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Reintegrating after return: Conceptualisation and empirical evidence from the life course of Senegalese and Congolese migrants

Marie-Laurence Flahaux

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Abstract

The study of reintegration after return is often disconnected from research on the intention and the realisation of return. This article develops a new conceptual framework linking the intention and realisation of return with the reintegration process. This framework is used to study the cases of Senegalese and Congolese migrants through a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data from the Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE) project, which collected the life stories of migrants and return migrants in origin and destination countries, are combined with qualitative interviews with returnees. In line with the conceptual framework, the analyses highlight the role of migrants' projections about their potential reintegration for return as well as the importance for reintegration of the preparation of return. Besides the importance of migrants' aspirations, they also emphasise the role of external factors, such as family and context in origin and destination countries.

INTRODUCTION

The return of migrants to their country of origin is a priority for policymakers, whose focus is increasingly on migrant reintegration (Latek, 2017). Support programmes are put in place to assist returnees in their return and reintegration processes in view of ensuring that the return is long term and of avoiding re-migration (Kabbanji, 2013; Kuschminder, 2017). Yet, in practice, measures implemented to support migrants' return are often disconnected from those focused on reintegration (Battistella 2018). First, measures forcing undocumented migrants to return do not include any support for the reintegration process. Second, assisted 'voluntary' return programmes, presented as an alternative to expulsion (Black et al., 2004), are not always accompanied by reintegration assistance. Third, assistance targeted at supporting skilled return migrants in their activities and investments—because they are considered as actors of development—is in practice often proposed to them after their return (Flahaux and Kabbanji, 2013). In general, the migration experiences of individuals in destination countries, their aspirations, and the obstacles they face are rarely taken into account by reintegration programmes. In the empirical and theoretical literature on international migration, the role of migrant agency and of external factors is highlighted, but the intention to return, the return itself, and the reintegration are usually analysed as separate matters. Research has analysed the role of the migration experience in the intention to return, the return itself, or post-return reintegration (Gualda and Escriva, 2014; Ruben et al., 2009), focusing on the impact of integration and transnationalism in particular (Carling and Pettersen, 2014; de Haas et al., 2015). However, there is a lack of studies taking into account the long-term life aspirations of individuals and highlighting their anticipation during migration of an eventual reintegration.

In this article, reintegration is defined as the process taking place after return, when return migrants have to find their place in the society of their origin country¹. I examine the reintegration of return migrants through the lens of individual life trajectories, in an approach that takes into consideration migrants' return intentions as well as the return itself. This approach considers that the issue of reintegration in the country of origin is important throughout migrants' trajectories and not only after their return.

This article has both conceptual and empirical facets. On one hand, I propose a conceptual framework that draws connections between intention to return, return, and post-return reintegration, and emphasises the role of migrants' aspirations and of external factors through their entire trajectory, from the moment of their original departure all the way to a re-migration after their return. On the other, I apply this framework to the case of Senegalese and Congolese migrants to Europe in order to examine the role of reintegration in their trajectory as well as of their own aspirations and the context in which they find themselves. I use transnational and biographical data from the Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE) project along with interviews with return migrants to Senegal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) in order to examine this question from a longitudinal and comparative point of view.

The first section of this article focuses on this study's theoretical approach: relying on existing theories of migration, a new conceptual framework with reintegration at its heart is presented. The second section applies this framework to Senegalese and Congolese migration by examining those countries' specific contexts, explaining the research hypotheses, and setting out the qualitative and quantitative data that were used. The empirical results are presented in the third section, while the final section draws conclusions and recommends the adoption of a holistic approach centred on post-return reintegration.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The question of post-return reintegration in migration theories has already been examined in the literature (Cassarino, 2004; Flahaux, 2013; Van Houte, 2014; de Haas et al., 2015). The theoretical approaches do not address the topic in the same way, and point to certain explanatory factors related to the individuals, their social network, and the context. While neoclassical theory (NE) and the new economics of labour migration (NELM) theory do not directly address reintegration, some authors expand on these, stressing the importance of the migration experience and the motive for migration for the post-return reintegration: they argue that a failure of migration would lead to reintegration difficulties post-return, and that migrants are less likely to encounter obstacles in the reintegration process when they have earned sufficient assets and knowledge to invest in their origin countries (Cassarino, 2004; de Haas and Fokkema, 2011). The structuralist approach emphasises that the specific contexts in which people live influence and limit the options available to them, complicating reintegration into the country of origin for return migrants (Cerese, 1974). Network and transnationalist theories highlight the importance of the social capital offered by social and familial ties in countering the risks they may face upon return (Massey et al., 1993; Cassarino, 2004). Based on these latter theories, Cassarino (2004, 2008) developed a conceptual framework in which he stresses that it is essential to take into consideration the planning process for return: migrants have different circumstances and motives that may affect how well the return is prepared for, which in turn affects how reintegration unfolds. Preparation takes time and can be subject to changes in personal or contextual circumstances in the destination country or the country of origin. An optimal preparation of return requires that the decision to return has been taken freely and only once the necessary resources have been acquired. Migrants whose return took place a stage where the return was not sufficiently prepared for and who had not gathered the necessary resources may find reintegration extremely challenging and end up considering leaving again (Cassarino, 2004, 2008).

Conceptualising post-return reintegration taking into account migrants' life trajectories

A new conceptual framework is needed to address the issue of reintegration throughout migrants' life trajectories, taking into account the different points at which it is relevant: at the time of departure, during migration, and after return. This new conceptual framework must also include the links between intention to return, return, and reintegration. Cassarino's (2004, 2008) approach, which focuses on how a return is decided on and prepared for and the impact of these elements on reintegration after return, provides a good starting point. As shown in Figure 1, this approach emphasises that the conditions under which return takes place influence the way reintegration unfolds. In other words, the return affects the reintegration (arrow a). Secondly, the way in which migrants imagine their reintegration into their country of origin while still abroad can have an impact on their return (arrow b). The idea is that migrants anticipate the future and imagine, depending on their past, current, and foreseeable situation in the country of migration, what their lives would be like if they decide to return. Unless the return is compelled by external factors, it is according to this anticipation of their reintegration that the decision to return or not return is made.

