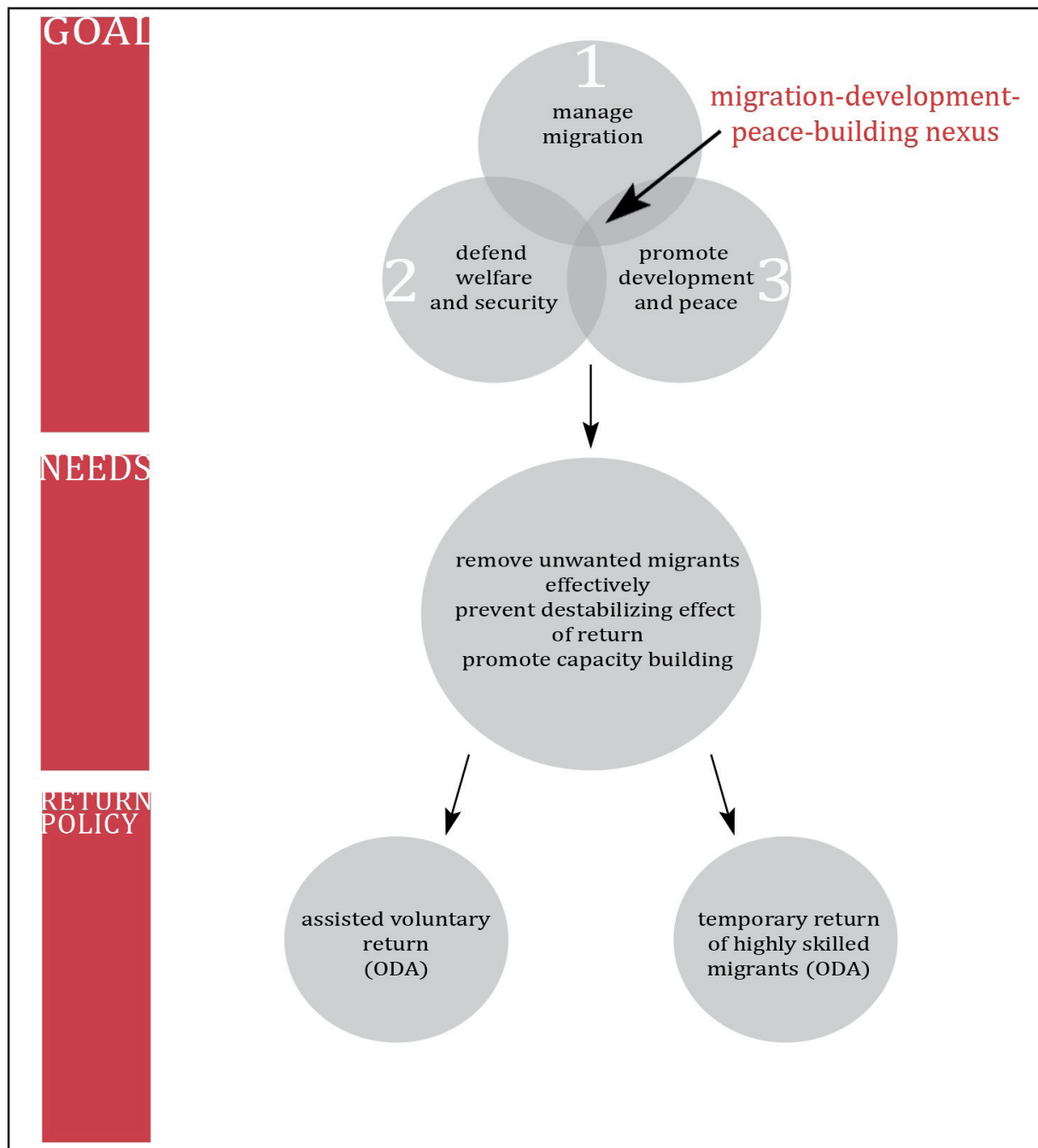
GOAL

NEEDS

RETURN POLICY

1 manage migration

migration-development-peace-building nexus

2 defend welfare and security

promote development and peace 3

remove unwanted migrants effectively
prevent destabilizing effect of return
promote capacity building

assisted voluntary return (ODA)

temporary return of highly skilled migrants (ODA)

Figure 1. Return, development and peace-building goals, needs and policies

From Cold War Protection to Return Migrants as Agents of Change

Historically, three durable solutions to the 'refugee problem' have been recognized: local integration in the host community, resettlement to so-called third countries (i.e. other than the country of origin and the original destination country), and repatriation to the country of origin. The end of the Cold War set in motion a number of changes in the industrialized states from the beginning of the 1990s onwards. These changes led to a gradually shifting discourse from integration to return as well as a shift from viewing migrants as victims of rival regimes to agents of change in their countries of origin.

The first consequence of the end of the Cold War was an increasing reluctance to accommodate asylum seekers. Protecting refugees from rival regimes had previously been a powerful source of political propaganda and, at the same

time, the non-departure regime of the Iron Curtain had kept refugee levels manageable. After the end of the Cold War, protecting refugees lost its geopolitical and ideological value for Western states. In addition, fading national and international boundaries, growing inequality and increased civil conflicts in the post-Cold War period caused increased numbers of refugees and asylum seekers to migrate (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014).

