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"Drivers and Barriers for Return Migration to sub-Saharan Africa"

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Table of Contents

List of figures

List of tables

Abstract

Return migration constitutes an integral part of many migration trajectories but little is known about the drivers and barriers which influence the return decision of migrants. This aspect constitutes a research gap due to little attention in the academic discourse in the past. But since 2008 an increased interest in return migration among researchers can be observed. Due to the characteristics of return migration, studies in this field are often restricted to single countries and only offer a limited picture. These observations triggered the motivation to investigate return migration from a meta-perspective, to systematically collect and process insights gained over the last years. The aim of this thesis is to improve the knowledge about the drivers and barriers that shape the decisions of migrants to either return to the country of origin or stay in the destination. Through a systematic review of small-scale studies conducted since 2008 the understanding of dynamics of return migration to sub-Saharan Africa shall be extended and the results shall be summarized in a conceptual framework. The results indicate that the return decision is a complex interplay of pushing, pulling, retaining and repelling factors which evolve in a certain temporal and contextual frame and are influenced by transnational ties. Social and personal factors seem to have a larger impact on the decision to return than merely economic ones: The wish to reunite with family and the longing for a life in the home-community are named most frequently as drivers for return. Policies restricting the movement between countries and making migration to and from the destination more difficult and have a negative impact on return migration. These complex aspects of return migration should be considered by policymakers and governments when effective policies for return migration shall be designed.

Zusammenfassung

Für viele Migrant*innen stellt Rückwanderung in das Herkunftsland einen integralen Teil in ihrer Migrationsbewegung dar, aber was ihre Beweggründe sind oder sie davon abhält, ist wenig erforscht. Diese Facette der Migrationsstudien stellt eine Forschungslücke dar und erhielt vergleichsweise wenig Aufmerksamkeit im akademischen Diskurs. Seit 2008 ist aber ein erhöhtes Interesse an der Thematik der Rückwanderung erkennbar. Aufgrund der speziellen Charakteristik von Rückwanderung sind Studien oft auf einzelne Länder beschränkt und bieten daher nur sehr beschränkte Einblicke in die Materie. Diese Beobachtungen geben Anlass, das Thema von einer Meta-Perspektive zu untersuchen und bisherige Ergebnisse der letzten Jahre systematisch zu sammeln und aufzubereiten. Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, den aktuellen Wissensstand über die Beweggründe und Hindernisse für Rückwanderung in das Herkunftsland zu erweitern. Durch die systematische Analyse von kleinräumigen Studien, welche seit 2008 in sub-Sahara Afrika durchgeführt wurden, soll der Wissensstand über Rückwanderung erweitert werden und die Ergebnisse sollen in einem neuen Konzept miteinander verknüpft werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Entscheidung über eine Rückkehr in das Herkunftsland ein komplexes Zusammenspiel aus treibenden, lockenden, hindernden und zurückhaltenden Faktoren ist, welche in einem gewissen zeitlichen und kontextuellen Rahmen gesehen werden müssen sowie zusätzlich von transnationalen Verbindungen beeinflusst werden. Soziale und personale Faktoren beeinflussen die Entscheidung über eine Rückkehr in das Herkunftsland stark, rein ökonomische Gründe scheinen eher nebensächlich zu sein: Vor allem der Wunsch nach Familienvereinigung und Heimweh werden oft als Gründe für eine Rückkehr genannt. Einschränkungen, welche Migration zwischen dem Herkunftsland und dem Aufenthaltsland erschweren, haben einen negativen Einfluss auf die Rückkehr von Migrant*innen. Sollen Migrant*innen in ihrer Entscheidung über eine Rückwanderung durch effektive Strategien unterstützt werden, muss die Thematik in ihrer vollen Komplexität unter Berücksichtigung aller Faktoren betrachtet werden.

Acknowledgements

The successful achievement of this thesis was accompanied by several people whom I want to thank for their support. First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to Marion Borderon, my supervisor, who not only sparked my interest in demography in one of her courses at the beginning of my master's degree but also guided and advised me throughout the research and writing process of this thesis. I would also like to thank my parents who always believe in me and enabled my educational career through their continuous support. I am also grateful to my partner Christopher, who helped me to sort my ideas and thoughts and was always considerate in our shared working space at home. Finally, I want to thank two very close friends, Flora and Melanie, who devoted their precious time to proof-reading this thesis and who gave their honest feedback at the final stage of this thesis.

1. Introduction

People have always moved and some of them returned to prior places of residence or their place of birth. This is an integral part of migrants' trajectories. However, the return of migrants and the drivers and barriers which initiate, support or hinder this movement still is an understudied research area. Especially in comparison to research about drivers for migration in the first place or the impact of remittances, return migration seems to get little attention (Bleck & Lodermeier, 2020; El-Mallakh & Wahba, 2021; González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Ketema, 2014; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017; OECD, 2017, 2020). Especially the lack of "systematic and representative large-scale data collection" is a major obstacle for further research developments (OECD, 2017, p. 247). Moreover, most studies are conducted from countries of destination, primarily in the Northern hemisphere, and therefore, a one-sided view is prevailing in research about return migration (Black et al., 2004; Carling et al., 2015). Although research activity about return migration is increasing, there are still research gaps about the factors which influence return decisions (de Haas et al., 2015). Probably, this lack results from the fact that the group of return migrants is a very heterogeneous one and often difficult to reach but sampling needs to happen on a large scale to allow generalizing conclusions. Carling et al. (2015) highlighted a interesting related aspect which sparked the motivation for this thesis: "There is a major discrepancy between the conceptual simplicity of return migration and its real-life complexities. Although a stumbling block for policy formation, this gap is an inspiring starting point for scientific research." (Carling et al., 2015, p. 3). Despite a continuing lack of representative data and systematic research in the field of return migration, there is another, promising side to the story: numerous small-scale studies have been conducted over the last years which contribute to a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of return migration. The existence of small-scale studies but the lack of systematic analysis has been the main motivation for this thesis. The aim of this thesis is to establish a comprehensive overview about the complex drivers and barriers which initiate, support, hinder or delay return migration of international migrants. This aim shall be achieved by conducting a systematic review of all suitable studies published over the last years, and the results shall be presented in a conceptual framework.

1.1.   Research Questions

To fill the research gap described above, the following research question has been formulated: "Why do migrants return to their country of origin in sub-Saharan Africa?"

To structure the research process, five further sub-questions accompany the main research question:

(1) "Which drivers linked to the country of destination do support return migration?",
(2) "Which drivers linked the country of origin do support return migration to sub-Saharan Africa?"
(3) "What hinders migrants to return to sub-Saharan Africa?"
(4) "How could return migration be situated in the context of (im)mobility?".
(5) "What are the similarities and differences between the drivers of return migration and migration?"

To answer these research questions, the current state of knowledge about the subject matter is collected and a systematic review is conducted. The theoretical part gives an overview about the current state-of-the-art research and constitutes the introduction into the subject matter. On the basis of these theoretical insights, a systematic review is carried out which shall provide a more detailed picture. The systematic review summarizes the results of several small-scale studies to generate a comprehensive picture about drivers and barriers of return migration to sub-Saharan Africa. The final aim of this thesis is to create a conceptual framework which draws together the insights of the systematic review and sets all potential drivers and barriers of return migration to sub-Saharan Africa in relation.

2. State of knowledge

This theoretical investigation in the state-of-the-art literature constitutes the first part of this thesis and shall provide the theoretical background knowledge for the systematic review in the latter part of this work. To provide an overview about current research, theories and concepts about mobility, immobility, migration and return migration are discussed and compared. The structure proceeds from general to more detailed information: First, general terminology is discussed to give an overview about the larger context of this thesis before the more specific topic of return migration is scrutinized. In general, literature from the last 20 years is covered but also older literature was included if considered vital. To gain a comprehensive picture, reports, articles and studies have been gathered for this theoretical part of the thesis. To process and sort the literature, the software Zotero has been used.

2.1. Mobility

Often, migration is used together or even interchangeably with the term mobility. To understand the differences, the more general expression mobility needs to be defined. However, a clear explanation and distinction of both expressions often lacks. For example, in the World Migration Report 2020 a chapter is named "Report Overview: Providing Perspective on Migration and Mobility in Increasingly Uncertain Times" but then no clear distinction can be found and the reader may wonder why both terms are used in the heading (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2019c, p. 1). This seemingly interchangeable use of the two terms might seem confusing, but in essence, migration can be simply defined as one kind of mobility. Mobility is a broader term covering numerous aspects of physical movement, which is the basis for all kinds of mobility (Walke et al., 2017). Mobility also covers the movement of objects, capital and information besides the movement of a person (Walke et al., 2017). On a smaller scale, mobility can also be understood "as the more local process of daily transportation, movement through the public space and the travel of material things within everyday life" (Hannam et al., 2006, p. 1). Hannam et al. elaborate even further; their comprehensive understanding of mobility covers "[…]corporeal movement, transportation and communications infrastructures, capitalist spatial restructuring, migration and immigration, citizenship and transnationalism, and tourism and travel […]"(2006, pp. 9-10).

Expanding to a more abstract level, mobility can also mean social or socioeconomic mobility[1]. These forms of mobility might be related to physical mobility and migration, as investigated by Viera (2020), but can also be a phenomenon on their own, achieved without the influence of migration. Hagan and Wassink (2016, cited in Viera, 2020) point out that migration in the traditional sense of physical migration often leads to socioeconomic upward mobility. Evidence by El-Mallakh and Wahba (2021) support this statement: they found that migration had a positive effect on occupational upward mobility upon return to Egypt. However, these findings may not be generalizable for all types of return migration due to the heterogeneity of this group and may also be dependent on the conditions in the country of origin. Nevertheless, they are convinced that their results can be also applied to other economic migrants from developing countries (El-Mallakh & Wahba, 2021). Social mobility may not only influence the socioeconomic status of the migrant, but also on his/her family and children in their place of origin; if children of migrants dispose of a higher socioeconomic or occupational status than their parents, it is spoken of intergenerational mobility (Viera, 2020). In a study about Mexican return migration Viera (2020) found that return migration had an overall positive effect on educational and occupational success of the returnees and their children. Through better chances on the labor market after return and the use of remittances for schooling of left-behind children, this upward mobility could be achieved (Viera, 2020).

2.2. Immobility

Although mobility seems to be the topic more widely discussed, more people are in fact immobile (Schewel, 2020). As Schewel (2020) points out, there exists a "mobility bias" (p. 328) in migration studies. Although only "one in seven people are on the move" (IOM, 2015, p. 4, cited in Schewel, 2020, p. 329), the question why the other six people are not, does not receive much attention among researchers. On the one hand, immobility can be something negative as in the context of trapped populations or a lack of possibilities (Walke et al., 2017) but for others it is a privilege (Schewel, 2020). Like mobility, immobility can be described through spatial and temporal characteristics (Schewel, 2020). Schewel "define[s] immobility as spatial continuity in an individual's centre of gravity over a period of time" (2020, p. 344). Thus, immobility does not need

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[1] http://en-ii.demopaedia.org/wiki/Social_mobility (retrieved on July 22nd 2021)

to be permanent and can alternate with events of mobility. Taking immobility into consideration, return migration could be said to be the migratory movement, and therefore one kind of mobility, from a temporary state of immobility at the destination and the return to another state of immobility at the place of origin. Immobility, as well as all forms of mobility, is based on a set of voluntary and/or forced decisions. Schewel argues for an independent examination of the factors for immobility but without departing from general questions of migration studies (2020). This necessity becomes obvious through a set of questions asked by Schewel:

> How, for example, do we conceptualize migrants who become "stuck" in transit, immobilized before they reach their aspired destination (Hyndman and Giles 2011; Collyer, Duvell, and De Haas 2012; Van Hear 2014)? Why do some migrants stay at their destination when others return home or move on (Halfacree and Rivera 2012)? What forms of (im)mobility characterize migrants' lives after return (Mata-Codesal 2015)? (Schewel, 2020, p. 330)

This extract exemplifies how intertwined these research questions are and a separate treatment of mobility and immobility does not seem to be the most effective approach. This also accounts for return migration within the mobility-immobility nexus. Therefore, this thesis shall render insights in how far the drivers and barriers for return migration need separate treatment or in how far they correlate with factors for mobility and immobility.

2.2.1. Aspirations-Capabilities Framework

One of the currently most widely used frameworks to explain mobility and immobility is the aspirations-capabilities framework which was the result of Schewel's research. She based her work on the aspiration-ability model which was introduced by Carling in 2002. Originally, three categories for mobility and immobility were defined:

I. mobility (i.e., having both the aspiration and ability to migrate),

II. involuntary immobility (i.e., having the aspiration but not the ability to migrate), and

III. voluntary immobility (i.e., having the ability but not the aspiration to migrate). (Carling, 2002, p. 12)

All three categories of (im)mobility are reflected in the following model (figure 1):
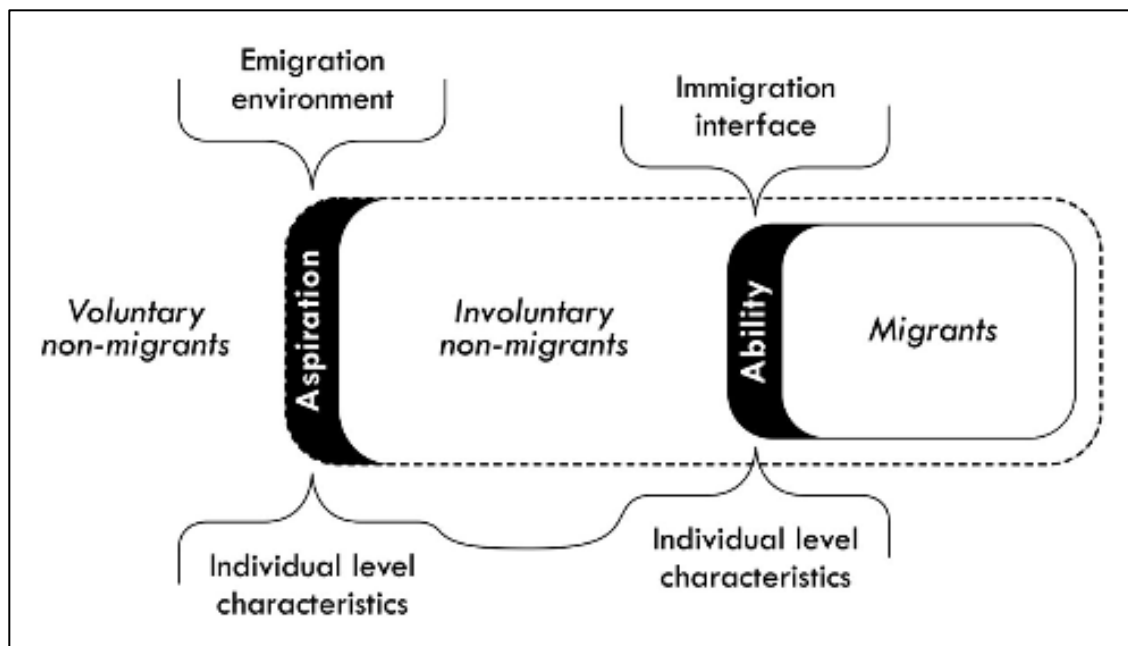
Figure 1: Aspiration-Ability Model (Carling 2002, p. 12)

In this model the three potential expressions of the aspiration-ability nexus are depicted. People without aspiration are voluntary non-migrants. However, Carling (2002) did not take into account the option of having no aspiration and no ability as Schewel criticized (2020). As soon as people have the aspiration to move, they can be further divided into a group lacking the ability and one group with the ability to do so. Characteristics on an individual level as well as the emigration environment influence migration. The environmental environment in this model describes the "social, economic and political context" which affects all people of a certain community or region equally (Carling, 2002, p. 13). Compared with other models, which we will see later, the emigration environment could be equated with the structural level (Carling, 2002). The immigration interface encompasses all obstacles a migrant may encounter (Carling, 2002).

Schewel further researched in the field with a special focus on immobility and composed the aspiration capability framework in which capability and aspiration to migrate are two axes and the four dimensions result from certain states of aspiration and capability (figure 2). This framework is based on the aspiration-ability model by Carling (2002) and it shall lend itself as "an analytical tool for exploring the determinants of different forms of (im)mobility" (Schewel, 2020, p. 328).
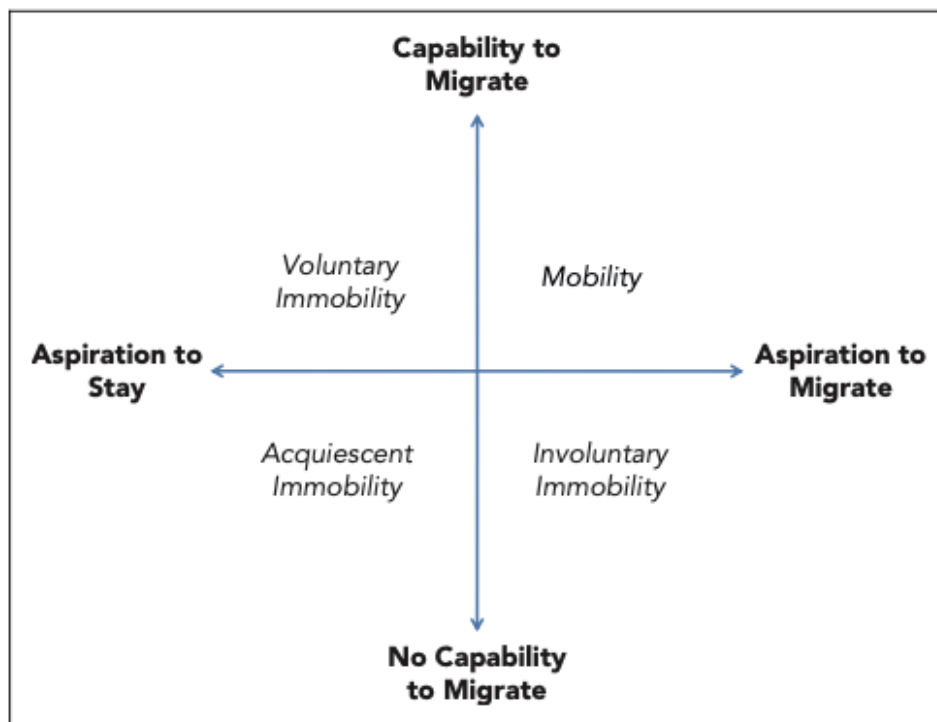
Figure 2: Aspirations-Capabilities Framework (Schewel 2020, p. 335)

Most of the terminology is similar to the one established by Carling in 2002. However, Schewel decided to use the "theoretically richer term 'capability'" (2020, p. 334) instead of the term *ability* because she is convinced that this term is more dynamic and it highlights the link between mobility and development and a potential transition from one state of (im)mobility to another over time (Schewel, 2020). Moreover, Schewel added the option of acquiescent immobility. Acquiescent immobility in Schewel's framework is not to be confused with *voluntary immobility* in Carling's model. Acquiescent immobility describes the state in which somebody does not have the desire but also not the capabilities to migrate, whereas in the case of voluntary immobility somebody prefers to stay although the capability to migrate would be given (Schewel, 2020). Now the question remains if and how return migration can fit into this concept. But to answer this question we will first look at concepts for migration in the next section.