- FIGURE 1 HERE -

One way of taking into account people's anticipation of the future is to look at their intentions with respect to return. These intentions can be at the time of the migrant's departure or during their migration. Migrants' return intentions depend on their **aspirations**, defined as the underlying factors driving them toward a situation they feel will be better for them and their family. Aspirations are about seeking out an ideal state of well-being, while return intentions are more specifically about the desire to return to the country of origin or to remain abroad. The logic is that those with the

intention of returning are those who aspire to go back to live in their country of origin; these migrants imagine a positive reintegration experience. Those who do not intend to return and aspire to remain abroad are those who expect that reintegration into their country of origin will be difficult and thus prefer to avoid living there again. This notion fits in with the conceptual framework of migrant agency; in keeping with de Haas (2011), who suggests developing a theory that takes into account the full complexity of migration, it is important to consider the fact that individuals make choices based on their own subjective aspirations and preferences. Several studies have shown that migrants' intention to return may be postponed or change over time over the course of migration (El Hariri, 2003; Sinatti, 2011; Wanki and Lietaert, 2018). It is indeed important to stress that individuals' aspirations can evolve, as the migration experience may affect what individuals think is the best for their future and that of their family (Boccagni, 2017).

Besides migrant aspirations being a determining factor in the intention to return, which can influence the decision to return and post-return integration, **external factors** can also play a role in the intention to return, realisation of return, and reintegration. On the one hand, structural factors, be they economic, political, or social, may present as constraints against the freedom and aspirations of individuals. For example, unfavourable circumstances in the country of origin may have a negative effect on return intentions and on return, with migrants anticipating obstructions to their reintegration, and may indeed be detrimental to the reintegration of those who do return. However, structures should not be considered solely as constraints on the agency of individuals. Indeed, as de Haas (2011) points out, structures also have an impact on what individuals believe is best for them and their families. Migrants' aspirations are imbued with their own values and with those commonly held in their society. Migration is also deeply rooted in a social context (Guilmoto, 1998), and this must be taken into account. For example, migrants may voluntarily intend and choose to return to their country of origin in accordance with prevailing social norms. An economically and politically favourable context may also favour the reintegration process when it offers stability and opportunities for return migrants.

On the other hand, social networks—including family—can have an impact and may present as opportunities or constraints for migrants along their life trajectory (Schapendonk, 2015). They can influence the migrants' intention to return or stay abroad, and they can push migrants to return or prevent them from doing so, as well as help them to reintegrate or be a burden for a smooth reintegration.

Figure 2 outlines the link between intention, return, and reintegration, while highlighting the role played by migrant aspirations (agency) and external factors.

- On one hand, if migrants feel that the place where they can flourish and achieve their life goals is in their country of origin, they will have an intention to return. To this end they will acquire human, social, and financial capital in preparation for their return to render their reintegration easier. For some, these preparatory efforts will not lead to an actual return. External constraints, such as their family situation or legal status, may prevent them from returning even if they want to; return then becomes a myth. In other cases the desire to return fades with their gradual integration into the destination society; the fact of finding their place and feeling comfortable may go hand in hand with the lack of desire to return to the country of origin (case 1). For migrants who return having prepared well for it, reintegration is likely to be successful (case 2), and as a result they have little or no desire to go back abroad; on the other hand they may develop an intention to migrate again, depending on their aspirations for the future and on external factors after their return.
- On the other hand, those who aspire to live abroad generally do not prepare for a return since they do not foresee having to reintegrate. Either they do not go back and remain in the

destination country long term (case 4) or external circumstances cause them to return against their wishes. In this case reintegration is difficult (case 3) and they wish to re-migrate from their country of origin, unless their aspirations change.

- Among those who return (cases 2 and 3), there are intermediate situations, such as unplanned returns where migrants are nonetheless able to mobilise some of their acquired resources, and returns that were anticipated but took place earlier than planned, without the necessary preparation. In these cases reintegration experiences can be mixed.

Figure 2 also shows that external factors may have an impact on migrants' life course, whether by encouraging or discouraging them to want to return, forcing them to do so, or compelling those who have returned to (wish to) re-migrate.

- FIGURE 2 -

APPLICATION OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO SENEGALESE AND CONGOLESE MIGRATION

Comparative analysis

This article aims to empirically test this conceptual framework using the cases of Senegalese and Congolese who have migrated to Europe, and who potentially return to the region of Dakar or Kinshasa respectively. Senegal and DR Congo also make for a good comparison in studying the impact of the context in the country of origin because these two countries are different culturally and have followed different paths since independence. Senegal is known for its longstanding status as one of Africa's most stable countries, while DR Congo has been in the grip of conflict for decades. Mobutu's long tenure was a period of relative stability because his political regime was highly centralised and repressive, but the early 1990s were marked by deep political turmoil following the failure of the democratisation process, leading to unprecedented levels of rioting, army mutinies, and pillaging in Kinshasa (Braeckman, 2009). The instability continued after Mobutu's ousting from power by L. D. Kabila in 1997, until the latter's assassination in 2001 (Hesselbein, 2007). The first elections took place in 2006, but the situation remains fragile. Economically both the Senegalese and Congolese people have seen their living conditions worsen over time, especially following the implementation of structural adjustment programmes and the withdrawal of the state from the social sectors (Thioub et al., 1998; Braeckman, 2009). In DR Congo the economy was severely hit by the deteriorating political situation, and the early 1990s was the country's darkest period. It can be expected that the different contexts in Senegal and DR Congo have had different effects in terms of migration, especially the initial intention to return, the achievement of return, and the reintegration post-return.