Along with these increasing immigration flows, the notion emerged that large volumes of migrants might threaten the social cohesion, welfare and security in destination countries. This resulted in a growing public and political resistance in the industrialized states against immigration in the 1990s. The events of 11 September 2001, which linked migration to issues of security, conflict and terrorism, led to further decreasing tolerance towards non-Western, Muslim and/or immigrant groups (Skeldon 2008; Raghuram 2009; Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 226, 324). Finally, the interest in managing migration increased in the context of the economic recession in Europe over the last five years (ICMPD and ECDPM 2013).

The perceived need of host countries to contain migration changed policies that were designed to welcome Cold War refugees into regimes meant to exclude unwanted or unproductive migrants (Duffield 2006; Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 226, 324). Obtaining refugee status became more difficult (Koser and Black 1999; Black and Gent 2006) and the act of leaving one's home and seeking asylum was progressively criminalized (Duffield 2006). New legislation aimed at the eventual return of asylum seekers, such as temporary protection regimes instead of permanent refugee status (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 226).

A second trend after the collapse of the former superpower hegemony was a discourse change towards individualization, which also appeared in the field of migration, development and conflict. In migration policy, individualization meant that returning back 'home' after conflict to restore the natural and social order became portrayed as a basic human right. Since the early 1990s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international bodies have promoted and facilitated return as the most desirable of all solutions for refugees (Hammond 1999; Omata 2013). In practice, however, a strong interest in returning unwanted migrants to their countries of origin led host countries to reject asylum seekers and pressure them to return much sooner than that the migrants themselves found feasible through financial inducements or with a threat of deportation (Black and Gent 2006).

In the context of the growing significance of civil conflicts, the limited success of classic development institutions and decreased budgets on aid and defence, the discourse of individualization led to the search of alternative grassroots actors for development and peace building (Zunzer 2004; Duffield 2006). Governments and international agencies became attracted to ascribing migrants the moral responsibility for development and peace-building in their places of origin[3] (Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002; Faist 2008; Skeldon 2008; Raghuram 2009).

Return Migration, Development and Peace Building

Without theoretical and empirical foundations, the discussion on the relationship between migration, development and peace-building risks being reduced to a merely political and ideological issue (Raghuram 2009) that produces inadequate policies (Bakewell 2008). Scholars highlight the limited and contradictory evidence found in research as well as the complex and heterogeneous linkages between return, development and peace-building (Cassarino 2004; De Haas 2010). The paradoxical expectations of return migration as both a movement back to normal

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[3] Policies aimed at stimulating the link between migration and development usually contain elements promoting remittances, skilled migration, circular migration, the engagement of diasporas and return migration (Skeldon 2008, ICMPD and ECDPM 2013).

and a movement forward to change need to be explored (Koser and Black 1999; Faist 2008). In addition, an important question is *which* categories of returnees are expected to contribute to *what* kind of change.

Return as Restoring Order: is Return Going Home?

The argument that return means a restoring of natural and social order in the country of origin implies that when the initial reasons for migration have disappeared, return equals going 'home' to the pre-conflict and pre-migration life. Return after conflict is seen as a means to undo the negative consequences of conflict, embodied in refugee flows. The expectation of return as going 'home' has made reintegration a key issue on the international humanitarian agenda, which envisions the disappearance of 'any observable distinctions which set returnees apart from their compatriots' (UNHCR 1997: 9).

Despite the political and humanitarian logic, the academic debate is now beyond the point of seeing return as the end of the refugee cycle where everything goes back to normal. First, return is not necessarily the best option or the most logical move in the lives of migrants (Monsutti 2008; Omata 2013). Migrants' decision to move is often part of dynamic life strategies that aim to seek a better future in holistic terms, including security, but also political, economic, social and cultural aspects. The financial, physical and emotional investments in migration imply that migrants have a lot to lose by going back, even if the conflict is settled and the country is considered safe. In addition, opportunities or gains achieved in exile can be a factor that may delay (or deter) migrants' decisions to return (Zimmermann 2012).

A second line of research highlights that reintegration is not evident, as the post-conflict moment is a new phase in a dynamic and ongoing process rather than a return to the pre-conflict situation (Hammond 1999; Cassarino 2004; Faist 2008). Return may increase tensions in the society of origin and hinder the transition from war to peace for different reasons. First, large-scaled repatriation movements can stretch the resources in the society of return. Second, returnees may be associated with former ethnic and political (élite) structures. Third, distrust and resentment regarding questions of loyalty between returnees and those who stayed in the country can form a new line of conflict (Zunzer 2004; Chan and Tran 2011).

In addition to socio-political and economic challenges of return, a third line of research highlights the tension between return, identity, home and belonging. First, 'home' has changed as the post-war economic, social, cultural and political situation in the society of origin is often very different from what people have left (Ghanem 2003). Second, the notion of the homeland as a 'purified space of belonging' (Ahmed 1999) no longer fits in the experience of migrants who construct multiple and hybrid forms of belonging. In addition, protracted refugee situations lead to second-generation migrants who were born outside of the country of 'origin', which further complicates notions of 'home' (Hammond 1999; Faist 2008; Monsutti 2008; Raghuram 2009). Return migrants need to both negotiate belonging to the community of return as well as the distinctiveness of their identity (Chan and Tran 2011).