De Haas ventured out to build a "meta-conceptual framework" (2021, p. 1) on the basis of the aspirations-capabilities framework, which claims to cover "almost all forms of migratory mobility" (2021, p. 1). He provides a very comprehensive analysis of prior theories and concepts about migration and aims at combining all insights in one

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framework. He concludes that existing theories about migration may share five potential dimensions:

I. Level of analysis: macro-, meso-, and micro-level.
II. Context: geographical, regional, national.
III. Social group: according to occupation, skill, income, ethnicity.
IV. Time: drivers, dynamics and conditions may change over time.
V. Thematic or disciplinary perspective: cultural, political, economic, technological, demographic, methodological (de Haas, 2021, pp. 11-12).

Moreover, he expands the aspirations-capabilities framework by incorporating motivations for human mobility, differentiating instrumental and intrinsic motivation, as well as different understandings of freedom. De Haas criticizes that migration cannot always be explained by disparities, push and pull factors or simple solutions to complex problems; he argues for including intrinsic motivation to account for the social aspect of human migration and its influence on broader social change. Additionally, prior theories often failed because processes of migration and social change, especially development, sometimes lead to unexpected outcomes. He postulates that migration is always a complex decision not only along instrumental dimensions but also intrinsic ones (de Haas, 2021). Moreover, he makes a major distinction between agency and structure:

> Agency reflects the limited – but real – ability of human beings (or social groups) to make independent choices and to impose these on the world and, hence, to alter the structures that shape and constrain people's opportunities or freedoms. Structure can be defined as patterns of social relations, beliefs and behaviour. (de Haas, 2021, p. 14)

In contrast to other frameworks such as the one by Black et al. (2004), which will be presented in the section about return migration later on, structure as meant by de Haas does not refer to political and economic conditions in the same sense. He rather says that the conditions in a country, among other factors, influence the agency and freedom of the migrant (de Haas, 2021). In his framework the category structure is explained through positive and negative freedom. This concept was originally introduced by Berlin (1969). The idea of negative freedom describes the "absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints", in contrast "[p]ositive liberty refers to the ability to take control

of one's life and to realize one's fundamental purposes." (de Haas, 2021, p. 24). An overview of the elaborated framework is depicted in figure 3:

Fig. 2 Expanded aspirations–capabilities framework for conceptualising migratory agency
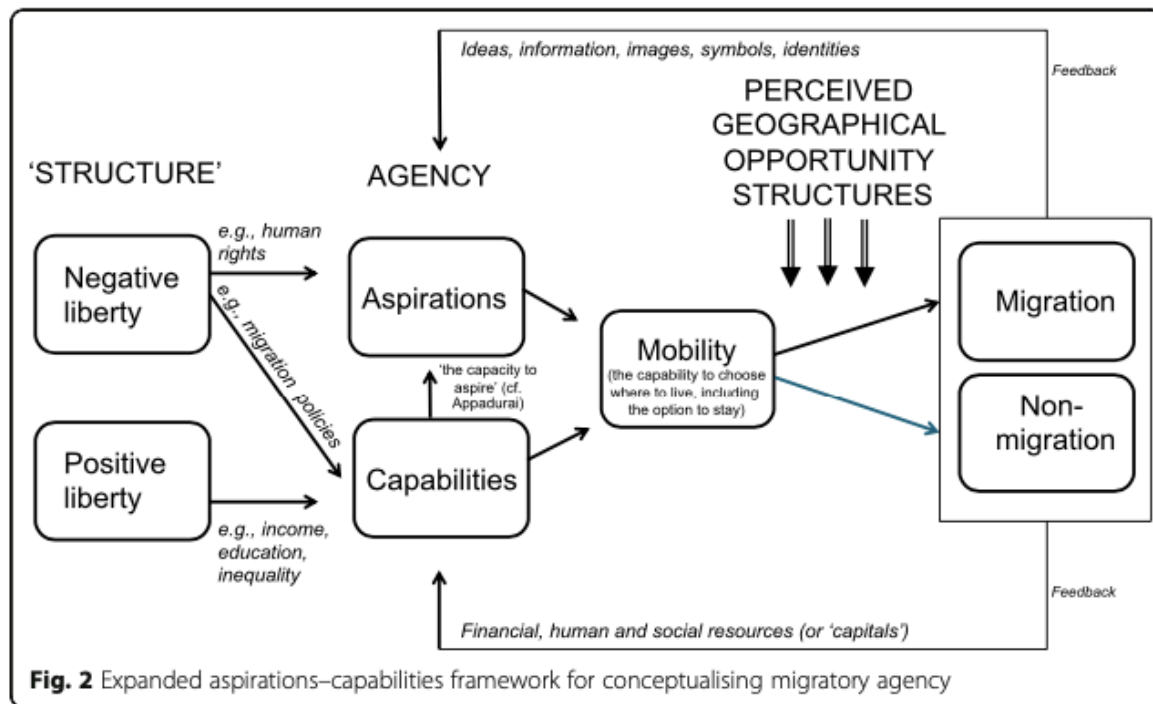
Figure 3: Expanded aspirations-capabilities framework (de Haas 2021, p. 25)

Scrutinizing the framework, it first seems very complex and some positive as well as critical observations can be made. On the one hand, familiar concepts can be identified such as aspirations and capabilities, mobility and migration. On the other hand, the used terms are sometimes misleading and need further explanation due to their unconventional interpretation. For example, the term structure is used twice along different points of the framework. Finally, mobility leads to migration or non-migration which again seems to be restrictive and the reader might automatically exclude immobility from his/her mindset. Although de Haas claims that his framework can be applied to all kinds of mobility and immobility, explicitly mentioning return migration and the lack of ability to return, so to speak involuntary immobility in the destination, the question remains how practically applicable it really is (de Haas, 2021). This will be reviewed in the final chapter of this thesis when the results of this study are embedded in prior theories and concepts.

2.3.   Migration

According to the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, international migrants accounted for approximately 272 million people, which is "3.5 per cent of the global population" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019, p. 1). The IOM defines an international migrant as "[a]ny person who is outside a State of which he or she is a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, his or her State of birth or habitual residence" (IOM, 2019a, p. 112). No distinction is made in regard to temporality and legal status (IOM, 2019a). However, this definition remains blurry in several aspects, due to its rather open formulation. As the OHCHR (n.d.) criticizes, there is no universally accepted definition. This broad definition entails advantages and disadvantages: On the one hand, a broad definition is inclusive and does not run the risk to exclude certain groups of international migrants; on the other hand, this broad understanding renders measurements and comparisons very difficult as every research team needs to define a certain focus group to make research feasible.

Generally, migration can be described as spatial or geographical mobility and "a change in usual place of residence and implies movement across an administrative boundary"[2]. On the basis of this definition, some forms usually addressed as forms of migration need to be reconsidered. It is suggested to use the term seasonal movement instead of seasonal migration because it does not result in a change of residence. Also, nomadic movements are excluded because no official change of residence takes place. Thus, it can be said that the change of residence is the most crucial characteristic of migration. Temporary or regular moves such as commuting, or tourism do not count as geographical mobility[3]. Considering these aspects and restricting the term migration accordingly, it still covers many different forms of mobility, such as seeking asylum, labor migration, migration for educational purposes, displacement and much more.

On a geographical scale, these movements can be internal and international. The place from which the migratory movement originates is referred to as place of origin. The (preliminary) final point of the migrant's journey is called destination or place of

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[2] http://en-ii.demopaedia.org/wiki/Migration (retrieved on August 9th 2021).
[3] ibd.

residence. However, it should not be forgotten that the destination can turn into a place of transit if the migrant moves on to another place. In the case of return migration, the place of origin becomes the place of destination. Instead of the term "country of origin" or "country of destination" the terms "place of birth" or "place of origin" and "destination" are used frequently to avoid unintended implications[4]. However, in this thesis the focus is on international migration, and this justifies the use of the term *country* without causing misunderstanding.

Sometimes, especially in the public discourse, migration is often loaded with negative connotations due to a one-sided coverage in the media which only presents a negative picture of migration (World Bank Group, 2017). But in fact, "mobility is an inherent characteristic of all populations unless specific policies or other factors are in place that limit or control that mobility" (IOM, 2019c, p. 5). De Haas reports a contrasting phenomenon about the young generation which "had become virtually obsessed with leaving" because international migration is viewed as an indicator for "material and social success" (de Haas, 2021, p. 17). Throughout this thesis, migration shall be viewed from a neutral standpoint in which migration is a natural social process (Black et al., 2011; de Haas, 2021). Now we will have a look at a model aiming at explaining the factors influencing migration.

2.3.1. The Push-Pull Plus Model

Over the last decades several theories which try to explain migration were developed. However, return migration does not seem to be taken into account in most of them, although return constitutes a natural part within the migration context. Nevertheless, general models on migration may offer interesting aspects which can be applied to return migration as well and therefore they deserve to be discussed, too. Besides the aspiration-capability framework, which was presented in the prior chapter, a common method to explain migratory movements is the push-pull model. Such models assume that a difference in conditions between country of origin and destination exists which pulls or pushes the migrant towards the destination (Van Hear et al., 2018).

One concept, which also follows this dichotomy, is the Push-Pull Plus model by Van Hear et al. (2018), which aims to explain the factors which animate or hinder people to

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[4] http://en-ii.demopaedia.org/wiki/Spatial_mobility (retrieved on August 9th 2021).

migrate. Later, this model will be useful in understanding, questioning and complementing other models about return migration. Although this model type has also been criticized for being too banal for the illustration of such a complex topic, it is being repeatedly taken up, refined and developed by researchers such as Carling et al. (2015) and Van Hear et al. (2018) due to its "intuitive" nature (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 928). Another noteworthy and often neglected aspect in the push-pull model is that migrants are agents and migration involves action (IOM, 2019c). This important point should not be forgotten in the following analysis and the different push and pull factors are only influencing this active decision-making process of the migrant. Van Hear et al. also put emphasis on this aspect: "We see drivers as structural elements that enable and constrain the exercise of agency by social actors." (2018, p. 928). However, in this model drivers only describe external, structural influences on the migration process; emotional, social and private determinants are excluded from this model which is characteristic for the classical push-pull model which relies on merely objective reasons for migration. This separation of structural drivers and drivers on a micro- and meso-level is further elaborated and justified in the following paragraph:

> For analytical purposes in this article, the term drivers is reserved to describe the array of factors that may make up the external structural elements shaping the decision space for those considering migration. Drivers thus shape the broader context within which aspirations and desires to migrate are formed and in which people make their migration decisions – whether to move or not. To be sure, those decisions and actions can ultimately help shape structures – or put another way, agency and structure play into one another – but our purpose in this article is to separate for analytical purposes the structural character of drivers from migrant agency, aspirations and desires. (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 930)

It has to be mentioned here that Van Hear et al. differentiate between drivers and factors: Factors are conditions and drivers are described as the activated factors (2018). This differentiation between macro- and micro-/meso-level might be the most prominent difference to Schewel's aspiration-capability framework. It seems questionable if the micro- and meso-level should be excluded especially if they have a significant influence on the decision-making process.

Other theories which also incorporate other levels are valued but structural factors are still seen as the primary force in decision-making. Interestingly, poverty is questioned to be a driver for migration, because the poorest lack the necessary financial means to move (Van Hear et al., 2018). In accordance with other theories such as transnationalism, they share the view that migration is not a one-way trajectory; drivers

continue to influence the migratory decisions when a trajectory is continued, paused or adapted (Van Hear et al., 2018).

The push-pull plus model covers four different kinds of drivers: "predisposing, proximate, precipitating and mediating drivers." (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 930). In table 1 an overview about the four different kinds of drivers and examples for each can be found:

Driver	Description	Examples
Predisposing drivers	Creation of a context in which migration is more likely.	Structural **disparities** shaped by global macro-political economy. Unequal outcomes of globalization, environmental change, urbanization and demographic transformation. 1) Economic disparities: earnings, livelihoods, living standards 2) Political disparities: conflicts, persecution, security. 3) Environmental disparities: resources, soil fertility, water availability, forest cover. 4) Geographical factors: proximity to boarders and destination,
Proximate drivers	Derive from structural features and have a more direct bearing on migration.	**Country of origin**: economic or business cycle downturns, worsening of security and human rights, large-scale projects which involve displacement and environmental degradation. **Destination**: economic upturn, societal improvement, employment opportunities, business development, pursuit of trade, educational opportunities.
Precipitating drivers	Actually trigger departure, usually	Financial crisis, drastic rise in unemployment, factory closure, collapse in farm prices, imposition of punitive taxation, disintegration

Driver	Description	Examples
	tied to an identifiable event.	of health, education and other welfare services.
Mediating drivers	Enable, facilitate, constrain, accelerate, or consolidate migration.	Presence or absence of transportation, communication, information and resources for the journey. Management of national and international organizations, policies for immigration, emigration and border crossing. Policies in other spheres such as trade and education. Migrant networks in source, transit and destination country, smuggling industry. "Culture of migration": people and communities become habituated to mobility (Van Hear et al., 2018).

Table 1: Push-Pull Plus Model (adapted from Van Hear et al. 2018, pp. 930-933)

Within the same publication Van Hear et al. add that these structural drivers alone do not control migration; "Rather, the particular manifestations of migration are shaped by decisions and actions of the people and communities affected", they add (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 932). Consequently, they recognize the importance of "individual and collective capabilities" (Sen 1999 in Van Hear et al. 2018). Moreover, individual factors such as "gender, generation, class and ethnicity" have an impact on aspirations, opportunities and decisions (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 933). Finally, also "other actors and agents, such as national and local government officials, businesses, international agencies, civil society organisations and various kinds of brokers", may have an effect on the final migration outcome (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 933).

The structural drivers presented above are further shaped by dimensions which allow us to get more detailed information about the drivers. In total, Van Hear et al. (2018, pp. 933-934) formulate five dimensions:

I. Locality: Drivers can be more related to the source, transit or destination country. Locality also covers geographical proximity and transnational or translocal connections.

II. Scale: Drivers may vary along spatial and social scales. Spatially, this can reach from local to global effects; social scales describes variation on the level of the individual person, a household, a family or even a community or wider society.

III. Duration: Some drivers may have an immediate influence, such as an environmental disaster, whereas others might occur over a longer period of time. This dimension does not describe the timeframe of migration, but on the duration of the driver. If migration is temporary, short-term, long-term or circular is not the interest of this dimension.

IV. Selectivity: Some drivers may only affect certain social groups. This can range from gender, generation and class to language, ethnicity, religion and other sociodemographic factors.

V. Tractability: This dimension describes how deeply a driver is embedded in society or culture. Some drivers may be more rooted in social or cultural regimes whereas others might be subject to every individual. (Van Hear et al., 2018, pp. 933-934)

The combination of drivers and dimensions according to an individual migration scenario result in a specific driver complex. One migration trajectory may be shaped by various complexes which all have an effect at a certain time or place. Van Hear et al. aim at proposing "a conceptual framework as a starting point for analyzing complex migration flows" and it claims to be applicable in various complex migration scenarios (Van Hear et al., 2018, p. 928). We will later see if it holds these claims and if it can be applied to instances of return migration as well.

After having discussed migration, mobility and immobility, it seems rather difficult where to position return migration. It seems feasible to integrate return migration within a framework which aims at explaining merely the different forms of migratory mobility. However, if we want to explain the drivers which trigger, support or hinder return migration, a combined model which explains drivers for all kinds of migration poses a bigger challenge. Consequently, the question remains, if and how return migration should be integrated in these existing frameworks or if return migration should be treated as an individual phenomenon with its own theories and concepts. To answer this question, we will look at return migration in specific in the next section of this thesis.

2.4. Return Migration

With no regard to the form of migration and the reason for it, every migrant has the possibility of return and, thus, becomes a potential return migrant (Carling et al., 2015). Although return migration is a rather under-studied field, numerous aspects are of great importance and will be discussed in the following chapters. After return migration is

defined, its aspects elaborated and the scope of this phenomenon presented, we will further venture out to examine return migration from a transnationalist perspective and discuss the failure-success notion before we will finally move on to the determinants which affect the return decision.

According to Demopaedia, return migration encompasses every kind of movement back to the place of origin, either a prior place of residence or the place of birth[5]. Return migration accounts for an essential part of migration flows (OECD, 2008) however, precise definitions and numbers about return migration in literature are scarce. This might be due to the rather little interest in the topic over the last decades. However, interest in return migration has been significantly increasing since 2008[6]; This trend can be expected to continue during the next years because many researchers addressed a serious lack of data (Ketema, 2014; OECD, 2017, 2020). Motivations to study this field can be numerous. Besides the general interest of researchers to understand a human phenomenon, other motivations of policy-makers in host countries and countries of origin need to be considered (Van Hear et al., 2018). Institutions in host countries might be interested in this topic to support voluntary return intentions of migrants more effectively (Black et al., 2004). Countries of origin might be interested in the motivations for emigration but also for return to lure back qualified personnel such as health workers (A. Adzei & K. Sakyi, 2014; Asampong et al., 2013; Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018; Nwadiuko et al., 2021; Poppe et al., 2016). Despite the comparatively small attention of return migration, several interesting findings have been made over the last decade which are worth being presented here.

To grasp the scope of return migration, words by Carling et al. offer a concise answer: "All migrants can relate to the possibility of return" (2015, p. 1). Thus, everybody who migrates automatically becomes a potential return migrant. Nevertheless, due to reasons of practicality, return migration needs to be defined to allow statistical documentation and analysis (World Bank Group, 2017). The OECD (2008) uses the definition of the United Nations Statistics Division which defines return migrants as "persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short- term or long-term) in another country and who are intending

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[5] http://en-ii.demopaedia.org/wiki/Return_migration (retrieved on 23rd 2021)
[6] https://migrationresearch.com/taxonomies/topics-migration-processes-migration-forms-return-migration?query=&page=1&sorting=relevance_desc&taxonomies%5B%5D=42 (retrieved on July 23rd 2021)

to stay in their own country for at least a year." (UN, 1998, p. 94). In this definition, four dimensions are covered:

I.   country of origin,
II.   place of residence abroad,
III.   length of stay in the host country, and
IV.   length of stay in the home country after return (OECD, 2008, p. 164)

However, this definition strongly bases on the notion of citizenship. Is a person returning to a prior place of residence a return migrant even if he/she does not hold the citizenship for this country? In the same publication by the OECD, return migration is also classified as "a particular case of re-emigration, one in which the new country of destination is the same as the country of origin"(OECD, 2008, p. 172). This understanding sets return into relation to other forms of migration such as immigration and emigration and renders it easier to measure. Gmelch, who was one of the first researchers investigating return migration, offers this definition: "Return migration is defined as the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle." (1980, p. 136). In both definitions, the possibility of several places for return is not addressed and return is depicted as a singular forth and back movement. Gmelch explicitly excludes visits with no intention to stay at the place of origin permanently (1980). He points out that a clear and practicable distinction between seasonal migrants and migrants visiting relatives at their place of origin is often difficult to make (Gmelch, 1980). Return migration is also not to be confused with secondary migration, with describes migration to a third country (OECD, 2008). Further aspects of migration processes need to be considered to achieve a comprehensive understanding of return migration.