Research hypotheses

The main hypothesis from the conceptual framework is that the question of reintegration is present at the different stages of migrants' life trajectories: (i) from the start of migration, they anticipate an eventual reintegration; (ii) during their migration, if they wish to return, they arrange their return to achieve the optimal conditions for reintegration; and (iii) upon return, reintegration depends on the planning they did beforehand. This section elaborates on these hypotheses through an interpretation of the results of existing empirical research.

- (i) The first hypothesis is that right from departure migrants look to the future and imagine their eventual reintegration, and base their desire to return—or not—on this anticipation.

- As such, the reason for migration is a factor that is worth taking into account. We assume that African migrants who leave to study abroad are most likely to want to return in order to work in their country of origin once they have obtained their qualifications in Europe, which will help them obtain a good job upon return (Hazen and Alberts, 2006; Baruch et al., 2007). The situation is similar for those going abroad for a professional posting, whose employment upon return is secure. However, with the considerable deterioration of living conditions in DR Congo, these assumptions may not be valid for migrants from that country, who may anticipate a difficult reintegration. When migrants leave to improve their living conditions it may be supposed that they do so to maximise their income and do not intend to return. Yet the literature on Senegalese migrants shows that they do intend to return to Senegal once they have acquired a certain level of financial capital in Europe (Sinatti, 2011), as suggested by the NELM theory. Finally, it can be expected that those who leave for political reasons have little likelihood of wanting to return or of returning as they would not wish to go back to living in the environment from which they fled (Klinthall, 2007; Carling and Pettersen, 2014).
- The period during which they left can also have an effect, especially for the Congolese. Compared to migrants who left before 1990, those who left later would be reluctant to go back to live in an environment they know is difficult, and thus would have less intention of returning (Marcelli and Cornelius, 2001; de Haas and Fokkema, 2010, 2011). They would also be less likely to return if they are concerned about the lack of jobs and the political climate (Marcelli and Cornelius, 2001; Moran-Taylor and Menjivar, 2005). Studies have also shown that migrants can postpone or abandon their return in the face of ever more restrictive migration policies, worried about not being able to easily leave again (Massey and Espinosa, 1997; Marcelli and Cornelius, 2001; Cornelius, 2001; Carling, 2004; de Haas and Fokkema, 2010).
- In this sense, although it has not been shown in the literature, it can be expected that those who encountered difficulties in reaching Europe—having passed through a country of transit—have less intention of returning and are indeed less likely to do so, for fear of encountering similar obstacles should they want to re-migrate to Europe if reintegration goes badly.
- Finally, migrants who had already started a family in the origin country are expected to have higher levels of intention to return and of actual return, especially to Senegal (Sinatti, 2011).

(ii) The second hypothesis relates to the importance of preparing for a possible eventual return while abroad because migrants want to optimise the conditions for *reintegration*.

- Migrants who leave with the idea of returning can be expected to be more likely to do so.
- The acquisition of resources probably also plays a major role in an eventual return. It is assumed that property ownership in the country of origin is a determining factor of return (Massey and Espinoza, 1997; Carling, 2004), especially for Senegal (Sinatti, 2011), and that the economic situation of a migrant's household in Europe is a factor for return as it is an indicator of their financial status (Klinthall, 2007; Sinatti, 2011).
- Finally, irregular migrants are likely to not return out of a desire to see their status regularised (Sinatti, 2011), but we may also suppose that their status prevents them from easily accessing the resources they need to prepare for reintegration.

(iii) The third hypothesis is that the success of reintegration post-return depends on its prior preparation.

- It is expected that migrants who did not want to return experience reintegration problems (Ruben et al., 2009), especially those who were deported (Carling, 2004; Golash-Boza, 2014). Faced with these problems, they can be expected to want to re-migrate from their country of origin. In contrast, migrants who return voluntarily generally do not envisage another departure (de Haas and Fokkema, 2010). Although this has not been examined in any empirical study, I expect that return migrants who wanted to return have a low likelihood of leaving again, while those who did not intend to return are likely to re-migrate.

- The duration of migration is expected to have an ambiguous effect on reintegration. On the one hand, it is expected that migrants who remained abroad for a long period of time are more satisfied with their situation post-return than those whose migration was short because the former had more time to prepare for their return (Carling, 2004). On the other hand, they may be less satisfied after their return because they are no longer well connected to their country of origin due to their long absence, and face greater culture shock when moving back compared to those who stayed abroad for a shorter period.
- Regarding migrants' financial status, which can be a reflection of their preparations for return, it is expected that those who do not own property in the country of origin are more likely to want to re-migrate, precisely in order to acquire financial resources (Massey and Espinoza, 1997), especially for Senegal, where becoming a property owner is a sign of social success (Sinatti, 2009). Still, we expect that those in this group will not always have the means to re-migrate.
- Finally, being a national of a European country would make it easier to be able to re-migrate to Europe, whether it be to adopt a transnational existence or because of difficulties encountered upon return (Gaillard, 1997). It is thus a part of the preparation strategy for return.

