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Cognitive Return Migration: Factors that shape returning the mind in situ to invest in a homeward future in Ghana

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4 **Cognitive Return Migration: Factors that shape returning the mind in situ to invest**
5 **in a homeward future in Ghana**
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20 Author's note
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4 Abstract
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6 Cognitive migration, the process of mentally travelling ahead of one's actual physical move,
7 is receiving attention in migration studies. However, the reverse process of mentally
8 returning after failing to move physically, has not received much attention. What are the
9 enablers to this return process? I answer this question to make a case for cognitive return
10 migration. Through the in-depth interviewing of 11 immobile cognitive returnees, the study
11 explores the experiences of these prospective migrants, who displace their migration
12 imaginations outward and later re-configure them homewards without physically moving.
13 By initially becoming cognitive migrants and being cognitively displaced, these prospective
14 migrants fail to physically travel to their imagined destinations. This creates a situation
15 where their imagination of the distal sphere overwrites their proximal, here-and-now
16 embodied experience. In this state, they invest all their resources, time and money in
17 furtherance of their repeatedly botched dreams of travelling to the imagined destination.
18 This failure starts a cognitive return process that foregrounds the consciousness of the
19 proximal, here-and-now sphere, enabling them to seize opportunities they had earlier not
20 "seen" or discounted to invest in a homeward future.
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38 Keywords: (im)mobility, imagination, displacement, cognitive return
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Introduction

Although potential migrants may physically be immobilised, becoming involuntarily immobile (Carling, 2002, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018; de Haas, 2011; Schewel, 2015, 2019), their minds can migrate ahead to the imagined destination (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; Mescoli, 2014) with the hope of uniting their bodies and minds to embody their future. Cognitive migration, according to Koikkalainen and Kyle (2016, pp. 759-760) is a process involving prospective migrants “visualising themselves in a future time and place prior to making the actual move”. In the event of failure to make it to the imagined destination, however, prospective migrants are left with one of two options. They either persist in pursuing an outward future abroad or they re-direct their imagination for a better life homeward. Choosing the former would mean prospective migrants retaining their involuntary immobilisation status (Carling, 2002) or remaining cognitive migrants (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016). Opting for the latter, signifies prospective migrants emplacing their minds in their countries of origin, developing a homeward future orientation as against outward future orientation for cognitive migrants and investing in a homeward future. Abandoning one’s desire to travel abroad for greener pastures in favour of pursuing same in the country of origin, is a process of cognitive return migration/emplacement. The aim of this paper is to explore the process of cognitive return migration, which is a dis(em)placement process and its enablers for cognitive migrants who elect to bring their minds back home to invest in local futures.

Many potential migrants are unable to embody their migration aspiration. Thus, they become physically immobilised or involuntarily immobile (Carling, 2002, 2014, 2017; Carling & Schewel, 2018; Schewel, 2015, 2019; Setrana, 2021). In spite of being physically immobile, their minds travel ahead to the imagined destination (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; Mescoli, 2014) with the hope of uniting their bodies and minds to embody

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4 their future. Setrana (2021) and Van der Meij (2017) show in different settings how some
5
6 Ghanaian youth cope with their involuntary immobilisation. Carling (2002) recognises that
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8 while many young people in developing nations have the aspiration to migrate to better
9
10 themselves socially and economically, there are few opportunities for this to happen,
11
12 resulting in 'the age of involuntary immobility' (Carling, 2002, p. 5). The involuntarily
13
14 immobile fails to cross a border to the imagined place away from home. A distinction
15
16 between the involuntarily immobile as put forward by Carling (2002), Lubkemann (2008)
17
18 and by Setrana (2021) in the Ghanaian context and the cognitive migrant is apposite.
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20 These authors focus on the physical limitations that immobilise the migrant aspirant. They
21
22 do not, however, highlight their ability to travel to the destination country mentally or
23
24 cognitively. Koikkalainen et al. (2020) and Womersely (2020) study cognitive migrants
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26 who are already at the imagined destination physically to unite their minds and bodies to
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28 embody their imaginations, but fail their asylum application. The realities of cognitive
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30 migrants who fail in situ, but return their minds (i.e., immobile cognitive returnees) to
31
32 invest in a homeward future remains underexplored in migration scholarship. Failure is
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34 defined in this paper as inability to reach the imagined destination. This definition is
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36 mindful of the step-wise character of migration and does not seek to flatten the very
37
38 convoluted, complex and contentious character of migration trajectories (Schapendonk
39
40 et al., 2018). How then do cognitive migrants bring their minds back to the country of
41
42 origin to invest in a homeward future? In other words, how do they foreground the
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44 consciousness of their embodied experience in the country of origin to invest in a
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46 homeward future?
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51 **Theorising cognitive return migration**