The wealth of literature on the dynamic and multi-local notion of home and belonging suggests ambiguity and variety as to what 'home' means; this concept needs to be taken into account in order to produce empirically and theoretically valid insights on return migration (Hammond 1999; Black and Gent 2006).

Return as Change: Contributing to Human Capital and Peace or to Inequality and Conflict?

In contrast to the 'restoring of order' argument that implies the disappearance of differences between returnees and the local population, the 'return as change' argument highlights the potential of such differences (King 1978; Bakewell 2008). First, as migration to industrialized countries is a privilege of a relatively wealthy minority, these migrants are considered as the higher educated,

wealthy, entrepreneurial and strongly networked élite. Second, they are expected to have acquired skills, capital and ideas while abroad. Third, they are believed to adopt an in-between position between the host country and the country of origin, which enables them to mediate between cultures and negotiate change (King 1978; Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002).

Despite these specific expectations on the characteristics of returned migrants as agents of change, a number of gaps remain insufficiently explored (Raghuram 2009). First, the increasing significance and benefits of mobility and access to transnational circuits makes inequalities with regard to the right or capacity to migrate an important dimension of social stratification (Carling 2002; Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002; Faist 2008; King 2012). Such increased socio-economic differences caused by migration can induce conflict rather than contribute to stability (Zunzer 2004). The study of migrants' contribution to development should therefore recognize the hierarchization of peoples' right to migrate (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 75-76).

A second knowledge gap is that there is limited and contradictory evidence on the extent to which migrants are willing and able to change existing (social, cultural, economic or institutional) structures in the country of origin. If they have gained new ideas for development and peace-building, how can they negotiate these changes within the society of return (Faist 2008)? Will their in-between position make them relatively independent from the constraints of structures (Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002)? Can they overcome the institutional constraints to which they themselves are subject, or is change only possible within an enabling institutional and economic framework (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 78)?

Third, migration-development-peace-building policies do not only assume the ability of migrants to contribute to change, but they also have specific, yet under-defined expectations on the type and direction of such change (Bakewell 2008; Faist 2008; Raghuram 2009). Implicitly, the notion of change is tied to socio-economic modernization in which migrants insert innovation, a sense of progress, justice, democracy and human rights into the society of return (King 1978; Raghuram 2009). In addition, change is expected to take place within existing (political) frameworks. Power shifts, political unrest, religious-based opposition and illegal activities are not the kind of change policy makers are hoping for. Especially since the events of 11 September 2001, and recent news of young Muslims traveling from Europe to Syria and Iraq to join Jihadist movements, there is a heightened awareness that migrants may also contribute to the 'wrong' kind of change (Raghuram 2009; Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 79). The idea that migrants' actions can and should be directed raises ethical and practical questions (Raghuram 2009).

What Kind of Returnees? Meanings and Motivations of Mobility

The tension in return as a movement back to normal versus a movement forward to change touches upon more fundamental questions about the meaning of mobility in the lives of migrants. The perception of return as going back to normal conceptualizes mobility as a disruption of life, with migrants as the victims of this disruption, while return is considered to restore a 'normal', sedentary life (Bakewell 2008). In contrast, the perception of return as change comes forward from the expectation that migrants increasingly benefit from their 'hyperglobal' (Carling 2002) and 'hypermobile' (King 2012) lives.

Although this understanding of migrants as either victims or agents informs dichotomies between voluntary and forced migration, the reality is more complex and heterogeneous. Scholars highlight that the motivations and meanings of migration and return are the outcome of a mix of migrants' choices and constraints to stay or move (King 1978; Cassarino 2004; Bakewell 2008; Monsutti 2008; Zimmermann 2012). Migration can be considered as a livelihood strategy through which people can adapt to constantly changing

circumstances (Monsutti 2008). Even wartime migration, although associated with disruption and loss, is argued to be less disempowering than involuntary immobility (Carling 2002).

With regard to return, it is argued that the motivation for return defines an important part of the post-return experience (Cassarino 2004). Cerase (1974) argued that migrants who return out of failure will be reabsorbed into society as if they had never migrated, while successful migrants who return with the ambition to start a new life, could potentially be a source of innovation. Although recent studies show a more nuanced image, going beyond dichotomies of success and failure and taking into account a wider variety of migrant profiles, they recognize similar processes (Cassarino 2004; De Bree, Davids and De Haas 2010; Cassarino 2014). Several authors argue that legal status is an important factor that shapes the meanings and motivations of migrants' return. (Carling 2004; Black and Gent 2006).

Moving Back or Moving Forward?

In the following sections we provide an answer to the questions raised above based on the main findings from the 2007-2008 comparative study and the 2012 Afghan case study.