2.4.1. Temporal and Spatial Aspects of Return

These considerations can all be classified within a framework of temporal and spatial aspects. From a spatial perspective, return migration can be seen as the final stage of the migration process or as one temporary state along it (Åkesson & Baaz, 2015). As Åkesson & Baaz found, most returnees may rather be transnational returnees or circular migrants (2015). Veronese et al. mention that return can also happen after a person has tried to migrate but along this journey has been held in a transit country and finally decides to return (2021). Through the lens of temporality, seasonal or

permanent migration can be roughly differentiated. However, this is a difficult aspect to measure because return migration often does not occur in a linear forth and back manner but rather in a complex, multi-directional way. Some migrants migrate on a seasonal basis, others re-migrate from one destination to another or move back to their country of origin but not place of origin, such as moving to an urban area instead of a rural setting (Carling et al., 2015). Thus, return migration becomes even more difficult to grasp due to this high diversity of possible migration and return migration trajectories. Viewing such instances such as the one presented by Veronese et al. in which migrants are involuntary staying in a transit center for a rather long timespan decide to return (2021), it becomes obvious that temporal and spatial aspects are closely intertwined and multifaceted. Gmelch established a typology of return migration in regard to temporal intentions of a migrant. He classified three types of return migrants:

I. Returnees who intended temporary migration. The time of their return is determined by the objectives they set out to achieve at the time of emigration.
II. Returnees who intended permanent migration but were forced to return. Their preference was to remain abroad but because of external factors they were required to return.
III. Returnees who intended permanent migration but chose to return. Failure to adjust and/or homesickness led to their decision to return. (Gmelch, 1980, p. 138)

2.4.2. Voluntary and Forced Return

Return migration can be further divided into forced, voluntary and assisted voluntary return (OECD, 2020). The World Bank Group also identified three possible scenarios of return migration which can be equated with the categories by the OECD: deportation, non-assisted and assisted return (World Bank Group, 2017). However these simple terminologies increasingly become outdated and return migration rather happens "along an intricate spectrum of agency, opportunity and coercion." (Carling et al., 2015, p. 2). Voluntary return is "based on the voluntary decision of the returnee" and can either happen within assisted programs of organizations and governments or independently (IOM, 2019a, p. 229). Forced return describes "[t]he act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, transit or to a third country." (IOM, 2019a, p. 77). Although it might be obvious that the motives of voluntary and

forced return vary distinctively, the line between voluntary and forced is not always easily drawn. Among scientists, the common view prevails that both voluntary and forced migration cannot be classified with a simplistic dichotomy but rather along a "continuum of agency" (IOM, 2019a, p. 77). Taking an example from Carling et al. (2015) this issue becomes visible: often relatives of a migrant must return due to personal or financial reasons although they would prefer to stay or have a legal right to remain in this country. Other migrants participate in voluntary assisted return programs although they would prefer to stay in the country, they migrated to, but their legal status does not allow this. These examples illustrate that, sometimes, migration does not always happen voluntarily but is also not forced by a state institution due to a lack of official legal status. Tedeschi et al. (2020) also point out that some migrants' return decision may not be voluntarily, and some might be even forced to stay because the capability to return may not be given. In line with Schewel's theory, migrants with the aspiration but no capability to return will find themselves in situations of involuntary immobility (2020).

Despite the awareness for this complexity, it shall be mentioned that the World Bank assumes that most returns happen voluntarily; they estimate that 20 to 50 percent of all immigrants in OECD countries emigrate again. However, it is not mentioned if they return or re-emigrate to another country (Dumont and Spielvogel, 2008 in World Bank Group, 2017). Lastly, it should also be mentioned that also double return to the country of destination can be another instance of return migration. In this thesis the focus will be on "simple" return migration from country of destination to country of origin although the option of double return should not be completely excluded.

2.4.1. Measuring Return Migration

All these considerations of the previous chapter bring the difficulty to precisely formulate what return migration is into prominence. This might also contribute to the fact that return migration has received less attention than other migration processes and measurement of return migration still poses a great challenge (IOM, 2019c). Despite increasing efforts to overcome the challenges of measuring return and close the gap in the knowledge about return migration, there is still a lot to be investigated about this subject matter.

As Gmelch already noted, "return is the most difficult aspect of the migration cycle to quantify" (1980, p. 135). Although the notion that migration happens in a closed cycle

and is finished at some point due to return to the place of origin, the fact that return migration remains the most difficult form to measure is still valid. Over the last years, significant progress has been made and the data about return migration is constantly growing (IOM, 2019c). In contrast to the demographic variables birth and death, migration may not be a singular and unrepeatable event and measurement is dependent on exact definitions (IOM, 2019c). Against this knowledge, it is also acknowledged that varying definitions exist due to good reasons. First, the legal status of a (return) migrant is nothing static and can change quickly and several times due to different trajectories of migration. Secondly, there exists no general agreement among all states of the world about how to define the status of (return) migrants and every country follows its own guidelines. Due to such differences, composing an internationally comparable collection of data or comparing the statistics of countries pose great challenges. And finally, figures abut migration are collected for several reasons and in various contexts. Depending on the specific context, also the measures variables may vary according to the definition most suitable for the context (IOM, 2019c). To acknowledge this complexity and avoid limited representations of the subject matter, a certain degree of variability and the accompanying reduction of comparability is accepted and tolerated. However, this also requires a high degree of professionality and knowledge from persons generating, analyzing and interpreting the figures, the IOM also warns (IOM, 2019c).

Besides the problem of defining migration and related phenomena, the OECD names another major challenge especially for the measurement of return migration: the lack of data availability (OECD, 2008). Only recently, the covid pandemic "has exposed significant data gaps that have prevented real-time monitoring of remittance flows and migratory movements, including of stranded migrants and returning migrants" (World Bank Group, 2020, p. ix). This lack of data availability may also have an impact on the comparatively low number of downloads of publications about return migration and reflect the still prevailing research gap: figures demonstrating the IOM research-related downloads by theme show a relatively low percentage of downloads in the field of return migration in comparison to other fields (IOM, 2019c).
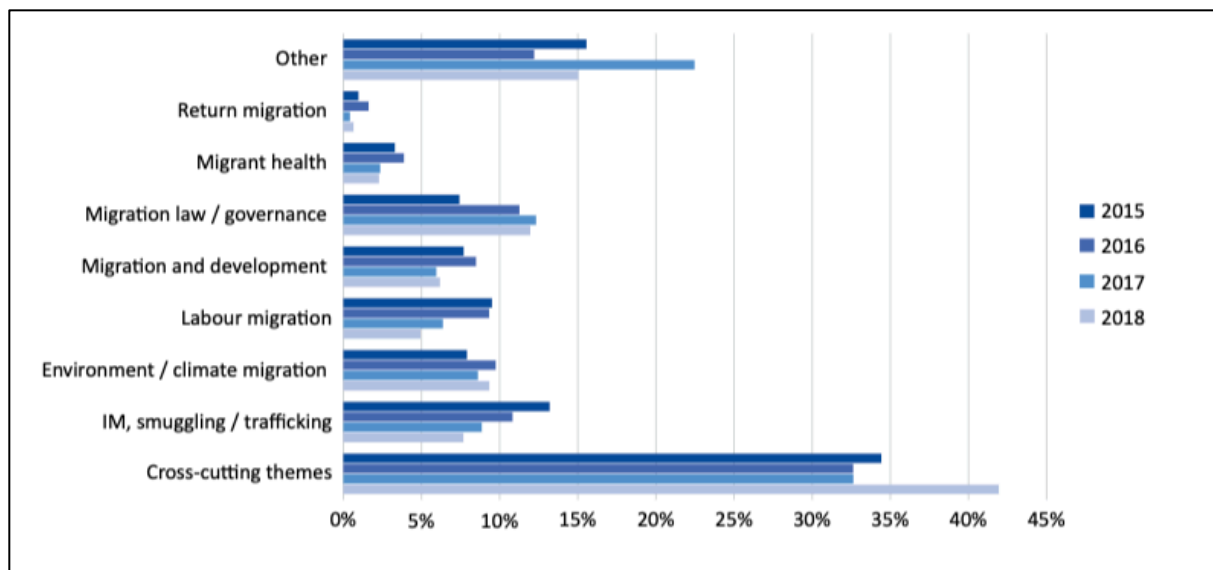
Figure 4: Proportion of IOM research-related downloads by theme (IOM, 2019c, p. 153)

Nevertheless, I try to provide some figures to grasp the scope pf return migration. A report by the World Bank states that after ten years of stay in the destination, nearly 50 per cent of the migrants leave the country again (World Bank Group, 2018). From these figures it cannot be said how many of those re-migrate or return. Rather consistent numbers about assisted voluntary return conducted by the IOM exist. However, assisted voluntary return only accounts for a small fraction of all returns. Between "2005 and 2014, the IOM assisted 34,000 migrants per year" and the total number of returns has increased which can be set into relation with the a rising number of migrants (IOM, 2019c, p. 37). Interesting to note in the context of this thesis it that return may also happen from transit countries and 22 per cent of all assisted voluntary returns by the IOM were conducted within Africa. Nearly a third of all returns is aimed at countries in West and Central Africa (IOM, 2019c). In 2018 more than 63,000 migrants participated in the assisted voluntary return program by the IOM; Three-fourths of those were male and nearly three-thirds had an age between 18 and 49 years (IOM, 2019b). 53.7 per cent of all assisted voluntary returns by the IOM happened from Europe and another 25.3 per cent from West and Central Africa. Countries of origin were West and Central Africa by 30.8 per cent and South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia by 27.6 per cent. Only one per cent of all assisted voluntary returned were aimed at Southern Africa, and 8.5 per cent to East and Horn of Africa (IOM, 2019b).

2.4.2. Return and Transnationalism

Another theory further contributing to understand the complexity of return migration is the concept of transnationalism. Return migration and transnationalism are two phenomena which are often intertwined with each other, while a migrant is living in another country but also after return (Carling & Erdal, 2014). The notion of transnationalism highlights the important aspect that return migration can be a repeated event which is an integral part of "sustained transnational mobility" (Carling & Erdal, 2014, p. 2). One important aspect of transnationalism for return migration is that it may shape the relation of the migrant to his/her place of origin; this can span citizenship, aspirations, identity and decisions (Tedeschi et al., 2020). This connection between the migrant in the destination and people at his/her place of origin might fluctuate and change over time(Tedeschi et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, modern technologies have simplified the channels for transnational communication (Tedeschi et al., 2020).

One interesting insight found by Carling & Pettersen (2014) is that intense transnational ties increase return aspirations. Contrastingly, visits to the place of origin often reinforced the convictions for migration in the first place and reinforce the connection to the destination (Chang, et al., 2017). Despite contrasting views in this respect, it can be said with certainty that transnational relations such as the maintenance of personal and social relations or financial investments at the place of origin are supportive for reintegration after return (Tedeschi et al., 2020). Transnationalism may also be a phenomenon which exceeds the actual return by maintaining connection to the host country (Tedeschi et al., 2020). As can be seen in figure 5 transnationalism and in consequence also return does not only affect the migrant but also his close kinship (Carling & Erdal, 2014). Additionally, this illustration also shows that migration is also related to questions of gender when a household needs to make decisions who shall migrate or return.
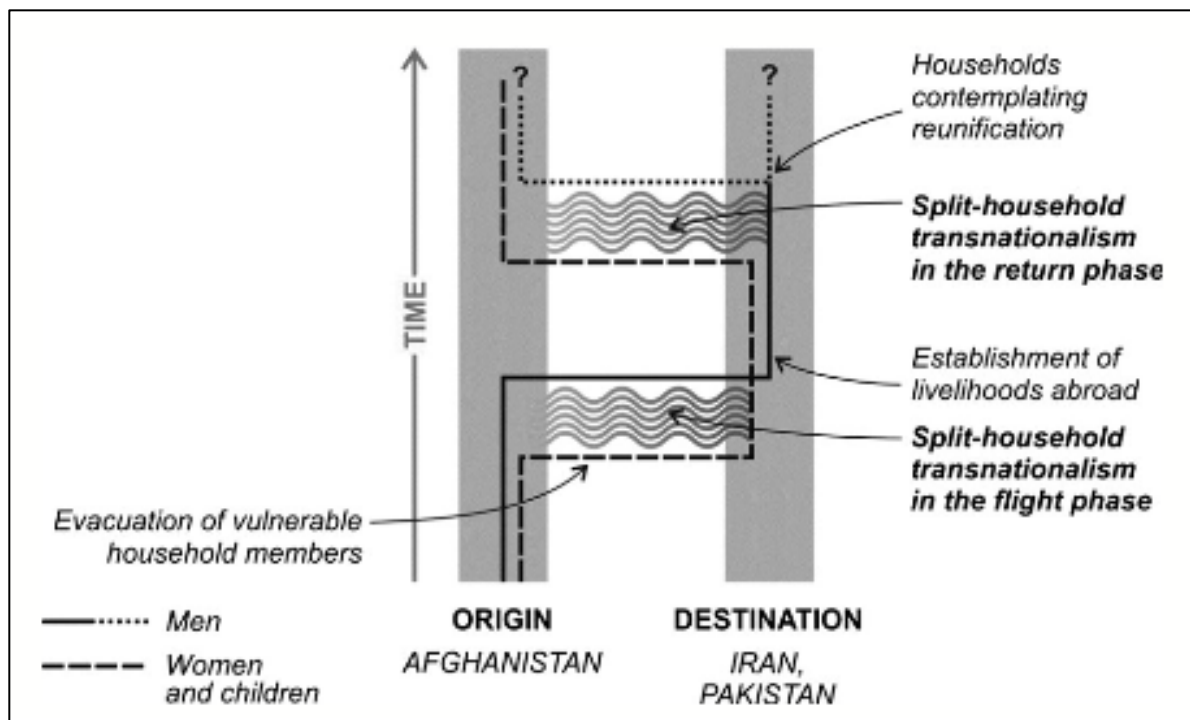
Figure 5: Return migration and transnationalism (Carling and Erdal 2014, p. 6)

2.4.3. Return as Failure or Success

Often, studies focus on the question if return is the expression of failure or success. Although is not the primary goal of this work to make judgements in how far migration processes can be considered a success or a failure – and both cases will occur in reality – it might be an interesting viewpoint to consider, because it may add some interesting aspects to the reasons why people decide to return. Already Gmelch (1980) pursued this question, and in 2015, still, de Haas et al., again ventured out to answer the same question. This debate is based on two theories, the new economics of labor migration and the neoliberal perspective, which represent opposing explanations for migration and in consequence also for return migration. Neoclassical migration theory assumes that return results from a failure of integration and therefore concludes an unsuccessful migration process. From this perspective, transnational ties and the wish to return would decrease with increasing success and integration. In the new economics of labor migration return is viewed as the final goal of a successful migration and integration biography. Here, migration is not merely the informed decision of one migrant, but a "livelihood strategy employed by households and families" (de Haas et al., 2015, p. 417). Gmelch (1980) voices several considerations why neither of both theories may be right: the lack of success may hinder return because migrants do not want to show their failure, or they do not have the financial means to return. On the

other hand, successful migrants may not want to return because it would mean a loss of income and security or even that the accumulated money must be shared with relatives (Gmelch, 1980). De Haas et al. (2015) ran a large-scale study among Moroccan migrants in Europe and they also concluded that neither theory can be supported completely by the data. Their findings underpin the neoclassical assumption that high socio-cultural integration decreases the desire to return. On the other hand they also support the claim by the new economics of labor theory that successful economic integration may be a precondition to return for many migrants (de Haas et al., 2015). Schewel addresses this topic when speaking about acquiescent immobility and she doubts neoclassical assumptions by saying that high prospects of improved living or economic conditions does not automatically imply a high aspiration to migrate (2020). Finally, also Nzima and Moyo (2017) voice their criticism for this assumed easy dichotomy of failure or success and even develop their own framework to explain the so-called *diaspora trap*. They find many points for criticism in the neoclassical migration theory: factors in the country of origin are completely neglected, economic factors receive too much weight while social factors are underrepresented, and return is seen as an exception rather than a normal process to name only some examples. Also new economics of labor migration is seen critically due to the one-sided view that only success triggers return and the main focus on economic explanations (Nzima, & Moyo, 2017).

In the final section about return migration, the determinants which influence the return decisions will be examined from a theoretical perspective before the empirical part of this thesis commences.

2.4.4. Determinants of Return Migration

Factors which influence return decisions of migrants are numerous and complex. The decision about a potential return is not only in the mere competence of the migrant but also his/her social environment is involved in this decision (Black et al., 2004). Besides the social and familial context, economic and political factors influence the return decision (Omata, 2013; World Bank Group, 2017). These factors often oppose each other and the decision to return is the product of difficult considerations on multiple levels. Numerous models and frameworks exist which try to grasp the complex factors influencing migration in general. However, models focusing on return migration in specific are rather scarce and some were developed based on responses from one

sub-group of return migrants only and, thus, it needs to be tested if these models are applicable for all kinds of return migration.

In this section the models available in current literature will be presented and analyzed. This shall give a first overview about the factors influencing return decision before we move on the systematic review. It has been decided to not only use the term *driver* because as Schewel (2020) points out, this term enforces the mobility bias. I will use the terms *determinant*, *factor* synonymously when I speak in general terms or accompanied by specifying adjectives such as *retaining* and *repelling* to be more precise. The term *driver* indicates that somebody is driven or pushed from somewhere and, therefore, is only used if suitable. Finally, we will also encounter the term *barrier*, but only if the context allows it. This use of terminology should not be underrated because certain words imply certain meanings. In line with the aspirations-capabilities framework, I aim at not constructing a biased view and, thus, I take into account that many migrants prefer to stay where they are (Schewel, 2020). Although the immobility of migrants or potential returnees is not the primary focus of this thesis, this aspect should not be neglected.

Black et al. (2004) composed a model which differentiates according to three levels or areas: structural, individual and policy interventions. The individual can be equated with the micro-level, the structural and policy interventions with the macro-level. The meso-level is represented by the point social relations, but this may not cover all aspects on the meso-level. Various factors on each level may influence the return decision. Five areas are identified: Conditions in the country of origin, conditions in the host country, individual attributes, social relations and incentives and disincentives. By mentioning destination and country of origin, they account for spatial differences. Why incentives and disincentives are not depicted by two separate points is not clear and does diminish the potential conflicting effects. Unfortunately, this model originated from a report which only took the decisions of refugees and asylum seekers from Bosnia and Kosovo in the UK into account and, therefore, only offers a limited picture. Despite its limited focus and its rather old publication date, this paper gives a good overview about the different determinants involved in the decision-making process of return migration.