A mixed-methods approach

The question of reintegration for migrants from Senegal and DR Congo is analysed using a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative data were drawn from the Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE) project, which collected the life stories of migrants and return migrants in origin and destination countries in 2008 and 2009 (661 Senegalese migrants in the Dakar region, France, Italy, and Spain, and 464 Congolese migrants in the Kinshasa region, Belgium, and the United Kingdom²). These biographical surveys used the same questionnaire for the two countries, thus allowing for comparable analyses. Despite possible memory biases due to the questions being asked retrospectively, these data are particularly rich and illuminate many aspects of the life trajectories of individuals, including their intention to return at the time of their arrival in Europe, the eventual return, and the eventual re-migration of those who have returned.³ The determinants of return (and re-migration) may be studied thanks to the fact that information is available on migrants who have returned (or have re-migrated) as well as on migrants who have not.

The profiles of Senegalese and Congolese migrants differ. At the time of their arrival in Europe, the Senegalese and Congolese migrants in the quantitative sample were respectively 28 and 29 years old. 28% of Senegalese are women, against 42% of Congolese. Congolese migrants are more educated, with 44% of them having a tertiary level of education, against only 3% on the Senegalese side. The primary reason for migration of Senegalese is to improve their living conditions, while Congolese migrate primarily for educational reasons. At the time of their arrival half of migrants intended to return (48% of Senegalese and 53% of Congolese). I conducted discrete-time event history analyses to study the determinants of return intention, return, and re-migration. The predicted probability of the initial intention to return and the cumulative probability of return and of re-migration were also computed to allow for a better comparability of results for Senegal and DR Congo. In this paper, these quantitative results are summarised; the tables with the main results can be found in Appendices A, B and C.⁴

These quantitative findings are complemented by and interpreted in light of qualitative interviews that I conducted with nearly 96 returnees in the Dakar and Kinshasa regions over several field trips between 2009 and 2012. Contacts for returnees were provided by people met during journeys on public transport, who were asked whether they knew individuals who would agree to tell me their return experience. As for the MAFE survey, the respondents had to have left Africa after the age of 18, stayed away for at least one year, and have returned to Senegal or DR Congo for at least one year

(or with the intention of staying for more than one year). Table 1 presents the sample of qualitative interviews conducted with Senegalese and Congolese returnees to the regions of Dakar and Kinshasa. This sample is not representative of all migrants returned to these regions, but was constituted in relation to my own research needs⁵ and the realities of fieldwork. A majority of men were interviewed in the two cases (contacts for women returnees were transmitted less often and more difficult to find). In Senegal, I met an equal share of people having finished secondary education or not, while in DR Congo almost all of my respondents had reached this level. The first destination country was France for the Senegalese and Belgium for the Congolese, but the other destinations were diverse. The reasons for migration were related to educational, professional, economic, family, and economic factors for migrants from both countries, as well as political factors for the Congolese. Senegalese return migrants were 37 years old and Congolese 44 years old on average when I interviewed them, but migrants from both countries were 34 years old when they returned. This is a reflection of the reality of return migration that is not for retirement reasons.

TABLE 1 HERE

Even if the questions were only posed to return migrants and focused on their past history and intentions, the qualitative data allow for a better understanding of the aspirations of migrants all along their life trajectory as well as how they perceived the constraints that they faced. However, as when the life course of individuals is investigated, it is important to keep in mind that past (reconstructed) aspirations might have been altered by changing life conditions (Boccagni, 2017). Initially, the purpose of this mixed-methods research was “completeness”: I had planned to use both quantitative and qualitative data in order to obtain a complete picture of the phenomenon of return and reintegration (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2017). However, I quickly realised that the purpose had changed to become rather “developmental” or “sequential”, as I used the results provided by one strand as hypotheses to be tested in the next (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2013). Indeed I went back and forth several times between qualitative and quantitative analyses over the course of research, in order to test and better understand the results obtained. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data yielded more reliable and richer results for appreciating the full complexity of the question of reintegration before and after return.

RESULTS

Anticipation of reintegration

The analyses investigating the role of motive for departure, context, experiences before arrival in Europe, and family situation on the intention to return and on the actual return demonstrate that right from their departure and during their migration Senegalese and Congolese migrants do anticipate the conditions of their reintegration after their return (Appendixes A and B).

First, the analyses on the motives for migration show that already on arrival in the destination country they have the intention of returning to the country of origin if they know they will have access to good opportunities there.

Quantitative analyses reveal that migrants from both countries who leave for their studies have about an 80% chance of intending to return. They expect to land a good position upon their return with their qualifications acquired abroad. In the qualitative interviews, **Joseph**, a Senegalese who migrated to France to study printing, said: *“I went to study (...); I left with ambitions: I wanted to do this, this, that (...). I knew I would come back.”* Some already had professional careers before leaving and left to study abroad in order to move up the ranks and gain greater responsibilities upon their

return, like **Gustave**, a Congolese who went to Belgium to get his doctorate: *“The idea was to leave, write a doctoral thesis, and come back as a professor and civil servant.”*

Those who leave for a professional posting also do not generally plan to settle abroad, especially the Congolese. The quantitative results show that their chances of intending to return was 90% (60% for the Senegalese).

The quantitative results also reveal that those who migrate to Europe in view of improving their living conditions have weaker initial intentions to return, especially for the Congolese. The differences between the Senegalese and the Congolese, and the impact of context in the country of origin, were highlighted in the qualitative interviews. The interviews carried out in Kinshasa show that the Congolese who migrate for a better future do not intend to return, discouraged by the challenges of daily life and the lack of opportunities in DR Congo. Figuring that the country will remain politically and economically unstable and that this would hinder their reintegration, they leave for good. **Barnabé**, a Congolese who left to escape the country’s economic problems, explained: *“It wasn’t working. I told myself that if I stayed there things would be tough for me. That’s why I went to Europe [...]. I left for good, yes—that was what I wanted.”* On the other hand I never heard such statements from the Senegalese I interviewed. Most interviewees in Senegal said their intention had been to save up money overseas in order to return to Senegal and live more comfortably. As **Lamine** explained: *“Here in Senegal, it was clear that I wasn’t able to save [...]. I told myself that I would leave in order to try to accomplish something and then come back to Senegal.”* **Makhtar**, a Senegalese who migrated to Italy to build up his savings in order to open his own woodworking workshop in Senegal, described the path that he followed and recommends: *“I feel that a young person who wants to work, who wants to achieve something in this country, but doesn’t have the means to do so should go elsewhere to acquire those means and then come back and do it.”*

The quantitative analyses also show that the Congolese migrants who left for political reasons are almost as likely to want to return as to not want to return.