Determinants of Post-Return Embeddedness

We first investigated whether the use of Official Development Assistance for 'Assisted Voluntary Return' programmes of rejected asylum seekers and undocumented migrants is justified (i.e. contributing to development) (see Van Houte and Davids 2008; Ruben, Van Houte and Davids 2009). Based on the 2007/2008 comparative study, we analysed the factors that influence post-return embeddedness, which is defined as an individual's identification with and participation in one or multiple spaces of belonging (Van Houte and Davids 2008; Ruben, Van Houte and Davids 2009), including return assistance, migration cycle experiences and individual characteristics. The results highlight the overall difficulties for rejected asylum seekers and undocumented

migrants with regard to building a sustainable livelihood, establishing social networks and having a sense of identity and belonging in the country of return. Our data suggests that returnees were often worse off in terms of access to independent housing and income compared to their pre-migration situation.

The process of post-return embeddedness is determined by a wide range of factors. The study showed context-specific factors as well as remarkably strong general trends across the six highly heterogeneous countries of return. First, the obstacles and opportunities faced by returnees are directly related to previous experiences in the migration cycle. The living circumstances in the host country and the motivation for return to the country of origin are of critical importance for post-return embeddedness. Years spent in restricted circumstances that constrain freedom of movement and limit possibilities for employment and education, thus making migrants dependent on social welfare, are factors that damage migrants' self-esteem, survival skills and social networks. Their damaging effects cannot be compensated by the limited return assistance that is provided. Apart from business assistance, the return assistance therefore has limited or even negative effects on all dimensions of embeddedness.

These findings show that it is unjustified and even misleading to suggest that 'Assisted Voluntary Return' programmes may promote development. While the intention is expressed, and budget assigned, to make this type of return migration contribute to development, this intention is undermined by restrictive migration policies. In contrast, we found that returnees faced deprivation rather than benefits from their migration experience. As achieving sustainable return for the individual returnee is thus already a challenge, returnees cannot be expected to contribute to development. Rather, the opposite is true; returnees are often a burden on their relatives' household budgets and put higher pressure on already limited employment, health care and education facilities in the country of return.

Meanings and Motivations of Return

Here we focus on the 2012 Afghan case study. First, the findings that return motivation, more than return assistance, is of crucial importance for post-return embeddedness, which called for a more thorough analysis of the meanings and motivations of return. In policy terms, return is called voluntary as long as it does not take place with physical force. We proposed to deconstruct return as a complex decision-making process to find an alternative for this unsatisfactory terminology. A better understanding of the meanings and motivations of return can help to better address the needs and potential of returnees through improved policies.

We took a closer look at the mechanisms that decide how much agency people have over their migration decision by taking into account structure, desires, capacities and agency of migrants concerning their decision to return. We found that there is no clear-cut boundary, but rather a gradual scale from voluntary to involuntary return (see also Monsutti 2008), and that almost all migrants could claim some degree of agency over their return.

The analysis, furthermore, shows that mobility entails an essential capacity *and* desire in the lives of return migrants, leading to strong empirical differences in the post-return experiences of those who are transnationally mobile after return and those who are not. Returnees who were unable to match desires of mobility with their capacities, because of their lack of legal status in the former host country and stricter migration policies, experienced involuntary immobility (Carling 2002). On the contrary, returnees who had permanent legal status in the host country returned while knowing that they would be able to re-emigrate if needed. This continued transnational mobility gave these returnees a sense of security and comfort, and allowed them to take advantage of geographical differences (Carling 2002).

We therefore challenge the current policy-oriented categories based on the use of force by defining the same categories in a more adequate and meaningful way. While pleading to take into account the complexities of return, a distinction that captures the large empirical differences in the post-return experience, which is therefore more relevant for policy and research on migration, should be based on post-return mobility. Practically, this categorization is based on legal status in the host country: return of migrants with a legal alternative to stay permanently in the European country of residence is the basis for calling return voluntary, while return of migrants without such legal alternative is defined as involuntary (see Van Houte, Siegel and Davids, forthcoming).

Interrogating the Expectations of the Characteristics of Return Migrants

This categorization was used to interrogate the expectations of the characteristics of return migrants, which inform the debate on the linkages between migration, development and peacebuilding. First, other than the assumptions that underlie migration and development policies, we showed that not all migrants are élites, not all returnees benefit from their migration experience and not all strongly participated in and identify with multiple places of belonging. Rather, the opportunities migrants have to accumulate skills, knowledge and savings in the host country, which they may invest after return, are unequally distributed among different types of migrants.

The majority of voluntary returnees in this study were members of the Afghan élite. They were able to leave their country at an early stage of the conflict and, because of their high profile, they were often granted refugee status and, eventually, citizenship of the country of residence. These refugees were able to participate in the new society of residence and had access to education and opportunities to learn the language and employment. Voluntary returnees returned to Afghanistan when they, given their individual circumstances, felt this was the best option (Cassarino 2004). They returned while maintaining strong and multi-local ties and continued transnational mobility.

Involuntary returnees, on the other hand, were of more modest descent and left later or stayed in transit countries for several years to save money for the rest of the trip; they therefore took up to nine years to reach Europe. Having arrived in European countries at a later stage, they claimed but never received refugee- or permanent asylum status. Their legal status did not allow them to fully participate in the host society. Contrary to voluntary return, involuntary return felt like a step back rather than an improvement. If involuntary returnees succeed economically, this was despite rather than thanks to their time abroad. The uneasy feeling of being 'stuck' in Afghanistan because of their involuntary immobility, and their relative failure compared to successful returnees (Carling 2004), made them feel impoverished, disempowered and frustrated.