Probably, this model could be extended and generalized to integrate other forms of return migration, too. Moreover, it highlights five key-areas which impact return

decisions in a very basic and clear manner and therefore I will take it as a starting point for the systematic review. The model is depicted in figure 6:
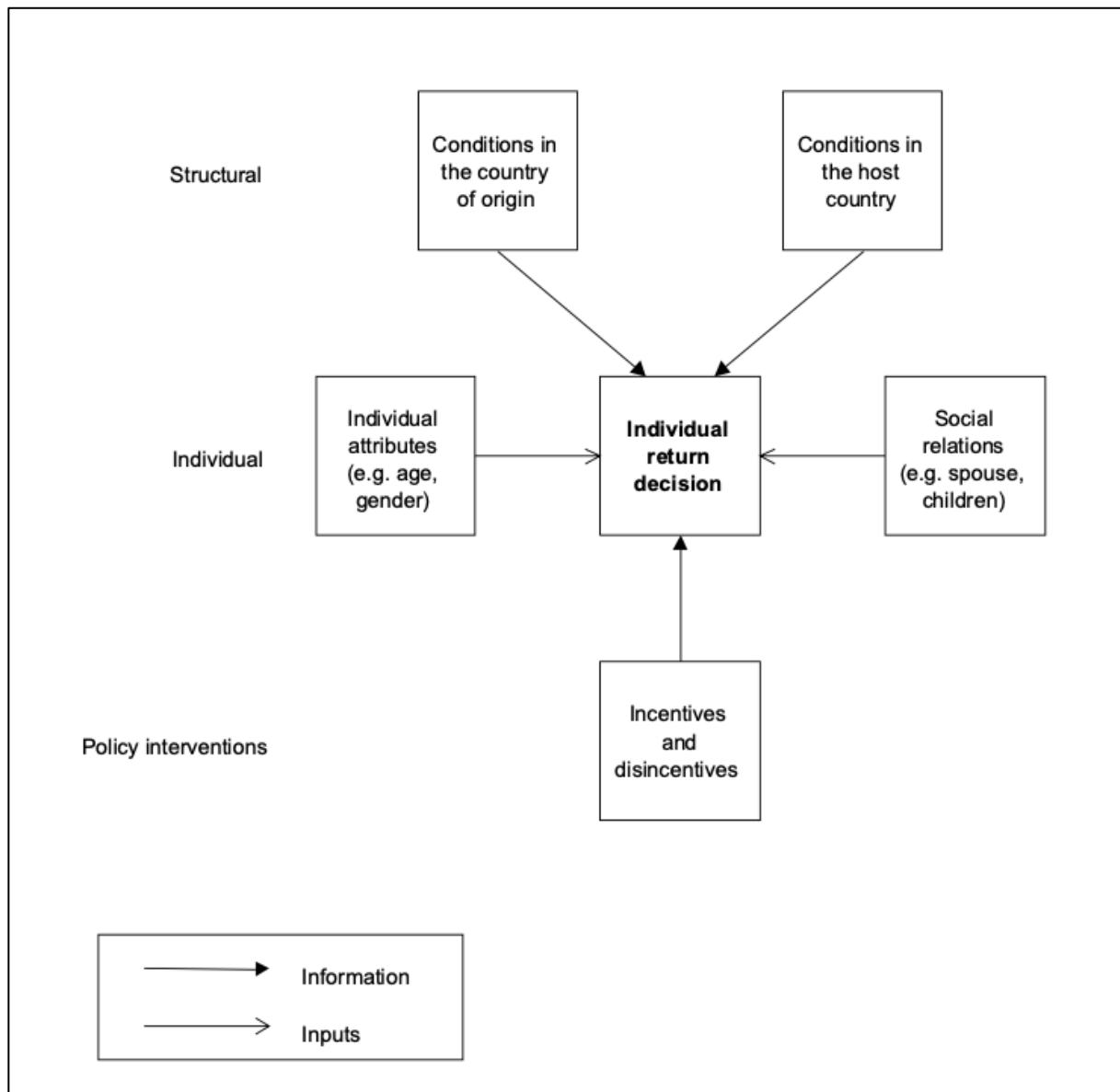
Figure 6: Drivers for voluntary return migration (Black et al. 2004, p 13)

This rough model was generated after a qualitative study in which several participants had been interviewed and shared their views on reasons for or against a return. In the report, a more detailed list of factors influencing the decision to return is provided which helps to make the rather broad categories more concretely conceivable. The most important factors cover structural and personal/emotional reasons such as peace, safety, security, and family support and feeling at home. The view that return decision is not a merely rational choice is shared by two influential research teams, namely by Black et al. (2004) and Carling et al. (2015). Omata, however, has done research on a similar focus group and is convinced that within this complex decision-making

process "nostalgic longing for a homeland has little space" (Omata, 2013, p. 1281). Which should not be underestimated is that integration in the destination is subject to emotional connection or the lack of it. Carling et al. mention, that feeling like a stranger at the destination maintains the option of return in the migrants' minds (Carling et al., 2015). These contradicting viewpoints might be due to the fact that these emotional factors are on the one hand extremely subject to the situation of every single returnee, on the other, difficult to define and measure and, thus, also subject to interpretation.

A list of all factors investigated by Black et al. (2004) can be seen in figure 7. The factors stated as "fairly important" are more diverse than the most important factors reaching from employment, education and financial help to issues of ethnical independence, health care and housing.

Group	Most important	Fairly important	Least important	Not important at all
Somalis	• **Peace** • Political changes • **Safety** • Family support • Feeling at home	• Employment • Education • Immigration status • Status • Reconstruction • Financial help	• Loneliness in Britain • Housing	• Health care • Explore and prepare visit
Tamils	• **Peace** • **Security**	• Tamil independence • Loneliness in UK • Employment	• Immigration status • Voluntary return programme • Education	• Health care • Explore and prepare visit • Housing • Family considerations
Kurds	• **Safety** • Democracy • Freedom • Human rights • Political changes	• Family considerations • Education • Employment • Health care • Housing • Reconstruction	• Immigration status	• Explore and prepare visit • Financial help
Afghans		Factors not prioritised		
Iranians		Factors not prioritised		
Kosovans		Factors not prioritised		

Source: Field data (2002-03)

Figure 7: Ranking of factors influencing the return decision in focus groups (Black et al. 2004, p 14)

In this model it is well illustrated that the decision to return is not only up to the migrant him/herself but other agents are involved. Van Hear et al. refer to this as "individual and group agency" (2018, p. 929). This important aspect of agency is also central in the aspiration-capability framework or the aspiration/ability model which have been presented in the prior section on mobility (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Schewel, 2020).

Now we will have a closer look at a model by Carling et al. (Carling et al., 2015) which was published in the course of a large research project on return migration, the

Possibilities and Realities of return migration (PREMIG). A positive aspect of this model is, that it is not restricted to a certain group. On the other hand, this model is not elaborated in detail and only presented in this report, which only gives a rough overview. Nevertheless, I will incorporate it in my thesis because this model has some interesting new aspect to share. This model, which is named four-way considerations, is also based on the push-pull idea like the push-pull plus model by Van Hear et al., which has already been introduced in the section about migration in general (2018). Carling et al. (2015) extended the simple push-pull idea by adding retention and repulsion to the considerations underlying a return decision. Thus, factors influencing return can be differentiated by positive and negative factors and on a geographical level, namely the conditions in the destination or country of settlement and the country of origin. The model can be seen in figure 8:

Four-way considerations

When people consider migration, the often cited *push* and *pull* factors are only part of the story. Equally important are what circumstances *retain* migrants, keeping them put in the origin, or *repel* them from the destination. These four sets of factors shape considerations about return migration, too. Selected examples from PREMIG case studies provide an illustration in the table. The specific factors vary between communities and individuals, and can change over time.[5, 9, 22, 41, 47]

	Country of settlement	Country of origin
Positive aspects	**Retention factors** • Rule of law • Employment conditions • Opportunities for sending remittances	**Pull factors** • Relaxed pace of life • Social relationships • Availability of potential spouses
Negative aspects	**Push factors** • Anti-immigrant politics • Lack of discipline for children • Absence of family networks	**Repulsion factors** • Corruption and nepotism • Social control • Expectations placed on returnees

Figure 8: Four-way considerations (Carling et al. 2015, p. 22)

As can be seen in figure 8, this model explicitly addresses factors shaping return intentions. Thus, it distinguishes itself from models about migration in general and makes factors shaping return migration more explicit. Figure 8 only shows examples,

and a more detailed discussion of other factors can be found in the publication. In line with this model, also Schewel argues for the inclusion of retaining and repelling factors in the debate and regrets that these factors are often neglected. Moreover, she also supports the view that "economic 'irrationality'" plays a crucial role in return migration (Schewel, 2020, p. 331) which would fit the argumentation by Black et al. (2004) and Carling et al. (2015) that social factors may outweigh economic ones.

3. Systematic Review

After having reviewed the literature about return migration in general, we will now move on to the empirical part of this study. Through a systematic review empirical studies published since 2008 is systematically processed and the results are extracted, compared and presented. The goal of this review is to summarize all factors which influence return migration to sub-Saharan Africa and compose an adapted framework which accounts for all drivers of voluntary return migration.

Besides the aspect of feasibility, this temporal framework has been chosen due to the observation of increasing interest since 2008. The International Migration Outlook 2008 by the OECD constitutes one milestone because in this renown publication one full chapter is dedicated to return migration. Before, return migration only seems to play a minor role and after 2008 interest in this sub-field of migration studies seems to rise. This development can also be seen in a graph published by the Migration Research Hub[7], in which the numbers of publications per year are illustrated. A distinct rise since 2008 can be seen:
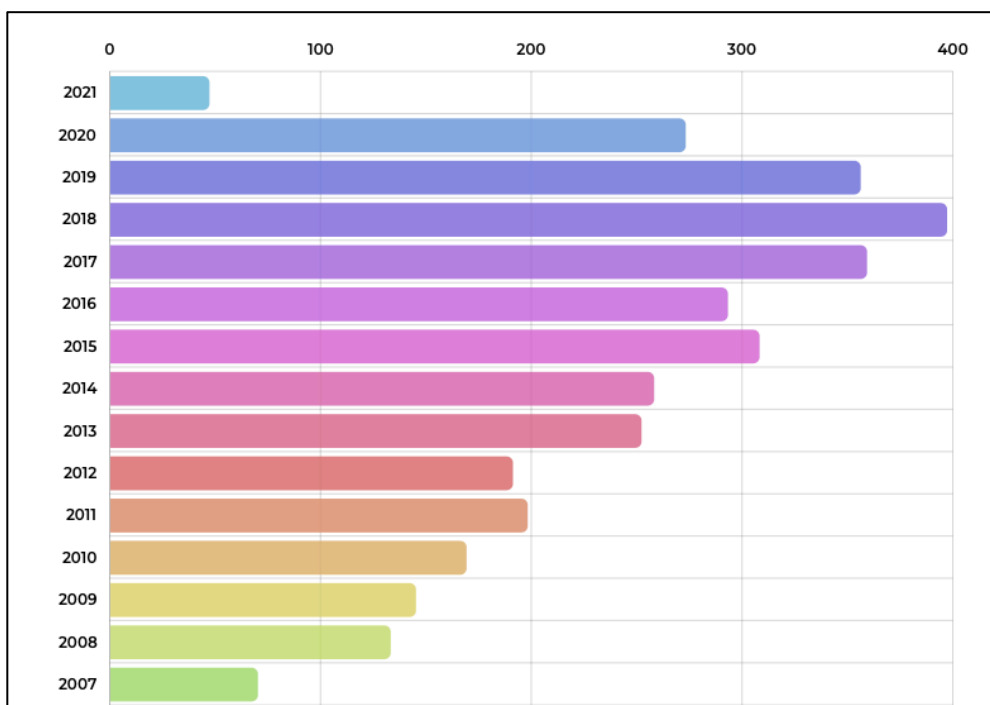
Figure 9: Publications on Return Migration (Migration Research Hub)

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[7] https://migrationresearch.com/taxonomies/topics-migration-processes-migration-forms-return-migration?query=&page=1&sorting=relevance_desc&taxonomies%5B%5D=42 (retrieved on July 23rd 2021)

The year 2018 constitutes a peak in research interest of the last decade. After this year the number of publications declined but the numbers for 2021 can be expected to further grow because this year's publications are still in progress.

As the graph above shows, this research gap has received more attention since, but still many researchers are convinced that more research is necessary: There are still many aspects which have not received sufficient attention (Flahaux, 2015) and little attention has been given to the explored homecoming migrants' reasons for returning (Veronese et al., 2021). Sinatti stresses that "new theorization is needed to grasp the full complexity of return migration as a phenomenon that is marked by different temporalities and aspirations." (2015, p. 275). This systematic review makes use of these increased research interest and aims at summarizing new findings.

Another seminal publication about return migration is *Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration* by Carling et al. published in 2015 in which return migration is explored from several angles. This work is undoubtedly one of the main sources used in this thesis and has contributed significantly to the development of it. However, the framework offered in the publication lacks detail and I am convinced that it can be further developed and refined. Another influential publication for this thesis is *Understanding Voluntary Return* by Black et al. (2004). It offers a comprehensive study which aimed at understanding the decisions for vuluntary return of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK to Bosnia and Kosovo. Unfortunately, the framework presented in this work is restricted to this focus group altough it can be assumed that many factors are also valid for other groups of return migrants on a larger geographical scale. Nevertheless, no generalizations can be made from this work only. Moreover, numerous small-scale studies have been conducted over the last years but they only represent a limited picture, focussing on a specific country, a specific group of people or a certain aspect of return migration. This structural lack of data might be due to the difficulties in regard to recruiting participants. It poses a great challenge to reach return migrants, be able to communicate with them in an intelligible language for participant and reseacher and it seems to be nearly impossible to set up a balanced set of participants (Gonzales-Ferrer et al. 2014).

To contribute to the knowledge about return migration, this review summarizes the findings of studies about return migration to sub-Saharan Africa. This geographical focus was chosen on the basis of the followin considerations: First, migration within

and from this region has risen tremendously over the last two decades; in 2019, more than 21 million migrants were living in another African state and about 19 million were living on another continent (IOM, 2019c). This implies that migratory trajectories from originating from this region may have considerable effects in countries of destination and origin. Return migration back to the region may be of considerable size and therefore is worth investigating. Unfortunately, no precise numbers for return migration to Sub-Saharan Africa exist. Another argument for this decision was that other researchers have already used the same geographical scope for their studies as for example Poppe et al. (2016) or in the MAFE project, which investigates migration between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe[8]. The data from the MAFE project was reused for several other studies which were also included in this review. However, the data of the MAFE was only collected in three different sub-Saharan countries and it seemed reasonable to expand the geographical scope of this systematic review to other countries of this region.

A systematic review of these studies, which combines all results, generates an added value by enabling a varification of the results and allowing a generalization of shared outcomes. These conclusions led to the decison to investigate this topic further and to compose a new or erlaborate an existing comprehensive framework taking into account all aspects of voluntary return migration and reflect the heterogenity of this phenomenon with regard to the current state of research.

3.1. Methodology

As methodological guides for this systematic review, the practical guide *Systematic Reviews in the Social Science* by Petticrew and Roberts (2006) and the book *Systematic reviews* by Torgerson (2003) have been used. The systematic review by Borderon et al. (2019) and the rapid evidence assessment by Cummings et al. (2015) have been used as positive examples in regard to the methodological process. The seven stages of a systematic review as suggested by Torgerson were followed:

I. Protocol/ Plan of research
II. Inclusion and exclusion criteria
III. Literature search and screening of results

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[8] https://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/

IV.   Scoping/Mapping

V.   Data extraction and critical appraisal

VI.   Synthesis

VII.   Report: Interpretation and publication (Torgerson, 2003, pp. 24-25)

The protocol or plan of research (1) shall include the "theoretical, empirical and conceptual background to the review; the research question(s); the objectives; the scope of the review and the methods for searching, screening, data extraction, quality appraisal and synthesis" (Torgerson, 2003, p. 24). The criteria (2) are already formulated in the protocol, too; in this thesis, the protocol can be equated with the literature review and the methodological part of the thesis in which all relevant aspects are covered. The literature search (3) can also include hand searching and other methods besides electronic search (Torgerson, 2003). Usually, the screening is conducted by at least two individual researchers, due to the circumstances of this thesis the screening was only done by one person. To avoid bias, the papers excluded in the second screening were re-assessed a second time, although I am aware that this cannot be equated with the quality of two individual researchers. Scoping or mapping (4) in the context of this study was only done by extracting some thematic, geographic and methodological aspects of the selected studies and juxtapose them in an Excel sheet. Thus, all crucial information could be collected without exceeding the scope of this thesis. In the latter part of this thesis, the critical appraisal (5), which assures the quality and relevance of the included empirical evidence, a closer description of the evidence, its synthesis (6) as well as an interpretation (7) of the results can be found. The interpretation in this review can be rather understood as the embedding in existing theory and a potential extension of the current theoretical insights. The thesis will be published in so far that it will be submitted and made available on the university website.

3.1.1. Theoretical Framework

To frame the ideas developed in this systematic review and to be able to relate them to existing theories and concepts, the theoretical framework of this thesis needs to be defined. First, the notions of international migration and voluntary return will be discussed. Then, a framework for potential drivers of return migration will be presented;

this framework will function as a "heuristic device to structure information" (Borderon et al., 2019, p. 493) for the gained results of this review.

This review will focus on the drivers which influence the return decision of a voluntary international migrant. Therefore, these terms need to be defined. For the term international migrant, the definition be the UN will be used. In the publication *Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Boarders* (OHCHR, n.d.) it is also noted that no universally accepted definition exists which makes it necessary to state what definition is used. In this review, the following definition will be used:

> [A]n "international migrant" refers to any person who is outside a State of which he or she is a citizen or national, or, in the case of a stateless person, his or her State of birth or habitual residence. The term includes migrants who intend to move permanently or temporarily, and those who move in a regular or documented manner as well as migrants in irregular situations. (OHCHR, n.d., p. 4)

This definition offers a rather broad view on international migration and is, therefore, not very exclusive. For example, it does not differentiate between legal and illegal migration or the kind or reason for migration. Another reason which speaks for the application of this definition, which is based on another UN publication (1998), is that has been widely used by the IOM for more than two years now (IOM, 2019a), hence, has a broad range and it can be assumed that most studies will use a definition which is matches this one. Moreover, it excludes short term travel for business and leisure and visits of friends and family (UN, 1998). However, some limitations need to be considered. First, in this definition the timespan spent in the destination is not taken into account; other definitions clarify that a stay in the destination for at least 12 months is necessary to be classified as an international migrant (OECD, 2008). Moreover, this definition puts great emphasis on the notion of citizenship which might exclude some groups. In the original definition by the UN this aspect is formulated even broader and they refer to *country of usual residence* which is addressed in the above stated definition as *state of habitual residence*. The UN states more precisely, that a person's country of usual residence is "the country in which a person lives, that is to say, the country in which he or she has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest." (1998, p. 92). These perspectives will be considered in the review.

The next question which arises is about voluntary return. The World Bank Group states that a voluntary returnee is a person would have a "valid right to remain in the

destination country but chooses to return by his/her own free will and volition." (2017, p. 19). It is elaborated that decisions might be varied and may include "life-cycle plans such as retirement and return to family", but also economic and cultural reasons (World Bank Group, 2017, p. 39).