The analyses on the motives for migration also reveal that migrants anticipated a future reintegration not only at the time of arrival in the destination country but throughout their migration. This is reflected in the quantitative analyses showing that the Senegalese who left to study have a high chance of returning, but not the Congolese, who, aware that economic and political instability is liable to make their reintegration difficult, choose not to risk returning. **Aristide**, a Congolese interviewee, said: *“I did not think I was leaving for good. For me, at first, it was the chance for me to study, to train. But in the meantime, back home, things did get worse.”* Although he no longer wanted to return, in the end he had to for administrative reasons.

Quantitative findings also show that the Senegalese who left to improve their living conditions initially had a stronger intention to return than did those who left for family reasons, but in the end did not return in any greater proportion. My hypothesis in this regard was thus not supported. This is likely because their accumulation of financial capital progressed more slowly than anticipated, thus delaying their return (Sinatti, 2011), which they preferred not to carry out in suboptimal conditions. Nor were those who left for professional reasons as likely to return as anticipated. Deteriorating conditions in the country of origin may also have had a negative impact on their return.

Also, the quantitative findings indicate that Congolese who migrated for political reasons almost never return. This suggests that the migrants who left in these circumstances made a clean break from their country of origin, even if at first they did not initially intend to settle in Europe. Their very low chance of returning may be explained by the lengthy procedures involved in gaining asylum and by the negative news that reaches them about the political climate in DR Congo, which would work against their reintegration, as was suggested in the qualitative interviews.

Second, the context in the country of origin is an indicator of migrants’ anticipation of their reintegration, especially for the Congolese. Indeed, as demonstrated in the quantitative analyses,

those who arrived in Europe after 1990 are less likely to want to return than those who migrated before 1990. The 1990s marked a sea change in DR Congo in comparison with previous decades. Political and economic instability affected the return intentions of migrants who initially did not imagine they could go back and live in such an environment. The Senegalese people also experienced a deterioration in their economic conditions, but not to the same degree as in DR Congo, which comes through in the results. Analysis of the qualitative interviews carried out in DR Congo reveal the differences in rationale between the Congolese who left in these two different periods. **Jean-Philippe**, who migrated to Belgium in the 1970s, described his outlook at the time of his departure and acknowledged that things are different today: *“I never thought I would stay in Belgium [...]. I told myself that I’m the oldest child and the family needs me. I didn’t plan to stay there; I could only be useful to them if I came back. That was the idea from the start. Maybe if it was today, as things stand now, I might see things differently... In any case, at that time, I really didn’t think I’d stay.”* Another recurring theme in their statements is a feeling of dismay or bitterness at the difficult living conditions and instability in DR Congo. **Justin**, who migrated in the 1990s, said: *“At that time the country really was not stable. There was no sense of security [...]. I was really disappointed in my country. I told myself that I’m going to leave and start a new life.”* It is possible that restrictive migration policies also play a role in the initial intention to return (Cornelius, 2001; de Haas and Fokkema, 2010; Marcelli and Cornelius, 2001), but this element did not come through in the qualitative interviews.

The initial intentions of the Congolese migrants in terms of return were confirmed by the quantitative analyses. The chances of return for Congolese living in Europe in the 1990s and 2000s are lower than those of Congolese who were in Europe before that time: these two groups are separated by 40 percentage points in terms of their likelihood of returning after 10 years in Europe, even when the intention to return at the time of arrival was taken into account. This suggests that the ongoing crisis in the country has had the effect of cancelling many plans for return. In the case of Senegal, all things being equal, the period effect is not significant, suggesting that the crisis in Senegal is not as severe.

Third, the migrants also anticipate their future in terms of their experiences before their arrival in Europe. In the quantitative analyses, it appears that migrants from both countries who did not reach Europe directly but spent at least one year in another African country first are less likely to envision a return. In fact, the Congolese—but not the Senegalese—who did not arrive in Europe directly have virtually no chance of returning. The fact of not having been able to get to Europe directly, probably due to restrictive migration policies, would have been very costly financially as well as taking a personal toll, which explains their desire to avoid having to go through it again and their settling in Europe for the long term.

Fourth, consistently with the quantitative analyses, qualitative interviews reveal that Senegalese migrants have a greater propensity to return to their origin country in order to live with their families, while the Congolese tend to favour family reunification in Europe. Two contrasting examples illustrate these different views: **Fadel**, who lives in Senegal with his family, said: *“I didn’t want my children to grow up as immigrants; I had seen that most immigrants’ children have a failed education”*, while **Matthieu**, a Congolese whose family lives in Belgium, explained: *“Instability, and the mentality here [in Kinshasa]. No, I don’t want to bring up my children in this environment.”*

Planning for reintegration prior to return

While abroad, individuals prepare for their return in an attempt to optimise the conditions for their reintegration. This result is reflected in the analyses on the role of the intention to return, the

economic situation in the destination country, and the administrative context of the actual return (Appendix B).

First, this effect is evident from the quantitative analysis of the factors of return, which shows that Senegalese and Congolese migrants who returned were more likely to have envisaged returning at the time of their arrival abroad.