Our findings show that previously existing socio-economic differences are reinforced by the migration experience, which results in strongly differentiated patterns of post-return multi-local embeddedness and transnational mobility. This finding restricts expectations of return migration and development.

Second, we focused on the expectations within the migration, development and peace-building debate on returnees' potential to mediate between cultures and negotiate change as a result of their multi-local ties and hybrid identities (Van Houte and Davids, forthcoming/b). We explored how Afghan migrants returning from European countries negotiated belonging to one or multiple spaces of belonging through their expressions and practices of marriage, sexuality and gender norms.

While the migration experiences strongly determined returnees' capacities, returnees also displayed a variety of desires. The findings show that all returnees can be seen as agents in an attempt to match their desires and capacities, although agency takes place through a variety of strategies. Involuntary returnees often choose to comply with the limits of the structures they are confronted with. Voluntary returnees, on the other hand, are embedded in multiple structures

between which they are transnationally mobile. This means that they have increased room to manoeuvre, and can form hybrid identities, which allows them to apply creative responses to new situations in their personal lives (see also Bakewell 2008).

Despite the fact that all returnees can display agency over their personal choices, they do not always want to, are not always able to, or do not feel the need to mediate between cultures and negotiate structural change in Afghan society. The expectation that returned migrants can mediate between cultures and negotiate change in existing structures (Sørensen, Van Hear and Engberg-Pedersen 2002) is therefore overstated and should be carefully formulated in policies on migration and development.

Return Migrants' Potential to be Agents of Change

Last, we explore the expectation that return migrants can be agents of change in development and peace-building (see Van Houte, forthcoming). We built on the previous findings to answer the main question. We took an emic perspective to explore the ways returnees identify with the conflict and what kind of 'change' they could potentially bring in the migration-development-peace-building nexus.

The only returnees who could *potentially* live up to any of the expectations raised in the migration, development and peace-building debate are voluntary returnees. They return while maintaining ties with the European country of residence. Their participation in and identification with multiple places of belonging (in the country of origin, the European country of residence and, often, the international expatriate community) and transnational mobility gave them the confidence that they could protect themselves from generalized violence and at the same time keep their dependants safe in the Western country of residence. While ethnic or other pre-migration security issues were remarkably absent in their narratives of security, their strong affiliation with the West and their sometimes high profiles

as successful returnees created a risk for them, both with regard to common criminality and kidnapping, and targeted anti-Western violence. Younger voluntary returnees found a sense of belonging in the Afghan society by taking that risk and are pioneers who take advantage of the opportunities of a market with limited competition because of the physical and financial risk involved.

Many voluntary returnees were driven by ambition and chose to return to Afghanistan despite the expected post-2014 turbulence. They returned with optimism, energy and proactive attitudes, which was a new input into the conflict-ridden Afghan society. They adopted a discourse of modernization in which they saw their knowledge, skills and attitudes from Europe as an asset they could offer to Afghanistan. However, although they tried to negotiate in-between practices of Western modernity in an Afghan context, any 'foreign' ideas were regarded suspiciously. Implementing them required patience and social skills, which made few of these efforts to change existing structures successful. Voluntary returnees constantly re-evaluated their decision to stay or move, and they were likely to re-emigrate in the face of the post-2014 changes. However, this very mobility also enabled them to take the risk to be 'different' from dominant society, and to advocate controversial opinions that go against the current discourse, through creativity, innovation and improvisation, as Hammond (1999) defined social change.

In contrast, involuntary returnees, who returned without having any legal alternative to stay, were in no way a potential to Afghan peace-building and development. Most of them were of modest background and returned further impoverished and frustrated rather than enriched by their migration experience (see Van Houte, Siegel and Davids 2014). Being weakly embedded in Afghanistan and involuntarily immobile, involuntary returnees felt exposed to generalized violence, as they did not have enough means to protect themselves and their dependants. However, their lower profile made them less of a tar-

get of violence compared to voluntary returnees. Having lived but never really participated in the former host country, they did not pick up many skills or ideas and rather leaned to the conservative and traditional side as a strategy to negotiate belonging to the Afghan society (see Van Houte and Davids, forthcoming/b). Having lived in constant insecurity for much of their lives, the expectation of increased insecurity after 2014 affected their mental health. Being unable to maintain ties with the host country in addition to their lack of embeddedness in the Afghan space, furthermore, made them angry and disappointed which compelled them to retreat from, rather than bring change in society.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, more than economic impacts, the human dimension of returnees' involvement in the country of origin is the most important potential contribution to change. Voluntary returnees' creativity, resilience and innovativeness, along with their entrepreneurial mentality and their intellectual skills, are important input by these returnees. Nevertheless, these aspects are relational and have proven to be extremely difficult to negotiate change in a society that is suspicious of returnees and 'foreign' involvement. In contrast, the human dimension of returnees who are impoverished and frustrated by their migration experience, and the role of the Afghan government and their European host country, can also have a negative impact. This negatively feeds the already present anti-Western sentiments in their return environment.