However, it seems to be more complex. A voluntary return can be "spontaneous or assisted" (OECD, 2020, p. 27). Assisted voluntary return may take forms of "[a]dministrative, logistical or financial support" and addresses migrants "unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit" (IOM, 2019a, pp. 12-13). What seems to be of utter importance is that the final return decision remains in the migrant's responsibility. Voluntary in this context means that the migrant can make "an informed decision" free of "physical or psychological pressure" (IOM, 2019a, p. 13).

Forced return is not considered in this review because the aim is to identify drivers which influence the decision-making process of the return. If return happens forcibly, the returnee is not in the position to decide freely, although in some cases a degree of ability to decide may remain (de Haas, 2021). Consequently, drivers do not play a major decisive role in this process. Furthermore, internal return migration was not taken into account, because the scope of the study needed to be restricted and defined clearly. Moreover, it needs to be highlighted that migration and return migration is seen as a natural demographic process and return migration does not constitute the end of a migration trajectory, but one possible decision in a migrant's life cycle. Another important information which needs to be shared is that no distinction between actual and potential return will be made in the review.

Besides typological specifications, a framework to process the gathered information from this review will be necessary to categorize the results extracted from the studies. For this purpose the framework by Black et al. (2004) will be used as a starting point. Due to its simple structure and its clear categories, it lends itself to structure the data. Although it has been composed on the basis of regionally limited data, the potential for a refined model on the basis of this model seems promising. The analysis will show if it will be sufficient to adapt and extend the existing framework or if a new framework will be necessary to cover all aspects found in the empirical studies. The framework can be seen in figure 10:

Figure 10: Framework for drivers (Black et al. 2004 in OECD 2020, p. 33)

This framework differentiates between three levels of drivers: structural, individual and policy. These levels will also be used for a first distinction in the synthesis of this thesis. This decision is supported by the fact that others have used a similar approach such as Yendaw (2013).

To specify the geographical concept behind this review, the following decisions have been made: Only the country of origin and the crossing of a national boundary were criteria to be included in the review. The country of origin needed to be within sub-Saharan Africa. This, however, does not imply that the country of destination needs to be outside this region; it can be within the region but also on any other continent. No further restrictions have been made in this regard. These limitations were necessary to render the definition of international migration applicable and to make the scope of the review feasible.

This review investigates the barriers and drivers for return migration from two perspectives: actual and potential return. Hence, studies having actual returnees but also potential return migrants as the investigated population were included, which might affect the results.

3.1.2. Literature Search

For the purposes of this thesis, studies about return migration to sub-Saharan Africa have been gathered on several online databases. Due to the small amount of

publications in this topic area, one database would not have rendered sufficient results (Torgerson, 2003). The following databases have been searched in the same order as listed: Scopus, Migration Research Hub, Connecting-Africa, AfricaBib and Google Scholar. I started with the two big databases Scopus and Migration Research Hub because most results were expected there. It has to be said that many results were found in both databases and because of the search order no studies from the Migration Research Hub appear in the listing although the database contained some of the studies used. Additionally, two small African online databases have been used to supplement the large databases and allow studies to be included which have been published by African authors. It has to be said that not all publications on the African databases are from African authors. Finally, also Google Scholar was consulted to ensure that no important publication as overlooked. Many results from Google Scholar were already found on other databases. Only one study resulted from the search on Google Scholar.

On all databases search was conducted with key words and results were restricted to publications since the year 2010 and in the language English. Depending on the size of the database the key word "return migration" or "return migra*" was used. On Scopus the search needed to be restricted further and the terms "international" OR "Africa" were added. Unfortunately, the keyword "sub-Sahara*" would not have rendered the desired results because most studies focus on one country but actually never on the whole region and therefore the term "sub-Saharan Africa" is seldomly used. To restrict the search regionally, the term "Africa" was the next one most suitable. This adapted search with the search term *"return migration" AND "international" OR "Africa"* still resulted in 498 hits. The title and, if necessary, also the abstract of the results was screened for their thematic and geographical relevance, which already constituted the first screening; the complete screening process is described in the next section. Due to the use of the term *return migration* in other scientific fields such as biology and medicine, a rather high number of unrelated publications were among the search results such as return migration of animals or the migration of cancer within the human body. This revealed one major difficulty of such a search process; the aspects of sensitivity and specificity needed to be considered (Torgerson, 2003). To avoid the accidental exclusion of important results, I opted for a high degree of sensitivity which resulted in a low specificity. Therefore, handsearching was necessary. On Scopus, for example, a hand-search with slightly varying keywords resulted in two more empirical

studies found which would not have been listed in the search for "return migration". On the Migration Research Hub the search for "return migration" and the same restrictions year-wise and language-wise resulted in 367 hits which were then hand-searched for suitability. However, all relevant results were already found on Scopus and therefore no new studies were found on this database. On the website connecting-africa.net the key word "return migration" led to 90 hits between the years 2008 and 2021, although no further limitations were made regarding language due to the technical limitations of this database. The search on the database AfricaBib.org delivered five hits but none of them were included in the final selection. Google Scholar was searched for "return migra*" AND "international" AND "Africa" as it was done on Scopus. This search delivered 425 results but no substantially new and relevant publications were found. The search was conducted mid-July 2021. The process of the literature search is depicted in the flowchart below:
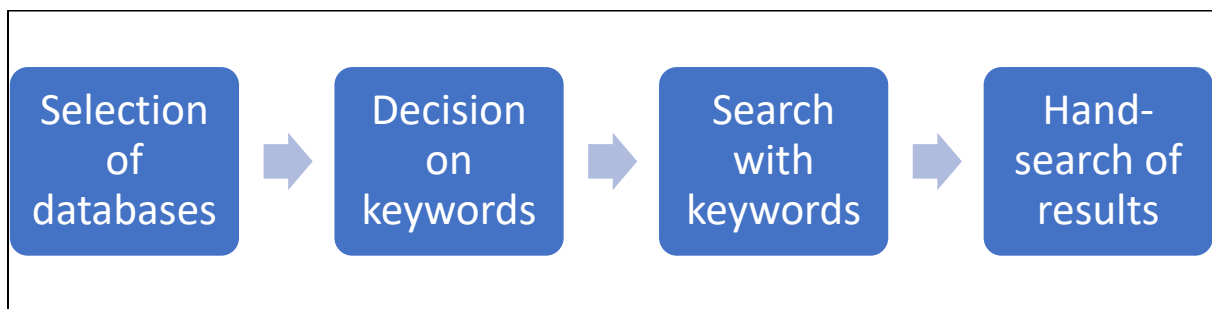
Figure 11: Literature Search Process

3.1.3. Screening

The screening process can be divided into two stages, the first screening, which was conducted in the course of the search process, and the second screening, which constituted a detailed scanning of all studies retrieved by skim-reading the full papers.

As already mentioned above, the first screening stage took place while the search was conducted. Titles and abstracts of the results were screened for their thematic and geographical relevance as well as their actuality. Thus, the three basic criteria for the first screening stage were:

I.   Thematic relevance: the publication somehow addresses drivers, factors, reasons or determinants for return migration.

II. Geographical relevance: the publication deals with return migration to sub-Saharan Africa.

III.   Actuality: The study was published in the year 2010 or later.

The first criterion relates to the research question which has been formulated to guide this research process. The geographical focus was chosen due to several reasons. First, the numbers of migrant flows from this region, primarily to Europe, have constantly increased over the last decade(s) and consequently also the number of returns back to the region increased (IOM, 2019c; Veronese et al., 2021). Nearly a third of all assisted voluntary return and reintegration organized by the IOM had countries in west and central Africa as destination for return (IOM, 2019c). Return from transit countries in the coastal areas of Africa to other African countries made up for another 22 percent of the total number of returns (IOM, 2019c). Accordingly, also interest in the potential of return migration for development is rising in host countries as well as in countries of origin in sub-Saharan Africa (Åkesson & Baaz, 2015). Return migration in general has been discovered as a promising facilitator for development and especially return to sub-Saharan Africa has gained attention of policy makers, as Åkesson & Baaz (2015) describe. González-Ferrer et al., (2014) also explain their interest in this region through extremely varied political, economic and ecologic conditions as well as historical backgrounds which allows them to draw multi-facetted conclusions. The last reason is a merely pragmatic one: the scope needed to be feasible and, therefore, the field had to be restricted to a certain geographic area.

The third criterion ensures that only recent publications are included, which serves the aim of this review to present new insights into the subject matter. Only if all three criteria applied to a publication, it was downloaded and added to a preliminary list of studies. All studies were listed in an Excel file and added to a Zotero bibliography. After the first screening stage the list included 35 publications.

In the second screening stage all papers were skim-read and tested for their thematic relevance based on the full text. Nine studies were excluded because it became apparent that their results would not contribute to answer the research question of this thesis because they did not match the first criterion (thematic relevance) formulated at the beginning of the screening process. Two more studies were excluded because on closer examination it was found that they both originated in studies already presented in other publications and, thus, no new insights could have been expected by including them. Finally, the two screening stages resulted in a selection of 24 studies. A list of

all 24 studies including a brief overview on methodological and geographic aspects can be found on the consecutive pages.

Nr.	Author(s)	Title	Year	Origin (Database)
1	Adebayo, K. O.	'I don't want to have a separated home': Reckoning family and return migration among married Nigerians in China	2020	Scopus
2	Adzei, F. A., Sakyi, E. K.	Drivers of return migration of Ghanaian health professionals: perspectives from doctors and nurses in urban Ghana	2014	Scopus (handsearch) and MRH
3	Agyeman A. E., Garcia, F. M.	Connecting Return Intentions and Home Investment: the Case of Ghanaian Migrants in Southern Europe	2015	Scopus (handsearch)
4	Almeida, D., Rosa, J.	Incidences of Return Migration: International Students from Cape Verde	2020	AfricaBib
5	Asampong, E., Amonoo Harrison, J.; Yarney, L.; Opoku- Mensah, K.; Shakoor Karim, A.; Fobil, J. N.	Back to My Roots: A Study of "Returning" Emigrated Health Professionals in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana	2013	Scopus (handsearch)
6	Benhayyoun, S.	Here no king. There no king. Perceptions of Return among Undocumented Nigerians in the Netherlands and Returnees in Nigeria	2018	Connecting-africa.net
7	Bleck, J., Lodermeier, A.	Migration aspirations from a youth perspective: focus groups with returnees and youth in Mali	2020	Scopus
8	Flahaux, M.-L.	Reintegrating After Return: Conceptualisation and Empirical Evidence from the Life Course of Senegalese and Congolese Migrants	2021	Scopus
9	Flahaux, M.-L.	The Role of Migration Policy Changes in Europe for Return Migration to Senegal	2017	Scopus
10	Flahaux, M.-L.	Return Migration to Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo: Intention and Realization	2015	Scopus (handsearched)
11	González-Ferrer, A., Baizán, P., Beauchemin, C., Kraus, E., Schoumaker, B., Black, R,	Distance, Transnational Arrangements, and Return Decisions of Senegalese, Ghanaian, and Congolese Migrants	2014	Scopus
12	Hunter, A.	Empowering or impeding return migration? ICT, mobile phones, and older migrants' communications with home.	2015	MRH
13	Kyeremeh, E.	Exploring the return migration experience of football migrants: a case study of Ghanaian footballers	2020	Scopus
14	Makina, D.	Determinants of return migration intentions: Evidence from Zimbabwean migrants living in South Africa	2012	Scopus
15	Motlhatlhedi, K., Nkomazana, O.	Home is home—Botswana's return migrant health workers	2018	Scopus (handsearched)

Nr.	Author(s)	Title	Year	Origin (Database)
16	Mwaura, N. J.	Identity & Return Migration: The Kenyan Case	2018	Connecting-africa.net
17	Nwadiuko, J., Switzer, G.E., Stern, J., Day, C., Paina, L.	South African physician emigration and return migration, 1991-2017: A trend analysis	2021	Scopus
18	Nzima, D., Moyo, P.	The new 'diaspora trap' framework: Explaining return migration from South Africa to Zimbabwe beyond the 'failure-success' framework	2017	Scopus
19	Omata, N.	The Complexity of Refugees' Return Decision-Making in a Protracted Exile: Beyond the Home-Coming Model and Durable Solutions	2013	Scopus
20	Poppe, A., Wojczewski, S.,Taylor, K., Kutalek, R., Peersman, W.	The views of migrant health workers living in Austria and Belgium on return migration to sub-Saharan Africa	2016	Scopus
21	Posel, D., Marx, C.	Circular Migration: A View from Destination Households in Two Urban Informal Settlements in South Africa	2013	Scopus
22	Robinson, K. B.	Perspectives of highly skilled migrants on return migration: A qualitative case study of Zimbabwean lecturers in the Western Cape of South Africa.	2019	Connecting-africa.net
23	Wong, M.	Navigating return: the gendered geographies of skilled return migration to Ghana	2014	Scopus
24	Yendaw, E.	A study of the underlying determinants of return migration of international return migrants to the Berekum Municipality, Ghana	2013	Google Scholar

Table 2: Selection after Screening

3.1.4. Critical Appraisal

In the critical appraisal, the relevance and the quality of the studies is again examined to finally lead to a strict selection of relevant and high-quality empirical evidence. For this step the quality and relevance check developed by Cummings et al. (2015) was adapted to allow an examination of qualitative as well as quantitative studies in one process. The original checklist and the adapted checklist used in this study are presented below:

Figure 12: Original Checklist (Cummings et al. 2015)

Principle	Questions	Scoring
Conceptual framing	a. Does the study have a conceptual framework, clear research question *or hypothesis?* b. Does the study appear to draw conclusions on its results rather than theory and policy?	0 Neither 1 One 2 Both
Methodological transparency	a. Does the study explain its research design and data collection method(s)? b. Does the study present *primary data* or link to data sources?	0 Neither 1 One 2 Both
Internal and external validity	a. Are alternative causes of impact or the study's limitations considered? b. Can the findings be generalized to other contexts and populations?	0 Neither 1 One 2 Both
Journalistic	a. How relevant is the study to answer the research question?	1 Partially 2 Directly
Scoring	0-4 Low (Excluded), 5-6 Medium, 7-8 High	

Table 3: Adapted Checklist for Quality Appraisal (adapted from Cummings et al. 2015, adaptions in italics)

To be able to assess qualitative as well as quantitative studies with this checklist, the first question was adapted, and "hypothesis" was added. Moreover, it was considered sufficient if the study had a conceptual framework OR a clear research question because it was found that in many studies the conceptual framework was not explicitly described but rather included in the introduction or other parts of the publications. It was necessary to loosen the quality criteria here, because otherwise too many studies would have been excluded leaving to little evidence to analyze. Regarding other quality criteria, the studies fulfilled all or most aspects; if this was not the case, they were excluded from the study. Concerning methodological transparency, question b was adapted because most qualitative studies presented their independently collected in

the study but did not provide or link to data sources. Nevertheless, it was clearly visible were the data originated from. However, a link to data sources is also not common for primary studies published in journals. Regarding quantitative studies, this question was in so far interpreted that if the data source was named explicitly in the paper, the study received a point.

According to this checklist, every single study was assessed which resulted in a certain scoring and weighting of each study. Depending on the quality of the study, a total of 8 points could be achieved. In dependence to the achieved score the studies were weighted in three groups: *low, medium and high*. A low score resulted in the exclusion of the study.

Nr.	Author(s), year (if necessary)	P1		P2		P3		P4	Score	Weight
		a	b	a	b	a	b			
1	Adebayo, K. O.	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	L
2	Adzei, F. A., Sakyi, E. K.	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	L
3	Agyeman, A. E., Garcia, F. M.	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	L
4	Almeida, D, Rosa, J.	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	4	L
5	Asampong, et al.	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	4	L
6	Benhayyoun, S.	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6	M
7	Bleck, J., Lodermeier, A.	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	M
8	Flahaux, M.-L., 2021	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	H
9	Flahaux, M.-L., 2017	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	M
10	Flahaux, M.-L., 2015	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8	H
11	González-Ferrer, et al.	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8	H
12	Hunter, A.	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	4	L
13	Kyeremeh, E.	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	5	M
14	Makina, D.	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	M
15	Motlhatlhedi, K., Nkomazana, O.	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	5	M
16	Mwaura, N. J.	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	5	M
17	Nwadiuko, et al.	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	M
18	Nzima, D., Moyo, P.	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	M

Nr.	Author(s), year (if necessary)	P1		P2		P3		P4	Score	Weight
		a	b	a	b	a	b			
19	Omata, N.	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	L
20	Poppe, et al.	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	5	M
21	Posel, D., Marx, C.	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	4	L
22	Robinson, K. B.	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	6	M
23	Wong, M.	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	5	M
24	Yendaw, E.	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8	H

Table 4: Results Quality Appraisal

Of the 24 studies eight had a *low* scoring below four and were consequently excluded. 12 studies achieved five or six points and were assessed as *medium*. Four studies received seven or eight points and obtained the weighting *high*. In the table below the details of the critical appraisal can be seen. Studies labelled in grey had a low weight and, consequently, were excluded. Studies with a high score were labelled in dark orange in the last two columns *score* and *weight*, studies with a medium score are labelled in light orange.

Finally, a summary of the selection process is illustrated in figure 13:

First screening: 35 studies

Second Screening:
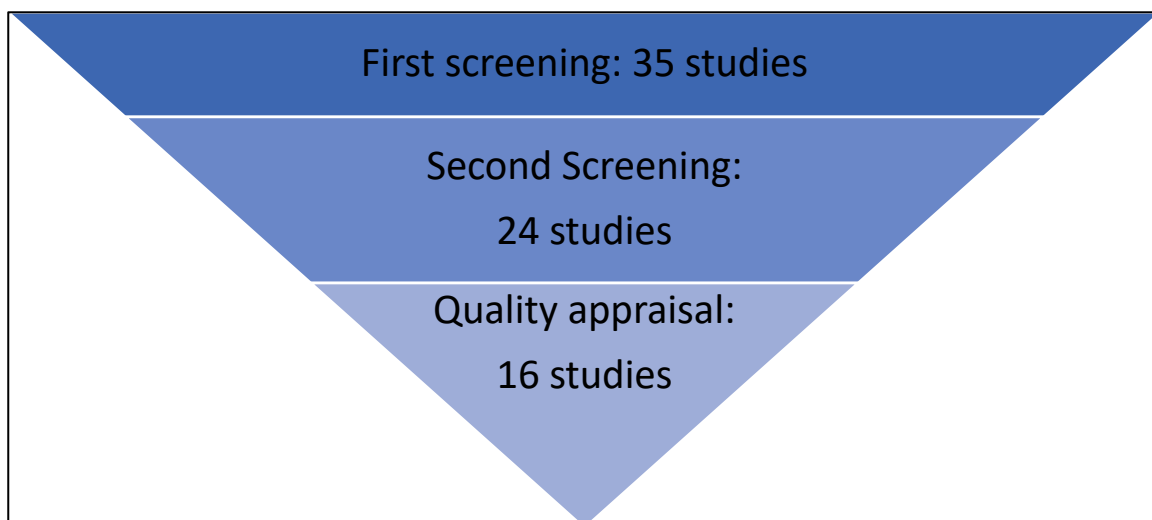24 studies

Quality appraisal:
16 studies

Figure 13: Selection process

A final list of the 16 studies which now will be closely examined and used for the systematic review is provided in table 6 on the next two pages.