Second, while preparing for return also involves the accumulation of financial resources, contrary to what was expected, the quantitative results do not show that migrants who own property in their country of origin are more likely to return than the rest. However, Congolese living in very comfortable conditions are twice as likely, after 10 years spent in Europe, to return to DR Congo than those living in households with less financial means.

Third, planning for return may include ensuring being able to leave again after the return. Irregular migrants know that this cannot be guaranteed, and in the quantitative analyses the probability of their returning is very low, especially—and significantly—for the Congolese migrants. All else being equal, after 10 years they are 20 times less likely to return to DR Congo than their regular compatriots. This result is important on two levels. First, it shows that the migrants who return are those who know that they will be able to go back and forth between DR Congo and Europe, as well as re-migrate if they encounter problems after their return. Second, it proves that most returns are not the result of deportation or of programmes encouraging migrants to return. The reason irregular migrants do not return is that their goal is to be regularised; they do not want to risk returning as they would be prevented from returning to Europe later. In the qualitative interviews, it emerged that having a long-term residence permit in Europe or nationality of a European country is a strong determinant in the decision to return for migrants from both countries. **Thomas**, for example, explained that the fact that his wife is now Belgian makes it easier for him to travel between DR Congo and Belgium, where his family is located: *“I don’t need to apply for a visa anymore because my spouse is Belgian [...] I have a residence card as the spouse of a Belgian. This was one of the conditions for me to go back.”* Those who are nationals of a European country know that this allows them to come back to that country if reintegration in their country of origin does not go well. This is what **Fallou**, a Senegalese who returned to try to open his own concert hall in Senegal, said: *“I really want [...] to try. Because in any case I’m French, so I can come [to Senegal]—I love my country, I make an effort, but I know that I can always go back to France and continue my career there.”* For the Congolese there is a different type of discourse, more related to the possibility of repatriation in case of unrest. **Gaëlle** explained that she accepted to follow her husband to DR Congo because she was assured of being able to leave again: *“If there is conflict, war, things like that, and for the children: the fact of having the nationality means that I can hop on a plane and leave right away!”*

The way reintegration takes place depends on its preparation

The lack of preparation for return often leads to re-migration, as the results regarding the initial intention to return, the migration duration, the material situation, and the administrative situation suggest (see Appendix C for the quantitative results).

First, when migrants plan for their reintegration before returning to their country, they are more likely to be satisfied with their return. This is clearly reflected in the qualitative interviews. **Diallo**, who returned after having acquired the resources to open a consulting business in Senegal, is flourishing. He said: *“I thought about my firm for years, and when I set it up, it went like clockwork.”* He does not want to live in Europe again. On the other hand, for migrants who returned before they were ready, reintegration is challenging, and they often express the desire to re-migrate. For

example, **Antonin**, who was deported to DR Congo, is clear about his need to leave again: *“It’s my biggest source of concern; I don’t want to live here.”* In the quantitative analyses, migrants’ willingness to return is measured according to their initial intention at the time of their arrival in Europe of returning to the country of origin. The quantitative results show that the Senegalese migrants who intended to stay in Europe for good but had to return—likely due to external circumstances—had a high chance of re-migrating to Europe. However, this is not the case for the Congolese, for whom it can come down to a lack of resources to be able to leave again, with the economic situation in DR Congo particularly difficult.

Secondly, it takes time to prepare for one’s return, and if the migration period is too short, the result may be re-migration. The quantitative analyses reveal that Senegalese who stayed in Europe for a relatively short period of time (less than 6 years) are more likely to re-migrate than those who stayed longer (a 50% chance of re-migration versus 22% for those who stayed longer). It seems that, for the Senegalese, a longer migration period is a factor in the accumulation of resources, and thus, in successful reintegration. This result, however, is not significant for the Congolese, who seem to face comparatively greater culture shock when moving back after a long absence.

Thirdly, as expected, but again only for the Senegalese, the return migrants who do not own property (a house, land, or a business) are the ones most likely to re-migrate to Europe, as shown in the quantitative analyses. Ten years after return, the chance of re-migration for those who are not property owners in Senegal is 58%, while for the same migration period those who already own property have only a 28% chance of re-migrating. This confirms that for the Senegalese, for the return to be long-term, property ownership as well as sufficient pre-return preparation is essential.

Finally, the quantitative analyses reveal that the fact of having acquired nationality in a European country is not a significant factor for the Senegalese, but it has a positive effect on re-migration for the Congolese. Despite the unstable context in DR Congo some Congolese did risk going back, but made sure first that they would be able to leave again for Europe if they encountered difficulties. Their return was highly likely to end in re-migration. In DR Congo, some children of return migrants informally told me that they regretted that their parents had not acquired nationality in their destination country before returning because if they had they would probably be in Europe now.

CONCLUSION

At the moment the theoretical and empirical literature on return migration addresses the intention to return, the return itself, and the post-return reintegration separately, without linking these phenomena. This paper proposes a new conceptual framework in which the issue of reintegration is central in the migrants’ life trajectories, and in which their aspirations, as well as external factors, are central in the anticipation, preparation, and process of post-return reintegration.

Consistent with this conceptual framework, the results indicate that the phenomena of initial intention, return, and reintegration are clearly interconnected. Indeed, it firstly appears that *migrants anticipate their reintegration*. According to what they feel is most suitable for them and for their family, they can intend, from the beginning, to stay in Europe temporarily or settle there permanently. In general, Senegalese and Congolese migrants who positively imagine their future reintegration in the country of origin do plan to return. Secondly, *when migrants have the intention of returning, they prepare for their return*, acquiring financial and human capital in order to maximise the chances of successful reintegration in Senegal or DR Congo. Thirdly, the findings reveal that *the preparation for and anticipation of return play an important role not only in the return itself but also*

in reintegration post-return. In this way, migrants who intend to return have higher chances of returning, while returnees who were forced to return experience many difficulties reintegrating and are more likely to re-migrate to Europe. These results confirm the conceptual framework in showing that the aspirations of migrants are important from the beginning of their migration all the way to after their return. However, migrants' choices can be influenced or limited by structural factors.