Second, while the international community sees repatriation as the ultimate proof of peace that represents the restoring of normalcy, it is rather continued transnational mobility that could be the basis for Afghan migrants' contribution to change in Afghanistan (Black and Gent 2006; Monsutti 2008). There is no such thing as a return to 'normalcy' in the context of Afghanistan, as the conflict and migration movements over the last 35 years have shaped the reality of today (Monsutti 2008). In the explosive environment of today's Afghanistan, continued transna-

tional mobility has become a strategy of migrants to become more independent from national structural constraints and ensure their own safety. Transnational mobility is, therefore, their strongest asset to overcome their constraints and carefully negotiate change; rather than a weakness, their mobility is therefore their strongest asset that may facilitate their most valuable contribution. Policies aimed at stimulating the migration-development-peace-building nexus should therefore release the focus on putting migrants 'back in their place' (Bakewell 2008).

Conclusions

Return is neither a movement back to normal nor is it easily a movement forward to change. When migrants return to their country of origin, they do not automatically contribute to development and peace-building. The relationship between migration and development is too complex for easy generalizations. Rather, the policy and practice of migration would benefit from highlighting the complexities of migration. By unfolding the meanings and motivations of return migration, and comparing the experiences of voluntary and involuntary returnees, this article identified contradictions in return migration policies.

First, we highlighted that return is more complex than going 'home' and introduced the concept of multidimensional embeddedness as a holistic approach to the post-return experience of migrants beyond 'reintegration'. We analysed the determinants of post-return embeddedness, showing a number of remarkable trends across six heterogeneous countries under study. The strongest findings showed the limited or even negative impact of return assistance, and the significance of the migration cycle experience and in particular the return motivation.

We therefore first focused on the meanings and motivations of return. We deconstructed return as a complex decision-making process that goes beyond dichotomies of voluntary and involuntary mobility. We furthermore highlighted the importance of post-return mobility, which we proposed to centralize in the study of

return migration as an indicator for voluntary or involuntary return.

Next, we interrogated the expectations of the characteristics of return migrants, that returnees are (1) positively selected, (2) benefit from their migration experience, and (3) form hybrid identities to negotiate change upon return. We found that these expectations are too easily formulated and strongly differ between voluntary and involuntary return, in which transnational mobility is the strongest differentiating factor. The findings therefore highlight the limitations of the applicability of return and development policies.

Last, we projected these insights on returnees' identifications with conflict. We highlighted that policy makers' idea that migrants' actions can and should be directed raises ethical and practical questions. With regard to the main question of this article on the circumstances under which return migrants are willing and able to contribute to development and peace-building, we highlighted the importance of the human dynamics and transnational mobility.

Overall, this article showed that return migration is a complex process to which contemporary policy is responding inadequately. Next, we discuss the policy implications of these conclusions.

Policy Implications: Humans as Policy Instruments?

Return migrants have come to be seen as a threefold multi-tool in which their actions and movements can be controlled to meet their host governments' overlapping goals. Policies and budgets on return migration and development are considered as instruments to:

1. *Manage, control and regulate the movements of migrants* who are economically and politically superfluous by returning them to the country of origin and relieve the burden of the host state;
2. *Defend domestic security and welfare* by relieving the burden of immigrants on host states while preventing destabilizing effects of return migration, which may initiate
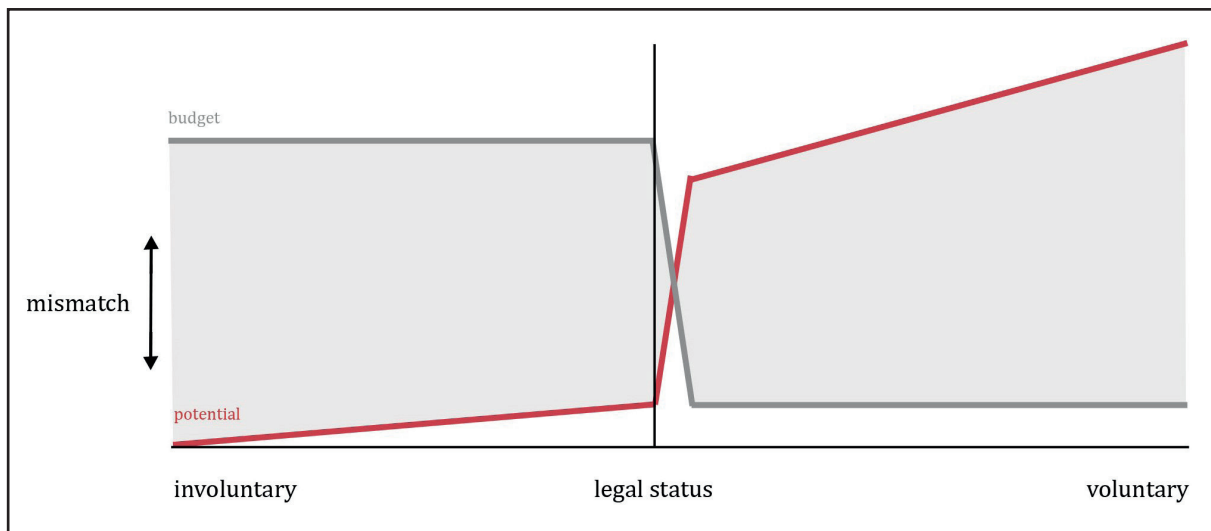
Figure 2. Development potential and development budget for returnees

new migration movements or be otherwise harmful for the host society;

3. Shift the responsibility of *development and peace-building* to migrants and give a positive connotation to their return, while controlling and preventing the 'wrong' kind of change, such as revolution, religious-based opposition or political unrest, which may be a threat to the second goal.