	Author(s)	Year	Origin	Journal	Prima ry/ Secon dary	Qualitat ive/ Quantit ative	Method	Sample size (N)	Population	Perspecti ve: Potential/ Actual Return	Destinati on	Origin	Score	Weight
1	Benhayyo un, S.	2018	Connectin g-africa.net	Thesis (Leiden University, Netherlands)	P	Quali	interview	14	undocumente d Nigerians in the Netherlands & Returnees in Nigeria	A/P	Netherlan ds	Nigeria	6	M
2	Bleck, J., Loderm eier, A.	2020	Scopus	Journal of Modern African Studies	P	Quali	focus groups	68	youth	A	Europe/Af rica	Mali	5	M
3	Flahaux, M.-L.	2021	Scopus	International Migration	S	Quanti	mixed-methods (life event history surveys, interviews)	1125	none	A/P	Europe	Senegal, DR Congo	7	H
4	Flahaux, M.-L.	2017	Scopus	International Migration Review	S	Quanti	discrete-time event history analysis	603	none	A/P	Europe	Senegal	6	M
5	Flahaux, M.-L.	2015	Scopus (hand searched)	Population	S	Quanti	life event history surveys	713 Senegal, 521 DR Congo, (104, 86 return)	none	A/P	Europe	Senegal, DR Congo	8	H
6	González-Ferrer, A., Baizán, P., Beauche min, C., Kraus, E., Schoumak er, B., Black, R,	2014	Scopus	International Migration Review	S	Quanti	individual and household surveys, biographic al retrospecti ve data	>4,000	none	A/P	Europe	Senegal, Ghana, DR Congo	8	H

	Author(s)	Year	Origin	Journal	Prima ry/ Secon dary	Qualitat ive/ Quantit ative	Method	Sample size (N)	Population	Perspecti ve: Potential/ Actual Return	Destinati on	Origin	Score	Weight
7	Kyeremeh, E.	2020	Scopus	African Geographical Review	P	Quali	interview	10	professional footballers	A	n. m.	Ghana	5	M
8	Makina, D.	2012	Scopus	Develoment Southern Africa	S	Quanti	Logistic regression analysis	4654	none	P	South Africa	Zimbabwe	5	M
9	Motlhatlhe di, K., Nkomaza na, O.	2018	Scopus (hand searched)	PLoS ONE	P	Quali	interview	8	health professionals	A	n. m.	Botswana	5	M
10	Mwaura, N. J.	2018	Connectin g-africa.net	Thesis (Leiden University, Netherlands)	P	Quali	interview	10	none	A	n. m.	Kenia	5	M
11	Nwadiuko, J., Switzer, G.E., Ster n, J., Day, C., Paina, L.	2021	Scopus	Health Policy and Planning	S	Quanti	trend analysis	>11.000	health professionals	A	AUS, NZ, CAN, USA, UK	South Africa	6	M
12	Nzima, D., Moyo, P.	2017	Scopus	Migration Letters	P	Quali	interview	90	none	P	South Africa	Zimbabwe	5	M
13	Poppe, A., Wojczews ki, S.,Taylor, K., Kutalek, R., Peersman , W.	2016	Scopus	Human Resources for Health	P	Quali	interview	27	health workers	P	Austria, Belgium	Sub-Saharan Africa	5	M
14	Robinson, K. B.	2019	Connectin g-africa.net	Thesis (University of the Western Cape)	P	Quali	interview	6	academics	P	South Africa	Zimbabwe	5	M
15	Wong, M.	2014	Scopus	Global Networks	P	Quali	interview	25	high-skilled	A	n. m.	Ghana	5	M

	Author(s)	Year	Origin	Journal	Prima ry/ Secon dary	Qualitat ive/ Quantit ative	Method	Sample size (N)	Population	Perspecti ve: Potential/ Actual Return	Destinati on	Origin	Score	Weight
16	Yendaw, E.	2013	Google Scholar	International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology	S	Quanti	interview	120	none	A	n. m.	Ghana	8	H

Table 5: Final Selection of Studies

3.2.   Description of Evidence

Now the evidence will be presented and described in detail, followed by a synthesis of the results and, finally, the existing conceptual framework by Black et al. 2004 shall be revised and elaborated.

Generally, the evidence consisting of 16 studies is distributed over the years 2012-2021. Interestingly, no studies from the years 2008-2010 were found which fit thematically and met the quality criteria. In line with the observation of an increased interest in the field as illustrated as previously discussed and illustrated in figure 9, the selection of studies for this review mirrors a similar trend. Three studies were published in 2018, two studies in 2014, 2017, 2020 and 2021 each and the remaining studies are distributed over 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2019 with one study per year.
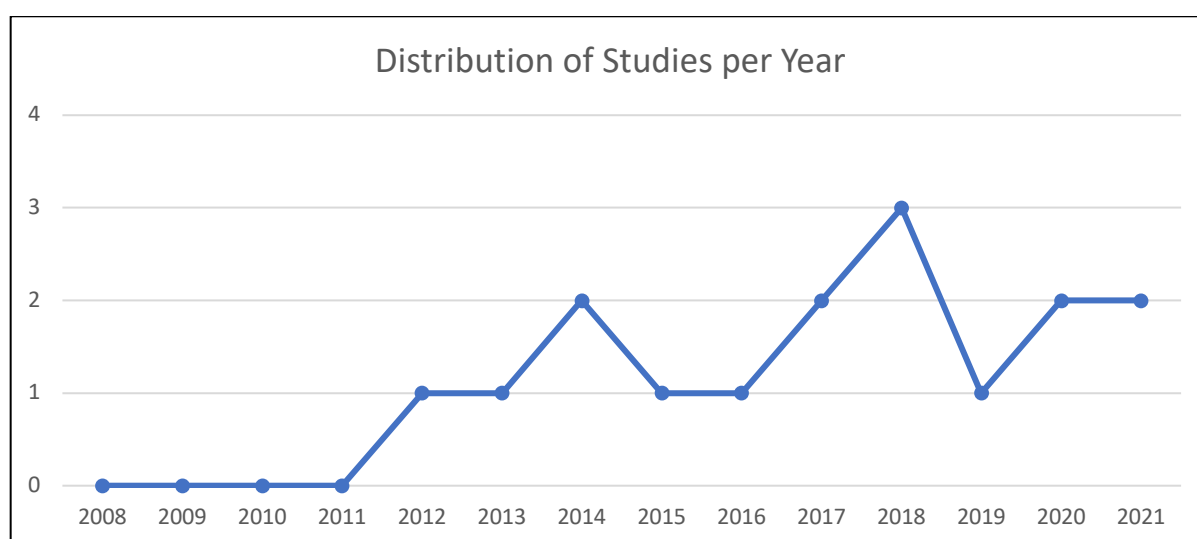

Figure 14: Annual Distribution of Studies

Regarding the kind of publications and authorship 13 out of 16 studies were published in form of journal articles. The remaining three were thesis published by University graduates, two published by the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, (Benhayyoun, 2018; Mwaura, 2018) and one by the University of the Western Cape, South Africa (Robinson, 2020). Despite a potentially lower quality due to the type of publication, all three studies received good scores in the quality appraisal and were therefore included. Generally, studies from various authors are covered. However, in the final composition of evidence, three studies originate from the same author, namely Marie-Laurence Flahaux, which was an unexpected and unintended result of the search, sampling and quality appraisal. Excluding one or two of the studies by Flahaux was considered but, finally, rejected because the decision could not have been based on rational justification.

Out of the 16 studies, nine used qualitative methods and seven quantitative methods. Among the qualitative studies nearly all studies used individual face-to-face interviews as the information extraction method, only one study used focus group interviews (Bleck & Lodermeier, 2020). Among the quantitative studies a more differentiated set of methods was found: life event history surveys, interviews, discrete-time event history analysis, individual and household surveys, biographical retrospective data analysis, questionnaires and a trend analysis.
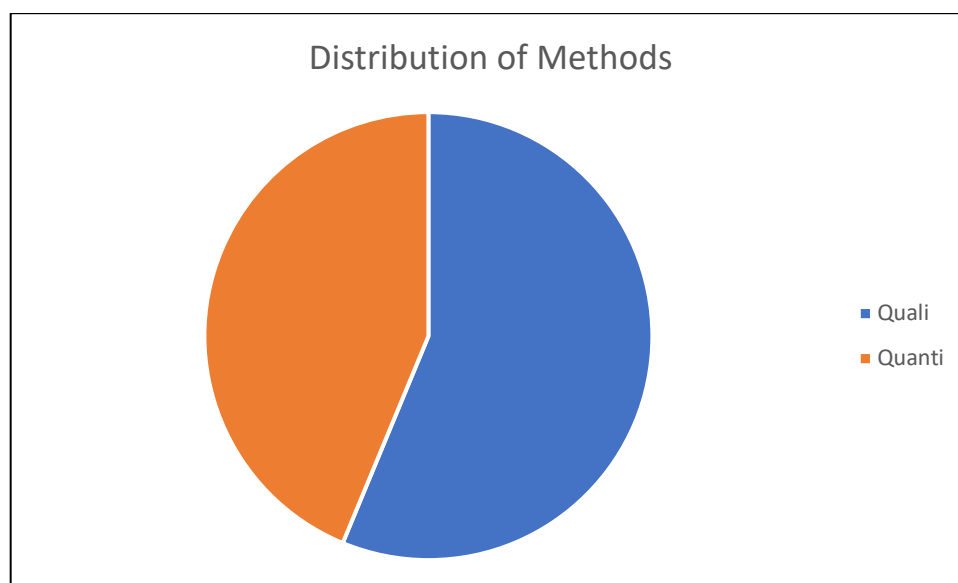

Figure 15: Study Methods

Sample size varied considerably among the studies, the smallest sample size was six and the largest over 4.000. However, this was primarily due to the methods used and sample size is not considered a quality criterion in this review. Eight out of the total 16 studies did not investigate a specific population, the remaining ones had a specific focus group. Benhayyoun (2018) reported on the perspectives and behaviors of undocumented Nigerians in the Netherlands and returnees which have been part of this group. Bleck and Lodermeier (2020) asked young Malian return migrants about their views. Five studies focused on high-skilled migrants, primarily on health care professionals (Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018; Nwadiuko et al., 2021; Poppe et al., 2016); One chose university lecturers (Robinson, 2020) and another one high-skilled people in general as the focus group (Wong, 2014). Another study did research on professional football players returning to Ghana (Kyeremeh, 2020).

All studies did research on return migration to sub-Saharan Africa. Countries of origin covered Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Kenia and South Africa. One study also did not discriminate

countries of origin but restricted the origin of the interviewees to sub-Saharan Africa (Poppe et al., 2016). The most frequent destination was Europe with seven countries explicitly naming Europe as destination. Some studies gave more detailed information such as Benhayyoun (2018) who restricted her study to the Netherlands destination-wise and Poppe et al. (2016) who chose Belgium and Austria as destinations. This is also due to the kind of study, and depends on the focus on actual or potential return. Bleck and Lodermeier (2020) reported on returns from both Europe and Northern Africa. Three studies scrutinized return from South Africa (Makina, 2012; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017; Robinson, 2020). In five studies no specific country of destination was mentioned. The geographic distribution in combination with information about the type of study can be seen on the map below:
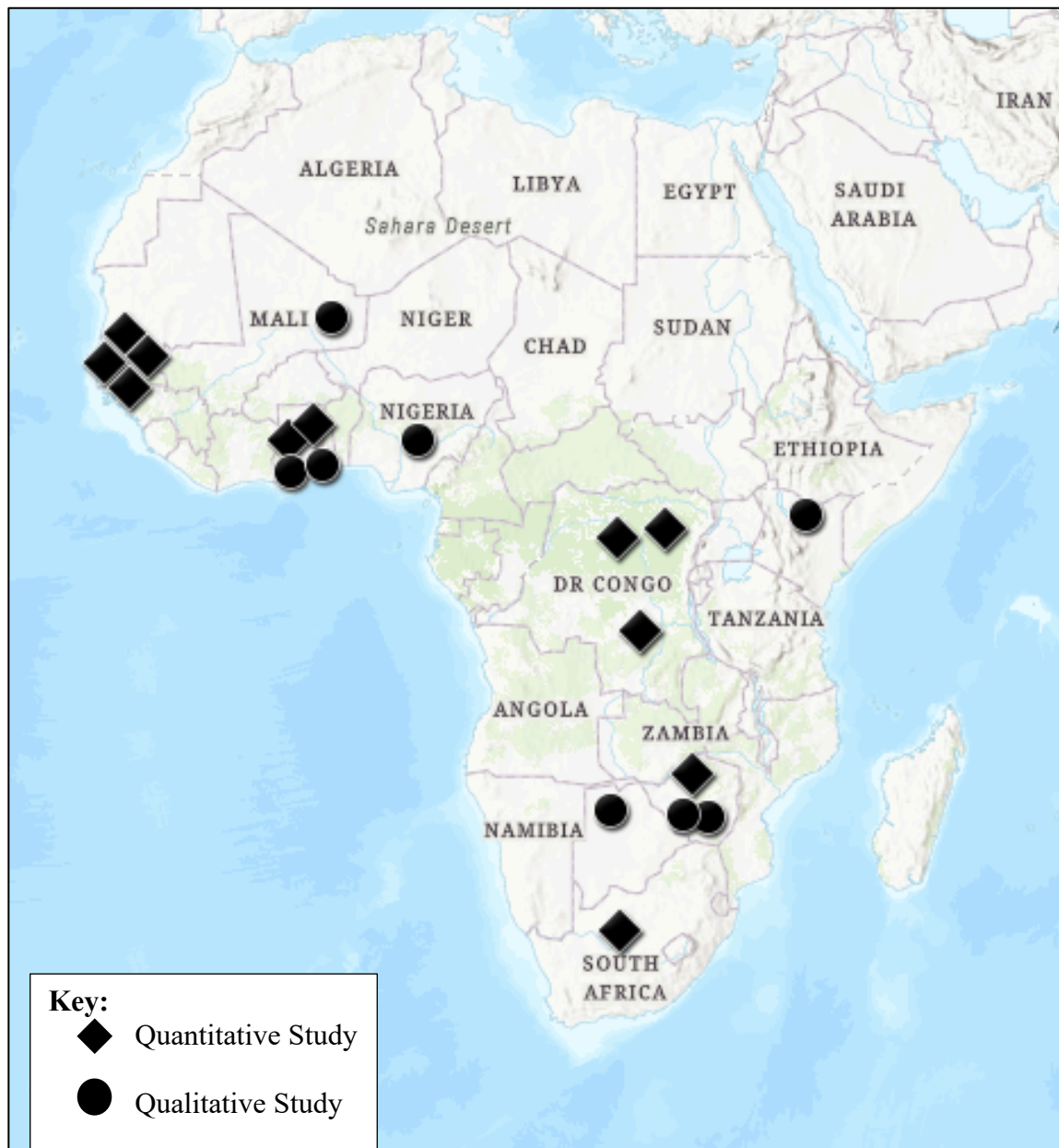

Figure 16: Regional distribution of studies (created on ArcGIS.com)

It must be mentioned that two quantitative studies were conducted in more than one country and one study did not distinguish by country at all. Thus, the figure does not represent a faultless picture, because two and three diamonds respectively refer to the same study and one qualitative study is not depicted at all on the map. Nevertheless, a general overview about the distribution of studies by type of method can be seen.

In the following two chapters the evidence will be presented according to the type of study, thus, evidence from qualitative and quantitative studies will be treated separately. Obviously, only the relevant parts of the studies were included and only the results section of the studies was integrated to retrieve new insights. Within the two main groups, evidence will be further discriminated according to the investigated population and to the perspective on return – actual or potential – because results may vary across these categories. The analysis in each chapter will be structured according to the framework by Black et al. 2004 in three main points: structural, individual and policy. The structural factors can be further divided in conditions in the country of origin and in the destination. Concerning the individual factors, we will make a distinction between individual attributes and social relations. Policy can be further divided into incentives and disincentives. Also the quantitative analysis will follow this scheme. The results of each study were gathered in an Excel spreadsheet and organized according to these categories. However, sometimes it was difficult to put a factor in one category or another; especially, when the presence or absence of this factor has different effects, it is necessary to mention it in both categories. In some instances, it seemed as if no category was suitable; these factors were collected in a separate column. The Excel spreadsheet in which all results are summarized can be found in the appendix. The analysis will show if the framework by Black et al. (2004) also accounts for the incidences of return in these studies or if it needs to be adapted or if even a new framework is needed. Finally, it needs to be said that in the following chapters factors for return will be further distinguished in drivers and barriers to account for factors that support and accelerate or hinder and retain return migration. In the course of the conduction of the review it became apparent that the term "driver" implies a wrong implication, namely that somebody is driven or pushed; however, in some instances exactly the opposite is the case, and somebody is hindered or held back. Therefore, I decided to use the term barrier as counterpart. Later we will discuss if other frameworks, such as the one by Carling et al. (2015), which follows a push-pull structure, is more suitable.

3.2.1. Evidence from Qualitative Studies

I opted for including qualitative studies because in-depth insights into processes, interventions and the behavior of people are the top priority of this review and a mix of study designs seemed most promising (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Additionally, a restriction to one study design would have further reduced the already rather limited evidence. Moreover, qualitative studies have received relatively little attention in systematic reviews but have gained interest among researchers in the recent past due to their narrative character (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

In total, nine qualitative studies were included, which all used primary data. Eight studies conducted individual interviews for data collection, one study did interviews with focus groups. The investigated population groups range from undocumented returnees and young Malian returnees to professional football players, health workers and high-skilled migrants. Six of the nine studies investigated actual return, thus, interviewed people after their return to sub-Saharan Africa. Three studies asked their participants about their potential return intentions.

Structural factors

Seven out of nine studies report structural determinants concerning the country of origin or state that migrants are kept from return because of a bad and volatile political and socio-economic situation in sub-Saharan Africa (Mwaura, 2018; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017; Poppe et al., 2016; Robinson, 2020). One of Benhayyoun's (2018) respondents also reports that he does not consider return due to his sexual orientation, which is punishable by law in his country of origin; this also implies a hostile political and cultural climate for the respondent. Other reasons which are potentially related to the political and socio-economic situation of a country and hinder a return to sub-Saharan Africa are "institutional crisis", "war and conflict" and "criminality", bad "working conditions" (Poppe et al., 2016, pp. 128-129) and the "fear of traffickers" due to debts and reciprocity (Benhayyoun, 2018, p. 48).

Interestingly, political and socio-economic conditions are sometimes also mentioned as a driver because the market of a country is considered to have potential or respondents expect a better life back at the country of origin (Mwaura, 2018; Wong, 2014). Another report the desire to give something back to the country as a driver (Kyeremeh, 2020; Poppe et al., 2016). This is closely related to the personal desire of a person but is mentioned here because these participants felt that they could

positively contribute to the situation in their country. Also cultural aspects are mentioned as additional driving forces for return, such as food and language (Kyeremeh, 2020). This may also contribute to a feeling of inclusion or exclusion which will be later discussed in the sub-chapter about social factors.