On the one hand, the comparison between Senegal and DR Congo reveals that the context in the origin country has an effect on migrants' strategies regarding reintegration. While Senegal has been politically stable since independence, DR Congo has experienced decades of strife and hardship. Living conditions have gradually become more difficult for the people in both countries, but the economic crisis has been deeper in DR Congo. It appears that *migrants are less likely to intend to return at the beginning of their migration or to return when the conditions in their home country are deteriorating*, which is especially the case for migrants from DR Congo after 1990. A particularly difficult environment in the origin country encourages migrants to migrate permanently or to postpone their return, due to their poor prospects for a successful reintegration in their country of origin. On the other hand, the results highlight the important role played by restrictive immigration policies in the intention to and realisation of return: *the harder it is to migrate to Europe, the less chances of migrants intending to return and actually returning.* The possibility of circulating easily after return is important for migrants when they anticipate their future in their country of origin when they return.

Ultimately, by putting the issue of the reintegration of migrants back at the centre of life trajectories, it can be said that migrants are right to anticipate and prepare for their reintegration before they return, because return is risky and a successful outcome indeed does depend on how they have anticipated and prepared for it. The results of this research should draw the attention of policy makers when they design programmes and policies aimed at promoting return and reintegration: they should indeed better consider the aspirations and life course of migrants, and understand that migrants do return when they have prepared for their reintegration and have good prospects in their country of origin. When migrants return involuntarily and have not been able to prepare for their return, the chances of successful reintegration are low. Such experiences do indeed commonly result in re-migration to Europe.

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Figure 1. The links between anticipation of reintegration, return, and reintegration

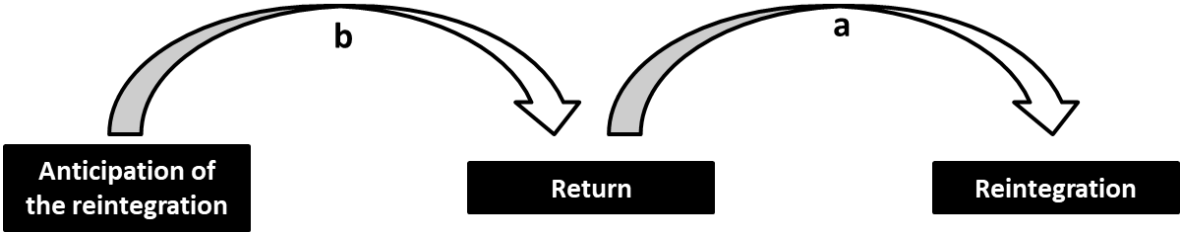


Figure 2. The links between intention to return, return and post-return reintegration, and the role of aspirations and external factors

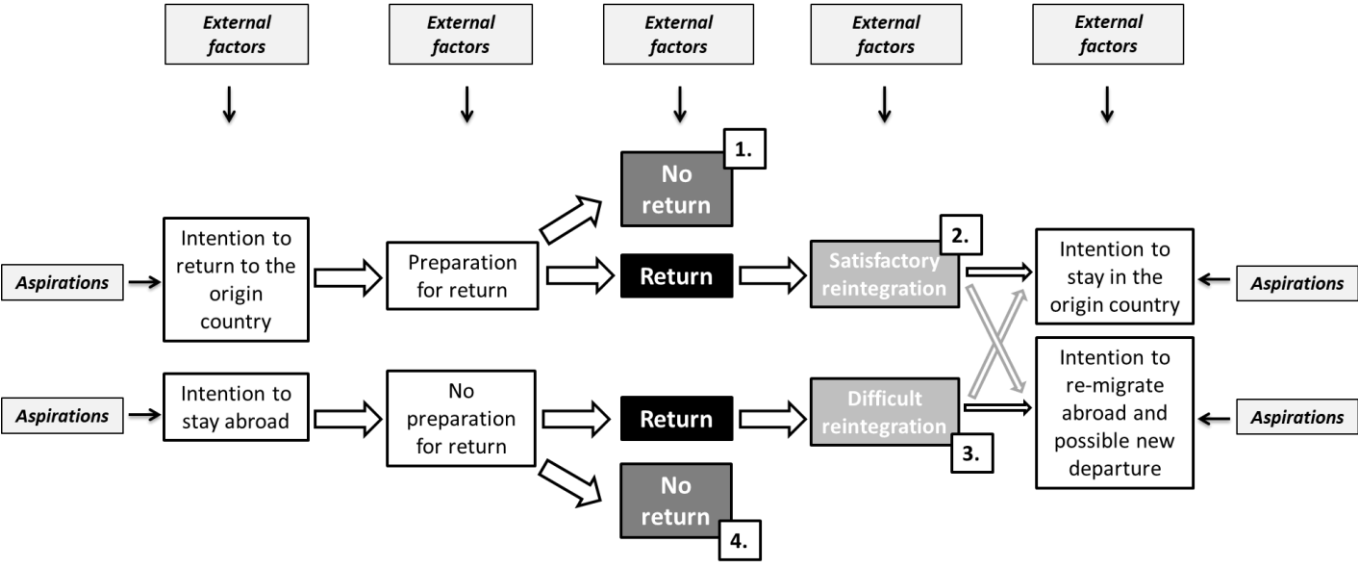


Table 1. Characteristics of return migrants interviewed in the regions of Dakar and Kinshasa (N)