In order to combine these goals into one policy, host governments choose to ignore and blur the understanding of the heterogeneity of these returnees, who include failed asylum seekers as well as high-skilled economic migrants. European countries assign substantial parts, if not the bulk of their Migration and Development policies that are paid out of Official Development Assistance budgets, to asylum and immigration policies and 'Assisted Voluntary Return' programmes (ICMPD and ECDPM 2013).

Ineffective Return and Development Policies
While the expectations on which migration and development policies are based only count for a small minority of returnees, this is not the group that is targeted by policy. Though the bulk of budgets of policies promoting return, development and peace-building go to de facto involuntary returnees, they are unable to contribute to

development in any way. This simple but ironic finding is visualized in Figure 2.

Why is this a problem?
The way migrants are seen as instruments for fulfilling the goals of the host state dehumanizes them, because it fails to see them as purposive actors whose actions are part of dynamic life strategies, ambitions, values and visions (Omata 2013). Governments representing liberal democracies should pay more attention to the individual lives of people without assuming that they can control migration (Skeldon 2008; Castles, De Haas and Miller 2014: 318). Rather than being used as an instrument for development, migration should be taken into account as an encompassing aspect of development and conflict. If migration is to contribute to development and security, migration should be facilitated rather than contained.

Both policy makers and civil society organizations have, however, been pragmatic about the mismatch between policy and reality. First, the current policy on return migration and development is intentionally misguided. Several reports have questioned the development potential of return assistance programmes (Van Houte and De Koning 2008; Frouws and Grimmius 2012). However, policy makers have not been respon-

sive to arguments about the limited evidence on return and development and the need for careful wording and definitions regarding the nature of mobility. They are aware that using a vocabulary of 'voluntary return' and 'return migration and development' makes it easier to explain a politically sensitive topic to the public, and that framing the policy in this way enables them to use budgets assigned for development assistance for the return of unwanted migrants. For host country governments, this is a multiple win situation.

Second, non-governmental organizations whose primary goal is the wellbeing of migrants have now been incorporated into the migration and development discourse. NGOs who became involved in return assistance, as a way to 'do something for those who have to return', now have to comply with the terms of the governments' return policies in order to receive funding, which basically means that they have to produce a target number of returnees. While NGOs oriented towards migrants have an image of independence in society and among migrants, they are in fact implementing government policy for removing unwanted migrants. The pressure to market their product, in what has been called the 'migration industry' (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2012), leads to claims that they contribute to sustainable return or even to development. Such claims may, in turn, be used by governments to further legitimize their return policies.

Expressing these expectations in policy papers, statistics and other communications is, however, not harmless, as it affects our thinking and debating about, and communication with, migrants. Civil servants in charge of convincing migrants to return tend to become frustrated with migrants who are not willing to leave. In their optimistic frame, migrants who do not cooperate with 'voluntary return' are unwilling to take responsibility for their own lives (Kalir 2013) and for the development of their 'home' country. These expectations, raised by both policy makers and NGOs, strain communication with migrants before return and foster anger and disappoint-

ment among returnees who find that the story is not as bright as was presented to them. Their discontent may have a destabilizing effect after their return, which then undermines the goals of migration and development policies.

Undoing the Mismatch
It is therefore both for moral and pragmatic reasons that NGOs and policy makers should acknowledge the real impact of return programmes on individual migrants and development in the country of origin, and to re-evaluate their roles in this process. To undo the mismatch between policy and reality, and in order to formulate adequate policies that address the needs and potential of returnees, we propose two modifications to current policy. First, to avoid further conceptual confusion, de facto voluntary and involuntary return should be redefined into more relevant terms that cover the matter. Second, it is time to re-evaluate and disentangle the different goals that inform (return) migration and development policies. This is displayed in Figure 3 and described below.

Although these goals do have overlaps, they imply different needs in relation to return migration. The first goal to regulate, prevent and reduce migration implies the need to remove unwanted migrants effectively. Since deportation is both financially and politically costly and ineffective, an effective way is to provide a return incentive by means of financial or in-kind compensation. Second, the goal to ensure domestic security and welfare implies the need to prevent any destabilizing effects of return through a 'safety net'. Both these goals and their needs can be met through policies of return assistance for unwanted migrants. The third goal to promote development and peace-building in the country of origin implies the need for an investment in human capacity of migrants and continued transnational mobility. Policies promoting the development and peace-building potential of migrants should ensure both needs.