Concerning the structural factors in the destination, drivers and barriers are diverse. Good living and working conditions are retaining reasons to stay in the destination (Benhayyoun, 2018; Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018; Poppe et al., 2016). However, unsatisfying work conditions can also be reason to return (Mwaura, 2018) or the desired wealth could be achieved and therefore the economic success triggers the return decision (Bleck & Lodermeier, 2020). The first point supports the views of neoclassical migration theory, the latter one would be an argument as suggested by new economics of labor migration theory. Benhayyoun (2018) also finds that return may constitute a loss of income for the migrant household which cannot be relinquished because it is necessary as a transnational livelihood strategy. This complexity in regard to economic success illustrates that drivers for return are numerous and depend on the individual situation. Other reasons for return are cultural "clashes" between western and sub-Saharan values and cultural habits (Mwaura, 2018, p. 78), "exclusion and prejudice" (Wong, 2014, p. 445) or expensive child-care (Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018). Bleck & Lodermeier (2020) state that not having reached the desired destination can be another reason for return.

Individual and social factors

Individual factors seem to play a minor role in the return decision process, nevertheless, several drivers could be summarized from the evidence. Economic success or failure primarily influence the return decision. If economic goals are achieved or if more success can be expected in the country of origin, but also if economic success in the destination is lacking, migrants are more likely to consider a return to sub-Saharan Africa (Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018; Mwaura, 2018; Poppe et al., 2016; Wong, 2014). However, the absence of economic success may also delay a return because it would mean a loss of pride and status, a lack of understanding among family members and in comparison with non-migrants it would constitute a personal failure (Benhayyoun, 2018; Wong, 2014). Successful economic integration in the destination may also retain a migrant to return (Nzima, & Moyo, 2017). Retirement or reaching a certain stage of the life cycle may also trigger the intention to return

(Kyeremeh, 2020; Poppe et al., 2016; Robinson, 2020). Regarding health issues, Kyeremeh (2020) states injuries as one reason for return amongst professional football players from sub-Saharan Africa. Poppe et al. (2016) and Mwaura (2018) report health related drivers, and Mwaura elaborates that stress and depression due to worries about the future and legal status can trigger return migration. Finally, some participants simply mention the "love for the country" (Kyeremeh, 2020, p. 227) and home-sickness (Benhayyoun, 2018; Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018, 2018; Poppe et al., 2016) as drivers for return. This, however, is also closely related to social and cultural factors which were discussed previously. It has been decided to mention it here because is constitutes an emotion and thus is also an individual issue. Also "personal determination" (Wong, 2014, p. 448; Robinson, 2020) is named as driver, which underpins that return decision is not an objective and merely rationale decision.

Contrary to individual factors, social factors are numerous and frequently named as drivers for return. Reunification with family, marrying and starting a family and the emotional links to family and friends are mentioned in nearly every study (Benhayyoun, 2018; Bleck & Lodermeier, 2020; Kyeremeh, 2020; Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018; Mwaura, 2018; Poppe et al., 2016; Robinson, 2020). The desire to life with aging parents or left-behind children is also strongly shaping return (Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018). Also a family crisis such as the death of a family member may be reason to return permanently (Benhayyoun, 2018; Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018). Contrasting statements have been found in regard to education and upbringing of children. Some migrants prefer to stay in the destination because they consider the environment more suitable for their children (Wong, 2014), others want to return to sub-Saharan Africa because they are convinced that upbringing will be easier or better there and they want their children to grow up with African culture (Poppe et al., 2016; Wong, 2014).

Interestingly, family can be both a barrier and a driver for return. Two different situations are reported: First, family in the destination may be a reason to stay (Nzima, & Moyo, 2017). Secondly, wrong expectations by the family and the feeling of exclusion from the family and community in the country of origin can be a barrier for return (Benhayyoun, 2018; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017). On the one hand, in the case of economic failure migrants are afraid to return "empty-handed" (Benhayyoun, 2018, p. 104), and, therefore, are not able to meet the "success social construct" (Nzima, & Moyo, 2017, p. 361) which is present in the relatives' minds, and in consequence lose their pride

and status (Benhayyoun, 2018; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017). On the other hand, Nzima, & Moyo (2017) observed that social-class differences with kinship due to economic success in the destination and the inability to transfer this success to them may be also a repelling factor. These instances illustrate that the decision to return is subject to the social context and it can be a driver as well as a barrier for return. This also entails issues of inclusion and exclusion. A feeling of exclusion in the destination may enhance the wish to return and to be an integrated part of a social group (Benhayyoun, 2018; Poppe et al., 2016). Moreover, Wong (2014) mentions that some migrants long for being part of the majority. Inclusion in the destination community may have the opposite effect (Benhayyoun, 2018; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017) and others fear exclusion after return (Benhayyoun, 2018).

Policy interventions

There is only little evidence about the effect of policy interventions. The evidence has been searched for incentives and disincentives. Benhayyoun (2018) comes to the conclusion that all participants have little or no knowledge about assisted voluntary return programs. Concerning the role of legal and illegal migration and its effect on return, contradicting views exist. Mwaura (2018) reports that a lack of legal status and the struggle to integrate into the legal system drives migrants to return. Poppe et al. (2016) come to a contradictory conclusion, that return rather takes place when there is a legal option to re-emigrate to the destination, which would mean the possession of a legal status in the destination. High-skilled migrants in South Africa state that assistance in regard to housing and schooling would enhance their decision to return to their country of origin in another part of sub-Saharan Africa (Robinson, 2020).

3.2.2. Evidence from Quantitative Studies

Besides the qualitative evidence, seven insightful quantitative studies are part of the evidence. All quantitative studies used data which was gathered in the course of bigger surveys or projects such as the Migration between Africa and Europe Project (MAFE). Six out of seven studies do not focus on a specific focus group but included all return migrants of the general population willing to participate. Only the trend analysis by Nwadiuko et al. (2021) specialized in health professionals. Four studies did not distinguish between actual and potential return, one investigated potential return and two studies focused on actual return. Overall, evidence from quantitative studies was

less exhaustive as the evidence from qualitative studies, which can probably be explained by the nature of structured interviews or given questionnaires.

Structural factors

In line with the qualitative evidence, also the quantitative studies confirm that the main repelling factor is the deteriorating political and socio-economic situation, or even crisis, in countries of sub-Saharan Africa which also causes unfavorable living conditions (Flahaux, 2021, 2015; González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Makina, 2012; Nwadiuko et al., 2021). Contrastingly, the opportunities in the country of origin are also stated as a reason for return (Flahaux, 2021, 2015). Generally, many authors note that distance and duration influence the return decision: the longer the distance and the duration in the destination, the smaller the chances for return (González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Makina, 2012). A long migration trajectory sometimes also entails higher risks and greater financial expenses; these factors may negatively influence the return decision because the high personal and financial cost for migration must be transformed into value. However, Flahaux (2017) finds contrasting statements which might be explained through greater socio-cultural differences with increasing distance. This might be especially true when comparing migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe and migration within sub-Saharan Africa.

Individual and social factors

Also evidence from quantitative studies confirmed that individual and social factors, especially family and responsibility for children and relatives, are strongly shaping return decisions (Flahaux, 2021, 2015, 2017; González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Makina, 2012; Yendaw, 2013). However there are some contradicting findings reported in the evidence, too: Whereas Flahaux (2021) views family in the destination as a barrier for return, González-Ferrer et al. (2014) are convinced that family in the destination has no influence on the return decision. Educational opportunities for children can be drivers and barriers for return, as already postulated by qualitative evidence (Flahaux, 2021). Moreover, integration difficulties in the destination are seen as an enhancing factor for return (Flahaux, 2017; Yendaw, 2013).

Numerous individual factors which increase the probability of return are stated: migrants with a high level of education are more likely to return (González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Makina, 2012). More generally, the successful acquisition of sufficient financial and human resources are stated as a reason for return (Flahaux, 2021;

Flahaux, 2015, 2017; Yendaw, 2013). Against other findings by qualitative studies, evidence of quantitative sources support the position that unemployment is rather a driver than a barrier for return (Flahaux, 2017; Makina, 2012; Yendaw, 2013). Nevertheless, return may only happen if sufficient resources have been acquired to be able to return (Flahaux, 2021, 2015, 2017). The desire to invest and be economically active in the country of origin are also named as drivers for return (Flahaux, 2021; Yendaw, 2013). Other individual factors influencing the return decision may be having fulfilled one's intentions for migration, the intention to migration only temporarily, having property in the country of origin, prior attempts to migrate (Flahaux, 2015, 2017). Hindering aspects for return may be high risks and costs afforded for migration (Flahaux, 2015), a high income in the destination or high wage differences between destination and origin (Makina, 2012).

Policy interventions

The strongest statement from quantitative studies concerning policy is that restrictive immigration policies and the lack of the possibility to migrate again after return negatively influences the return decision (Flahaux, 2021, 2015, 2017; González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Nwadiuko et al., 2021). More specifically, an illegal status is a barrier for return because migrants do not want to lose the chance of obtaining a regular status in the destination and the illegal status makes re-migration to the destination very difficult (Flahaux, 2021, 2015, 2017). Nwadiuko et al. (2021) also mentioned that work permits and licenses are taken into consideration upon return because health professionals cannot afford losing them or it took great efforts to initially receive them. Only Yendaw (2013) comes to a contradictory conclusion and states that governmental restrictions enhance return.

3.3.　Synthesis

From a meta-perspective, it can be said that qualitative evidence rendered more exhaustive and varied data whereas quantitative data was also valuable by adding more generalizable evidence due to larger sample size. Thus, both methods contributed to this thesis in a distinctive way. As the main aim of this systematic review is to gain a broad and varied picture about return migration to sub-Saharan Africa, all evidence can be considered important. However, in the following paragraph we will emphasize findings which have been reported by numerous studies and, hence, may

have a greater impact on return migration than others. Concerning the main insights, it may be interesting to mention that similarities have been observed in both qualitative and quantitative studies. First, the most important and frequent findings for the categories *structural*, *individual* and *policy factors* are summarized and their potential for generalization is discussed.

Concerning structural drivers and barriers, bad economic and political conditions in sub-Saharan Africa were the main barrier for return. Also work and living conditions are considered in return decision processes and conditions in the destination are compared with the (expected) situation in the country of origin. Regarding individual and social factors, drivers and barriers regarding family and the feeling of missing home were very prominent in the evidence. Lastly, the lack of a legal status and restrictive immigration policies were seen as major obstacles to return because re-migration to the destination would be very difficult. Overall, individual factors, especially social ones, seemed to be most vital in the return decision process, which can be said to be a major difference to the drivers underlying migration decisions. Poppe and her colleagues suitably summarize this force of individual emotional factors in the following sentence: "Rational factors seem to dominate the balance in favor of remaining in Europe, while the reasons cited for returning are more emotionally driven and situated at the micro level." (2016, p. 131).

Some contradicting statements were found in the evidence, too. The first contradiction concerns social relations, in particular family. Whereas most studies conclude that often family is either a driver and a retaining factor, depending on where the other family members are settled, González-Ferrer et al. (2014) did not find that family in the destination impacts return decision. Moreover, contradicting findings about economic success and failure are found. While some authors report that unemployment is a driver for return (Flahaux, 2017; Mwaura, 2018; Yendaw, 2013), others say that unemployment postpones a return because returnees do not want to return empty-handed (Benhayyoun, 2018; Nzima, & Moyo, 2017) and only return when goals have been achieved, including the accumulation of sufficient financial resources (Flahaux, 2021, 2015, 2017; Motlhatlhedi & Nkomazana, 2018; Mwaura, 2018; Poppe et al., 2016; Wong, 2014). However, these findings need to be viewed differentiated because these decisions underly complex factors. For example, Wong (2014) points out that socio-economic success is compared with peers in the country of origin, thus, socio-economic success might be subject to the conditions in the country of origin. Moreover,

Nzima, & Moyo (2017) see another difficulty in the socio-economic differences between returnee and his/her kinship when success cannot be transferred to relatives. Flahaux (2017) puts it in a nutshell by saying that the capability for return needs to be given, thus, sufficient financial resources must be acquired. Probably also the more abstract condition of having achieved the individually desired and socially expected goal must be fulfilled, otherwise a return would be shameful for the returnee. Another contradiction exists about immigration policies. Although the prevailing view is that harsher immigration policies hamper return intentions, Yendaw (2013) comes to the opposite conclusion and says that restrictions in the destination increase return rates.

Besides these factors captured with the help of the framework by Black et al. (2004), other, more abstract, drivers were observed. First, temporal aspects were reported frequently in the evidence and seem to influence return decision in various ways. Drivers and barriers for return are not constant, but may change over time (Benhayyoun, 2018). Additionally, drivers for return might be related to the motives which originally triggered migration; therefore, conditions and drivers already present prior to migration should not be forgotten. Moreover, the probability for return increases with the duration of stay in destination (Flahaux, 2017). However, Poppe et al. report contradicting findings: while some migrants planned to stay only temporary, their decisions to return becomes increasingly difficult and unlikely over time (2016). The period from a political and economic perspective also has effects on returns because potential returnees take into account the conditions in the country of origin; therefore, return can also be analyzed from a historical perspective (Flahaux, 2015). Finally, short-term visits to the place of origin have an impact on the return decision (Mwaura, 2018; Wong, 2014); visits can enforce or diminish the return intentions, depending on the reality encountered by the visitor. Visits are closely related to maintaining social ties; however, they were not put in the category of individual factors because visits are only the means to keep up the relations but not the relation itself. It may also be the case that social ties are maintained without visits. To offer a quick overview about the evidence, a table covering all factors is provided on the following pages. Some factors operate both as driver and as barrier or can be counted as structural and social factors and therefore are listed twice in the table. Examining the table, the weight of individual and social factors becomes evident. The comprehensive table in which all evidence is collected and sorted by author can be found in the appendix.

	Driver	- Barrier
Structural	- Expectation of economic opportunities (potential of emerging market) - Political stability - Desire to give something back to society in country of origin - Expect work to be more satisfying in country of origin - Insecurity & poor economic situation in destination - Unsatisfying work conditions in destination - Better living conditions in sub-Saharan Africa expected - Cultural reasons: food, language, cultural clashes. - Expensive child-care in destination - Feelings of obligations towards home country due to studies financed by country of origin - Exclusion in destination society & prejudice	- Political and economic instability/crisis - Homophobic laws - Fear of traffickers due to debts - Deteriorating living conditions in sub-Saharan Africa - Good living conditions in destination - Distance & duration of migration - Large wage difference between destination and origin - Structural integration (economical, political, social)
Individual & social	- Homesickness/nostalgia - Family: marriage, family formation/reunification, family crisis (e.g. death of relative), responsibility for children and other relatives (e.g. aging parents) - Exclusion in destination society & prejudice - Economic & personal success (accumulation of human and financial capital) - Not having reached desired destination - Education of children - Transnational ties - Intention to migrate only temporarily - Possession of property in country of origin / having the intention & means to build a house in country of origin - Unemployment - Prior incidences of migration (repeated migration) - High level of education - Health: Stress and depression, injury - End of training/study/contract - Retirement - Inculcate African identity to children - Sense of stagnation in personal life course / personal ambitions - Emotional links - lack of economic mobility/ being overqualified for job - wish to be part of majority - environment to raise children	- Inclusion in destination society - Family in destination - Expectations of family in country of origin cannot be fulfilled (social success construct) - Feeling of exclusion from community in origin - Social class differences with non-migrant kinsmen - inability to transfer success to relatives - Fear of returning "empty-handed", loss of pride and status - Economic success - Education of children - Transnational ties: Visits and remittances prolong stay in destination - Lack of economic success & unemployment - High cost & risk taken for migration - Environment to raise children

	Driver	- Barrier
Policy	- Illegal status in destination - Possibility to re-migrate (to destination) - Difficulty to obtain work permit/license - Assistance in moving and settling	- Absence of knowledge about return programs - Illegal status in destination - Lack of possibility to re-migrate - Outlook to obtain a regular status in destination - Restrictive immigration policy in destination

Table 6: Overview of drivers & barriers for return to sub-Saharan Africa

Some of these drivers and barriers may be generalizable to return migration to other regions of the world, but others may be rather specific to sub-Saharan Africa. Because of the fact that regional conditions, especially the differences between the country of destination and origin, and the reasons to leave the country of origin in the first place influence return decisions, the regional specificity needs to be taken into account. Especially the structural drivers and barriers for return to sub-Saharan Africa may be comparable to reasons for return to regions with similar political and economic situations. Individual and social factors may be rather universal, probably shaped by cultural values, and weighted against economic realities and needs of migrants. To exemplify this, the return decision can only be driven by social factors if the economic situation of the migrant allows it. As the evidence suggests, policy restrictions are primarily bound to governmental decisions in the destination and therefore little can be said about policy factors in countries of origin. Unfortunately, no evidence about policies initiated by countries of origin was found. Nevertheless, this lack of knowledge about or existence of policies enhancing return migration also indicates potential for improvement through policy incentives set by sub-Saharan states to support return migration. Concludingly, the insights gained from this review may be applicable to other instances of return migration from wealthy and stable regions of the world to less wealthy and instable regions because of the rather frequent regional focus on migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. Some conclusions may also be drawn for return migration between countries on a similar developmental level because several studies used in the systematic review investigated intra-regional migration in sub-Saharan Africa. Although some assumptions can be voiced, the generalization of these factors needs to be tested in another research project.

3.3.1. Adapted Conceptual Framework

Already González-Ferrer et al. (2014) warned that the complex return decision and process cannot be captured by one single framework or theory. This viewpoint was

supported by the theoretical as well as empirical part of this thesis. I now try to set the findings of this thesis into relation to already existing theories and frameworks and extend the current knowledge about this topic through the insights gained by this systematic review. I am aware that composing a framework which accounts for all aspects of return migration might be impossible. Nevertheless, this should not keep us from constantly trying to expand our knowledge about this subject matter. A framework that aims at incorporating all aspects which have been tested to be vital in the systematic review will be developed in this chapter.

Numerous connections to already existing theories and concepts could be detected in the evidence. Although some results might be contradicting or only present one side of the story, an overview about found similarities is given because the adapted framework, which will be presented in the consecutive paragraphs, aims at incorporating most aspects which were found to be crucial in the systematic review. Instances of involuntary immobility could be found, for example when actual return cannot take place because of a lack of financial means. Thus, return migration could also be incorporated in the aspirations-capabilities framework by changing perspective to return migration from destination to origin. All instances from voluntary return, forced return and involuntary, voluntary immobility as well as acquiescent immobility in the destination are logic situations which could be investigated from the perspective of the aspirations-capabilities framework. Nevertheless, aspects of other concepts were found to be useful, too.