| Variables | Modalities | Senegalese return migrants (Dakar) | Congolese return migrants (Kinshasa) |
|---|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Sex | Men | 38 | 33 |
| | Women | 15 | 10 |
| Educational level | Has not reached secondary education | 26 | 1 |
| | Has reached secondary education | 27 | 42 |
| Motive for migration | Studies | 22 | 19 |
| | Professional opportunity | 4 | 2 |
| | Improving living conditions | 23 | 7 |
| | Family reason | 4 | 6 |
| | Political reason | 0 | 9 |
| Destination country | France | 25 | 4 |
| | Italy | 9 | 0 |
| | Spain | 6 | 0 |
| | Belgium | 3 | 24 |
| | United Kingdom | 0 | 5 |
| | Other (Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, etc.) | 10 | 10 |
| | | | |
| Age at the time of return (mean, in years) | | 34 | 34 |
| Age at the time of interview (mean, in years) | | 37 | 44 |
| Total | | 53 | 43 |

Appendix A. Determinants of the intention to return for Senegalese and Congolese migrants at the time of their arrival in Europe (logistic regressions, results weighted and expressed as odds ratios, net effects)

| Variables | Modalities | Senegalese migrants | Congolese migrants |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Motive for migration | Family (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Improving living conditions | 2.23* | 0.56 |
| | Work reason | 4.77** | 44.60*** |
| | Studies | 12.78*** | 13.03*** |
| | Political reason | / | 1.54 |
| Came directly from country of origin | Yes (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | No | 0.34* | 0.18*** |
| Family situation | Family in origin country (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Family in destination country | 0.43* | 0.89 |
| | Single and childless | 0.76 | 0.50 |
| | Family in both origin and destination countries | 0.27* | 0.68 |
| Period of arrival | Before 1990 (réf) | 1 | 1 |
| | From 1990 | 0.74 | 0.17*** |
| Number of "events" | | 293 | 225 |
| N | | 713 | 521 |

Source: MAFE-Senegal (2008) and MAFE-Congo (2009) life event history surveys

Note: The logistic regressions controlled for the following variables: sex, age, level of education, migration row, administrative situation, destination, and material situation

***: $p < 0.01$; ** : $p < 0.05$; * : $p < 0.10$

Appendix B. Determinants of actual return for Senegalese and Congolese who migrated to Europe (discrete time logistic regression; weighted results, expressed as odds ratios, net effects)

| Variables | Modalities | Senegalese migrants | Congolese migrants |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------------|--------------------|
| Motive for migration | Family (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Improving living conditions | 0.73 | 2.07 |
| | Work reason | 1.08 | 2.96 |
| | Studies | 4.66* | 3.13 |
| | Political reason | 1.00 | 0.07** |
| Initial intention to return | No (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Yes | 2.51** | 4.62** |
| Administrative situation | Documented (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Undocumented | 0.67 | 0.02*** |
| Came directly from country of origin | Yes (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | No | 1.30 | 0.24* |
| Family situation | Family in origin country (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Family in destination country | 0.13*** | 0.10*** |
| | Single and childless | 0.62 | 1.35 |
| | Family in both origin and destination countries | 0.29* | 2.19 |
| | Family in origin country (ref) | 0.24 | 1.00 |
| Material situation | Property in origin country (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Property in destination country | 0.35 | 1.00 |
| | No property | 0.68 | 0.65 |
| | Property in both origin and destination countries | 0.60 | 1.00 |
| | Property elsewhere | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Economic situation of the household | Resources more than sufficient (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Resources not more than sufficient | 0.79 | 0.33** |
| Period | Before 1990 (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | From 1990 | 0.69 | 0.23*** |
| Number of events | | 104 | 86 |
| N (number of person-years) | | 8041 | 5893 |

Source: MAFE-Senegal (2008) and MAFE-Congo (2009) life event history surveys

***: $p < 0.01$; **: $p < 0.05$; * : $p < 0.10$

Note: The logistic regressions controlled for the following variables: sex, age, level of education, migration row, migration duration, visits to the origin country while abroad, professional situation, and destination.

Appendix C. Determinants of re-migration for Senegalese and Congolese who returned to their origin country (discrete time logistic regression; weighted results, expressed as odds ratios, net effects)

| Variables | Modalities | Senegalese migrants | Congolese migrants |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Migration duration | Less than 6 years (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | 6 years or more | 0.29** | 0.58 |
| Initial intention to return | No (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Yes | 0.27* | 2.67 |
| Material situation | Property in origin country (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | No property | 3.13* | 0.38 |
| | Property in destination country | 0.66 | / |
| Nationality from a European country | No (ref) | 1 | 1 |
| | Yes | 5.10 | 19.43* |
| Number of events | | 49 | 48 |
| N (number of person-years) | | 1029 | 1044 |

Source: MAFE-Senegal (2008) and MAFE-Congo (2009) life event history surveys

***: $p < 0.01$; **: $p < 0.05$; * : $p < 0.10$

Note: The logistic regressions controlled for the following variables: sex, age, level of education, migration row, migration duration, family situation, visits to Europe while in the origin country, professional situation, duration since return, and period.

¹ In this conception of reintegration, there is no criterion of durability. The individual may perceive reintegration as “successful” or “sustainable” or not.

² In the quantitative sample, 293 Senegalese migrants and 225 Congolese migrants intended to return at their arrival in Europe. Among Senegalese migrants 104 returns took place, and 86 among Congolese. There were also 49 new departures among Senegalese return migrants and 48 among Congolese.

³ For detailed information on the MAFE project, see: <https://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/>

⁴ Detailed analyses as well as a full description of the data samples are available in Flahaux (2013).

⁵ For example, I met a larger proportion of migrants who were undocumented in Europe before returning in order to be able to study the effect of deportations and ‘voluntary’ assisted return programmes (Flahaux, 2017)