Considering the discussion above, it becomes clear that these goals are not complementary

GOAL

1 manage/control migration

2 defend security and welfare

3 development and peace-building

NEEDS

remove unwanted migrants effectively ↔ prevent destabilizing effect of returnees

promote capacity building of migrants

return incentive

return with safety net

ensure transnational mobility of migrants

POLICY

return assistance for involuntary return
non-ODA

migration and development policy return & non-return
ODA

TARGET GROUP

unwanted migrants

rejected asylum seekers

undocumented migrants

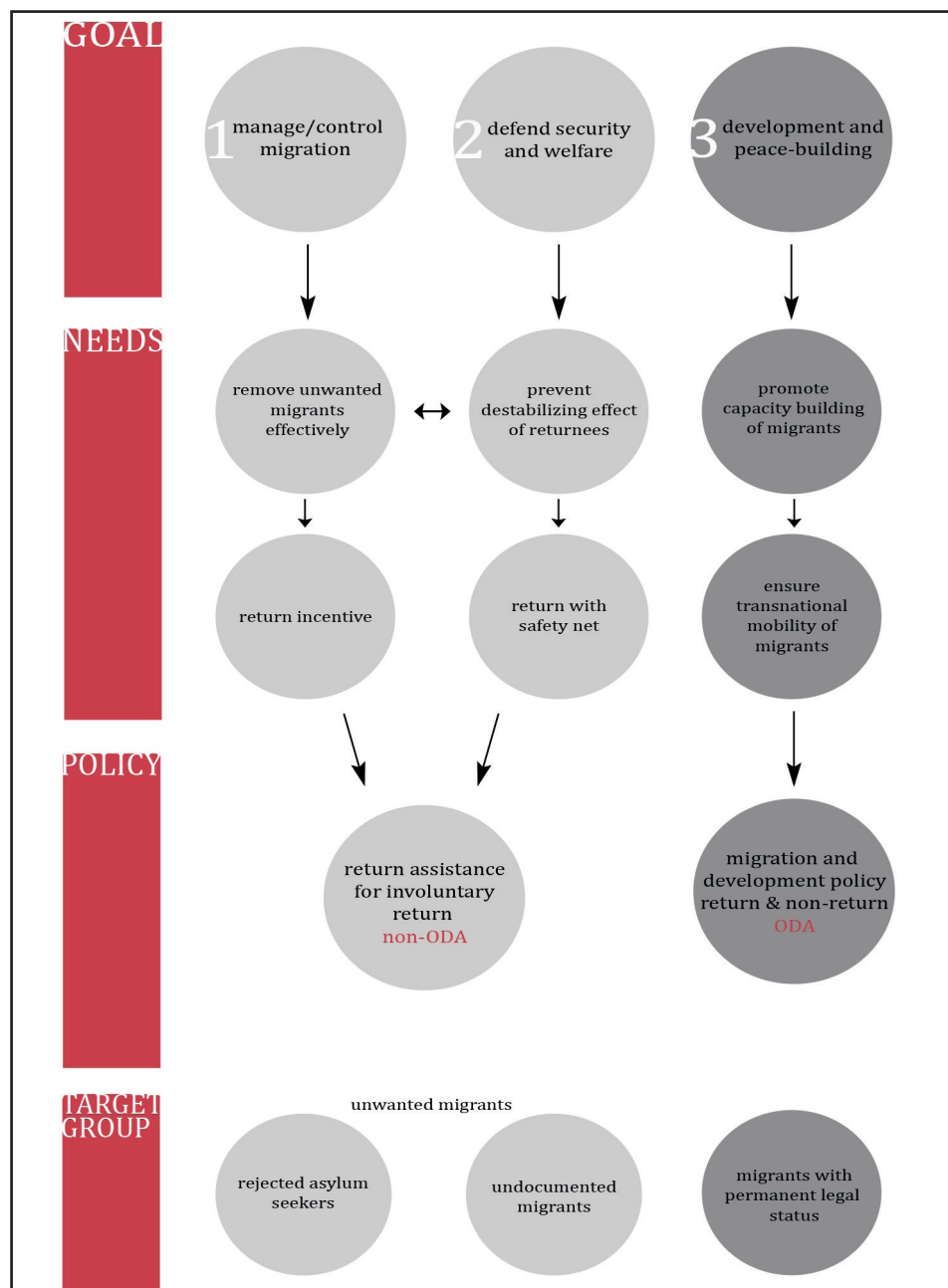migrants with permanent legal status

Figure 3. Disentangling return, development and peace-building goals, needs, policies

but rather serve different needs, call for different policies and target different types of migrants. While the first two goals aim at putting unwanted migrants back in their place, the third goal highlights the need for continued transnational mobility, which does not even require migrants to return. In addition, while the first two goals only meet the needs of the destination countries, the third goal would mainly favour development and peace-building in the countries of origin and

in the lives of the individual migrants, if they would be allowed to increase their capacities through rights to employment, education and freedom of movement in the host country.

The different goals and needs therefore imply the use of different budgets: if return is to regulate migration and ensure domestic security and welfare, this is a matter of home affairs and security budgets. Only if return occurs under the condition of continued transnational mobility and

strengthened human capacity, it may meet the goals to promote development and peace-building, which justifies funding from Official Development Assistance budgets.

Migration will always be part of people's survival strategies in times of conflict and crisis. Instead of trying to manage and contain these migration flows, a way forward in the migration and development debate should be how we can facilitate the resilience and determination of people to find a better life. Further policy-oriented research is needed to look into how transnational mobility can be fitted better into current migration and development policies.

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