The complexity of the factor family illustrates that the push-pull dichotomy was found to be helpful in some instances and should not be dismissed completely, however, it should not be seen as an adequate tool on its own to explain return decisions because it simply does not manage to grasp the topic in its full complexity. To exemplify this, the factor family cannot be grouped according to the push-pull model because it can function as driver, retaining and even repelling factor and, thus, grouping according to the push-pull model would be insufficient and an explanation would be indispensable to avoid confusion. However, the elaborated Push-Pull Plus model by Van Hear et al. (2018) tries to incorporate more than push and pull factors and also accounts for various temporal and special differentiations. A similar approach pursued by Carling et al. (2015) is the four-way considerations model which also incorporates retaining and repelling factors. This approach was found to be useful in the analysis of the evidence because the push-pull dichotomy seems to fail in some instances.

Other parallels could be found with transnational theory and new economics of labor migration theory. Regarding transnationalism, transnational ties seem to play an important role in shaping return decisions, both as pull factor and retaining factor. This seems to be influencing the return decision in a rather complex way and sometimes even contradicting, nevertheless, this is an area of research which is worth to further pursue. In line with the new economics of labor migration theory, the results indicate that return takes place when the desired goal, usually economic success, has been achieved. However, it should not be forgotten that this theory only covers a very limited part of migration and the factors influencing migration and return migration go far beyond economic factors.

Taking stock of the current theories and in the light of the insights gained through the systematic review, an adapted framework is presented. The driving consideration was to include all frameworks which were proven to be significant in the course of the systematic review. The main focus of this framework is on the structural, social, individual and policy factors which shape return migration to sub-Saharan Africa. However, there are other more abstract and complex factors, contexts and impacts that also contribute to this decision and therefore I identify the need to extend the framework by Black et al. (2004). This framework was constructed with the aim in mind, to be as generalizable as possible and thus also applicable to return migration to other regions of the world. However, it needs to be tested in another scientific endeavor if this is the case or if this framework only covers drivers and barriers of return migration specific to sub-Saharan Africa. The suggested new framework is illustrated in figure 17.

In this model aspects of the framework by Black et al (2004), the aspirations-capabilities framework (Carling, 2002; Schewel, 2020), the Push-Pull Plus Model (Van Hear et al., 2018) and the "Four way considerations" model by Carling et al. (2015) , and, lastly, also aspects of transnational theory (Carling & Erdal, 2014) are included. Although aspects of the new economics of labor migration theory have been confirmed, this is not taken into account because this theory focuses on only one kind of migration and has a strong focus on economic factors. Finally, temporal and spatial aspects shall receive a more prominent place as in prior models because they seem to be important, too. Van Hear et al. (2018) account for temporal aspects by splitting up the factors in different categories according to when the effect on the decision occurs. Also Carling et al. (2015) mention the importance of the temporal aspect, but do not illustrate this in

the Four Way Considerations-Model. The model by de Haas (2021) did also shape the process of the creation of this framework, however, it is not represented in it because it was found to be too complex and the role of the various drivers is not in the center of attention. Nevertheless, it is a noteworthy contribution to migration studies and it might be the subject of further research interest. It also has to be noted that this paper was published after the work on this thesis had commenced and therefore only shaped the research process to a certain extent. Probably, with the knowledge of this publication, this thesis would have taken another direction. Now, we will take a look at the adapted framework, which was designed on the basis of the results extracted from the systematic review:
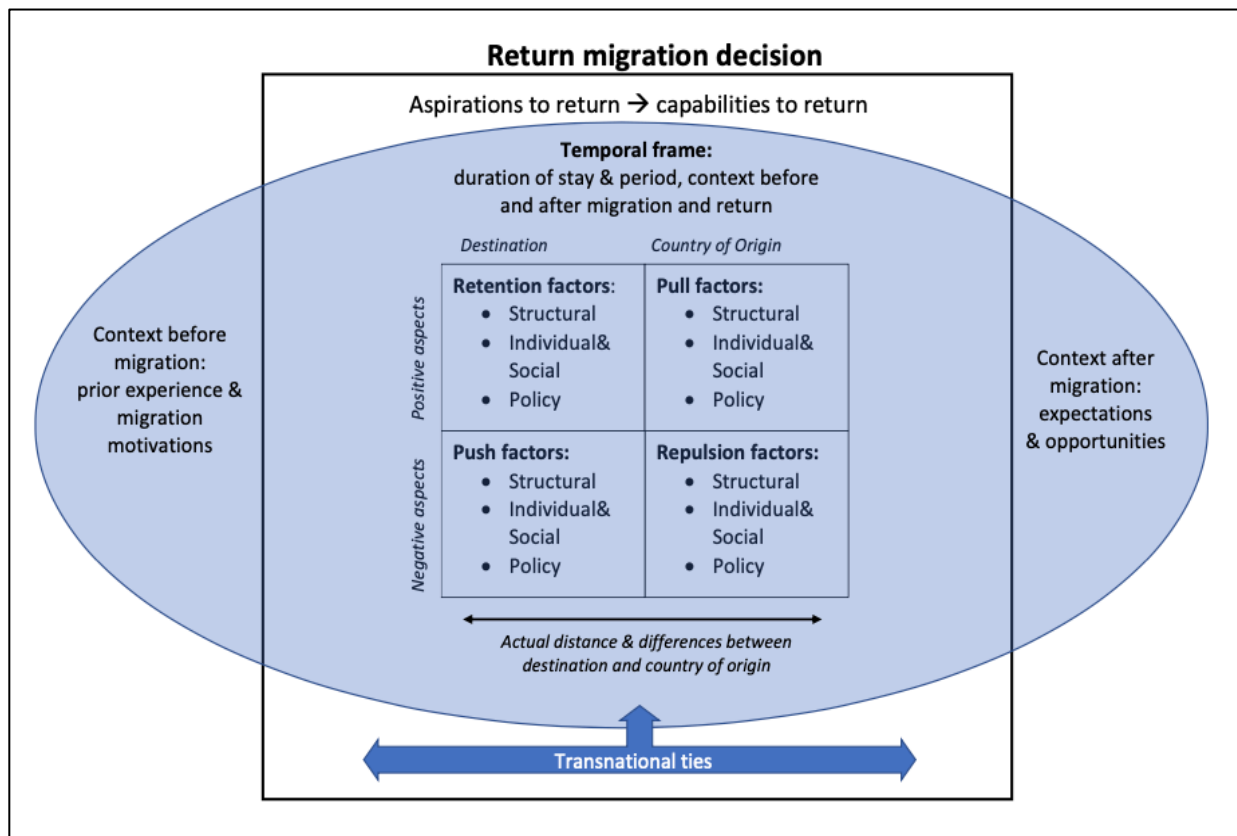
Figure 17: Adapted framework (own illustration)

In figure 17 the adapted framework is illustrated. At its center the four-way considerations originally composed by Carling et al. (2015) can be found. Within these considerations the three-level structure established by Black et al. (2004) is embedded. This decision was made because in all four areas factors of all levels can be situated. This combination was considered useful because some factors, such as family, fall into several categories. Family in general is a social factor but it can be a retention factor but also a pulling factor and in same instances it may even be a repulsion factor. To illustrate this: migrants from sub-Saharan Africa stated the desire for family

reunification as a pull factor, but others named family in the destination as retention factor and again others said they were afraid of not meeting expectations of their family members and therefore they are repulsed to return.

The four-way considerations model was also found to be useful because it also takes spatiality into account and differentiates above the push-pull dichotomy, thus, avoiding being too simplistic. In addition to the spatial differentiation of destination and country of origin, space also plays a role in regard to distance and the differences between the two places which were frequent factors stated in the evidence about sub-Saharan return migration.

Nevertheless, further aspects need to be considered. Aspirations and capabilities seem to play a major role in the decision-making process of the migrants because their desires and the encountered realities distinctively shape the decision to return. This also entails the decision to stay in the destination, postpone or completely dismiss the option of return. In the evidence it was frequently reported that the financial means need to be accumulated as a precondition for return and only if this is the case, aspirations can be considered. Therefore, also aspects of the aspirations-capabilities framework were incorporated. Another aspect influencing the return decision, as well as the context before and after return, is called transnational ties. Transnational ties may influence prior experience of migration and original motives to migrate in the first place, but also the expectations and opportunities which await the returnee after return to the country of origin. Hence, they also deserve to be mentioned in the adapted framework.

Additionally, the aspect of temporality has received distinctive attention in this new framework. In this respect several points need to be considered: Firstly, the duration of stay influences return decision, secondly, also the period in which the decision is made is crucial because political, economic, social and cultural conditions may have changed for the better or for the worse. Moreover, the returnee him/herself and the context from which he/she migrated from and to which he/she plans to migrate might have changed over time and according to the conditions of the periods. Therefore, prior (migration) experience and the original motives for migration also influence the return decision. Additionally, also the context which is expected to be encountered back home and potential opportunities back in the country of origin are subject to time and might have changed during the stay in the country of destination.

To clarify the process between the analysis of evidence and the composition of the adapted framework, it should be highlighted that the evidence extraction started off with a distinction of structural, individual and social factors and policy incentives and disincentives as suggested by Black et al. (2004). In the course of the evidence extraction, it was found to be useful to differentiate between push, pull, retailing and repelling factors. Therefore, it was an aim to analyze and describe the evidence according to this distinction. Everything, which did not fit into this construct was recorded separately.

3.4.   Limitations

The most present limitation of this study is that it was carried out by only one person; usually a team of at least two researches conducts the systematic review to avoid bias (Flahaux, 2021, 2015, 2017). Nevertheless, all studies with a low-quality rating were re-assessed to assure that criteria were applied evenly throughout the procedure, to minimize the probability of bias. Moreover, evidence could have been exploited even further and there remain points not covered by the review. This is partially due to the limited scope of the thesis but also the set goal and framework of the study. Some points did not fit in the theoretical framework or only appeared once and therefore were not addressed. The detailed elaboration of single aspects and the application of quantitative meta-analysis are for sure points which were not covered by this thesis but are of interest for further research. Another limitation is the varying quality of the studies used and in general, the rather low number of studies included in the review. However, Petticrew & Roberts (2006) state that also a rather low amount of evidence, sometimes even less then 10, may be sufficient for a review, depending on the amount of evidence available and the aim of the review. Concerning the balance between high quality and a sufficient selection of the available studies a suitable compromise needs to be found, which posed a challenge in this review.

Although the findings of this review add to the current knowledge about return migration, they still cannot be generalized because results only concerned sub-Saharan Africa. A larger systematic review covering return migration to other regions or even global return migration could further add to the knowledge about return migration and would help to reduce the research gap about the drivers and barriers of return migration.

4. Conclusion & Outlook

Several interesting insights could be gained through this thesis and different factors shaping the return decision were explored. Some existing theories and knowledge were supported by the results or this systematic review, concerning others contradicting evidence was found. One crucial insight is that the return decision is not only based on rational factors but often shaped by emotional and social factors such as longing for family or homesickness. Both, factors in the country of destination and origin have an impact on return migration: opportunities, living conditions and the political, economic situation are considered before a decision is being made. Policy incentives and disincentives, such as information about return possibilities and support schemes, seem to play a minor role but general restrictions to migrate in the first place but also to return to the destination a second time constitute a barrier for some potential returnees. In any case, the final return decision is a complex interplay of structural, personal, social drivers and barriers, additionally influenced by policy restrictions. Moreover, these factors are formed by more abstract aspects such as temporality and transnational relations. Despite the growing interest in environmental drivers on migration (Black et al., 2011; Borderon et al., 2019), it is interesting to note that none of the studies mentions this in the context of return migration. However, this might change in future as climate change accelerates and it might be a topic of interest for future research. These considerations can be embedded in a push-pull framework, but this would leave out some other crucial aspects such as prior experiences and expectations about opportunities upon return.

Return migration can also be viewed through the lens of (im)mobility because instances of voluntary and involuntary return – although this does not have to mean forced – can be observed in the evidence. Therefore, the aspirations-capabilities framework can be said to cover return migration as well. However, this deals with the topic from another perspective which does not put emphasis on the drivers and barriers of the decision-making process. Similarities between migration and return migration can be detected, but reasons for each movement may differ. The evidence suggests that migration is primarily led by economic reasons whereas return migration by social and emotional drivers. Nevertheless, one interesting insight is that prior migration experience and the risks taken to migrate are taken into consideration when migrants plan to return.

A noteworthy insight on the methodological level is that the field of return migration still offers much room for development and further research is necessary. This also means that it would be desirable that the results of this thesis are tested, criticized and improved by others. Besides this, also other research projects are needed to better understand the complex phenomenon of return migration in all its aspects. Especially large-scale surveys are scarce in this field but could contribute to improve the knowledge about the drivers and barriers of return migration in an objective and generalizable way and accounting for all – or at least more – groups of the large population of return migrants.

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6. Appendix

6.1. Data Extraction: Results

| Author(s) | Year | Structural | | Individual | | Policy | | Other |
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Benhayyoun, S.	2018	risks: homosexuality punishable by law, fear of traffickers (due to debts and reciprocity)	family at origin relies on income in destination, return would mean loss of income, **illegal status (undocumented) → stress, fear of being deported)**, better living conditions at destination	**missing home (nostalgia)**	**death of a close relative, longing for family,** relationship, inclusion in destination community, **exclusion in destination community,** wrong perceptions of family about destination (Europe), feeling of exclusion from community in origin, *(absence of) transnational ties,* return "empty-handed", pressure and expectations of relatives, lack of understanding, loss of pride and status upon return.		absence or no knowledge of return programs	drivers might change over time

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Bleck, J., Lodermeier, A.	2020		**insecurity and economic problems (forced), not having reached the desired destination, having earned enough money**		**desire to reunite with family and/or marry.**			
Flahaux, M.-L.	2021	**positive imaginations and expectations about (occupational) opportunities in origin,** deteriorating conditions (e.g. political instability, economic conditions, living conditions), ongoing crisis	better living conditions	**having acquired enough resources to be economically successful in country of origin (accomplished reason for migration)**	live with family in destination, *education of children*	*(lack of) possibility to migrate again (regular status, long-term permit or even nationality in destination)*	illegal status in destination (difficulty to migrate again), outlook to obtain a regular status	motives for migration also influence return decision (e.g. study aboard or professional posting --> higher wish to return)

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Flahaux, M.-L.	2017			**intentions to return at time of migration, acquisition of human and financial capital, having property in country of origin, unemployment, number of prior times of migration (re-migration increases chances of return), cumulation of resources for return**	family, **(lack of)** integration in destination	**possibility of re-migration or circulation between origin and destination**	harsher restrictions for migration to Europe (chances to re-migrate to destination are low)	capability to return necessary to actually be able to return (e.g. financial resources), time spent in dest. (more time spent increases the probability of return)

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Flahaux, M.-L.	2015	political and economic situation, (lack of) **opportunities after return**		initial intention to return: **original intention fulfilled (skills acquired in destination (educational and occupational)), intention to migrate temporarily, second attempt to migrate,** high costs (effort and money) and risks taken for migration, difficulties in accumulating financial means for return	*family*		restrictive policies, illegal status in destination (chances for re-migration low)	period (political, economic - temporal aspect)
González-Ferrer, A., Baizán, P., Beauchemin, C., Kraus, E., Schoumaker, B., Black, R,	2014	political and macro-economic conditions	*distance reduces chances for return (return more likely from other African countries than Europe), duration of stay (longer duration, higher probability of return)*	education **(high education increases probability to return)**	visits and remittances (prolong the stay in the destination), **children at origin,** having a partner or/and children in Europe does not make a difference		strict immigration policies, illegal status	brain circulation instead of brain drain.

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Kyeremeh, E.	2020	**give something back to society, food and language**		**love for country (home), injuries, lack of occupational opportunities (contracts) and age**	**family and friends**			food and language (cultural aspects)
Makina, D.	2012	*reason for migration (economic and/or political more likely to return if situation improved)*		*level of education* **(high level, professional qualification such as teaching, nursing, artisans → more likely)**, *age, economic activity, level of income (the higher the income the lower the probability, wage difference between destination and origin).*	*number of dependents left at home*			
Motlhatlhedi, K., Nkomazana, O.	2018		benefits of working and living in high income countries, **expensive child-care**	**accomplished goals, missing home**	**family challenges, left behind children, aging parents**			

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Mwaura, N. J.	2018	*economic and political climate,* **potential of Kenyan markets**	**unsatisfying work conditions**, structural integration, **cultural clashes**	**loss of job, prospects of work and start a business, earned enough money to build a house, stress and depression (due to worries about future and legal status)**	*desire to get married and start a family*	struggle of legal integration, lack of legal status		short-term visits
Nwadiuko, J., Switzer, G.E., Stern, J., Day, C., Paina, L.	2021	political stability					change in immigration policies (restrictive) and required work permit (increased requirements for licenses which would be lost)	

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
Nzima, D., Moyo, P.	2017	volatile and unfavorable socio-economic and political conditions (esp. Differences between countries)		successful economic integration	strong social integration: transnational family in destination, "social success construct" expectations of family and relatives: did not meet reality, it would be a shame to return. Social class differences with non-migrant kinsmen and inability to transfer success to relatives.			
Poppe, A., Wojczewski, S.,Taylor, K., Kutalek, R., Peersman, W.	2016	institutional crisis, war and conflict, working conditions, criminality, **working in source country would be more satisfactory due to the influential difference, obligations towards source country (due to studies) and**	good living conditions (also for children)	**prospects of being professionally successful in source country after having saved enough money, retirement**	*family*, health reasons, financial issues, **feeling of not belonging in destination/ of being home in origin, inculcate African identity to children**		no possibility for legal return	

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	Destination	Individual attributes	Social relations	Incentives	Disincentives	
		feeling to contribute something in return.						
Robinson, K. B.	2019	economic and political conditions		sense of stagnation, personal ambitions and life stage	emotional links	assistance in moving and settling (housing, schooling for children,…)		
Wong, M.	2014	expectation of better quality of life	exclusion and prejudice	comparison with non-migrant peers (socio-economically), network of peers (cross-border linkages), job dissatisfaction, insufficient economic mobility, being overqualified for the job and lack of respect in it. personal determination, financial capital (in particular to build or buy a house)	decision is tied to family members and their interests, environment to raise children, being part of the majority (not being the minority), constraints of family life			short-term visits

Author(s)	Year	Structural		Individual		Policy		Other
		Origin	**Destination**	**Individual attributes**	**Social relations**	**Incentives**	**Disincentives**	
Yendaw, E.	2013			**desire to invest savings and work at home, end of study/training/contract, unemployment**	**integration difficulties, family**	**governmental restrictions in destination**		

Key:

Italics = both barrier and driver

Bolt = driving factor for return

Normal = barrier/retaining or repelling factor for return

Yellow = qualitative studies

Orange = quantitative studies

Erklärung

Ich versichere:

- dass ich die Masterarbeit selbstständig verfasst, andere als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt und mich auch sonst keiner unerlaubten Hilfe bedient habe.

- dass alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäß aus veröffentlichten und nicht veröffentlichten Publikationen entnommen sind, als solche kenntlich gemacht sind.

- dass ich dieses Masterarbeitsthema bisher weder im In- noch im Ausland (einer Beurteilerin/ einem Beurteiler zur Begutachtung) in irgendeiner Form als Prüfungsarbeit vorgelegt habe.

- dass diese Arbeit mit der vom Begutachter beurteilten Arbeit übereinstimmt.

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