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53 Cognitive return migration occurs when the mind, first travels (or is displaced)
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55 ahead of the body to the imagined destination and is subsequently brought back (or is
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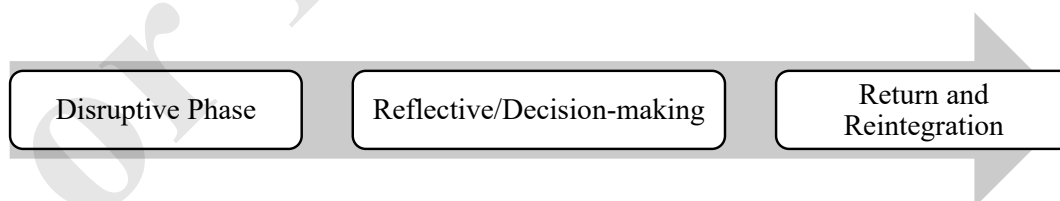
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4 emplaced) home after embodied migration fails. The mind travelling ahead of the body
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6 and getting displaced means that cognitive migrants imagine going to destinations
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8 perceived to hold the key to their future, mostly Europe or the USA. Some, however, go to
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10 imagined destinations on the Continent and other emerging destinations in Asia. They
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12 sustain these imaginations by feeding them with all kinds of resources (social media, films
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14 from the Global North, here-say, etc.). These imaginings seem partly to “overwrite” the
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16 proximal sphere of experience, to the point that some start to change their embodied
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18 practices – they wear or eat as-if they were in a distant place. Yet they still function, to
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20 some level, in the here and now: they communicate, they eat and move around. Hence, it
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22 seems that that their imagination made them loop out, and not really loop back - these
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24 people keep partly imagining while being here and now. Their reality of the present is
25
26 backgrounded by their imagination of the destination country. It is as if, rather than
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28 alternating between proximal and distal experiences, they let these two types of
29
30 experiences coexist. Thus, these people are neither here nor there, or perhaps, both here
31
32 and there. In some ways they could be seen as in a liminal state, or even, a liminal hotspot
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34 (Greco & Stenner, 2017; Stenner, 2017). The failure signals an imaginative rupture
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36 resulting in pre-migration trauma, loss of time and money and beginning the return
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38 process (Bekoe, 2021). Thus, failure jolts them out of this imaginative travel and
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40 foregrounds their here-and-now reality becoming a turning point that starts the cognitive
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42 journey back home.
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47 Cognitive return migration is not a linear process; many enablers are responsible
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49 for the cognitive return/emplacement process. These diverse components exist across
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51 multiple scales (micro, meso, macro) and interact to generate cognitive emplacement. It
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53 begins from perceiving a macro emigration-immigration context that generates migration
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55 imaginations and subsequent cognitive displacement. The macro emigration-immigration
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4 context however, refuses a physical border-crossing. To respond to the consequences of
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6 this failure, immobile cognitive returnees through their meso-level networks at home and
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8 abroad are helped to cope with the trauma of failure via psychosocial support, exposure to
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10 livelihood opportunities and mentoring. In the end however, it takes immobile cognitive
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12 returnees' micro-level biographical experience and individual agency to leverage
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14 opportunities that the rupture of failure opens up. The enablers of cognitive
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16 return/emplacement “overlap with and feed into one another, interacting in an open-ended,
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18 recursive, and synergistic fashion” (Emirbayer & Mische, 2002, p. 988).

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20
21 In all, I delineate three stages in the cognitive return/emplacement process. These
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23 comprise disruptive/rupturing stage, the reflective and decision-making stage and the
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25 return and reintegration stage. The acute disruptive or rupturing stage comprises the
26
27 immediate aftermath of being refused a visa (i.e. reactions including shock, disorientation
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29 and confusion. The reflective and decision-making stage, involves taking stock of one's
30
31 life. It is a metacognitive process resulting in the evaluation of decisions. The return and
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33 integration stage, is the stage where immobile cognitive returnees settle and appreciate the
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35 benefits accruing from the decision to stay at home.
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39 **Figure 1: Stages of Cognitive return migration**



Although imagination (Chambers, 2018; Ingold, Smith, 2006; Zittoun, 2020) or
projectivity (Emirbayer & Mische, 2002) drive cognitive return and reintegration, they do
so within the structural constraints of a given context. The act of cognitive return and
reintegration reflect the agency-structure conundrum in the social sciences. The five (5)

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4 enablers of cognitive return or emplacement work within the different temporalities and
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6 unfolding multiple contexts that cognitive return migrants or immobile cognitive returnees
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8 as social actors embed. Furthermore, the process of emplacement involves a re-
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10 composition of imagination through “subjective and/or narrative reconstruction of the self
11
12 through self-interpretive activity during critical life transitions (Cohler 1982 cited in
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14 Emirbayer & Mische, 2002, p. 1010). This self-reflective and reconstructive process is
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16 facilitated by posttraumatic growth processes and other enablers. With the exception of
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18 posttraumatic growth that is occasioned by the body’s failure to travel abroad, all other
19
20 enablers are existing contextual factors that immobile cognitive returnees, in their earlier
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22 state as cognitive migrants, perceive as not conducive to the pursuit of a homeward future.
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24 This starts the whole cognitive displacement process giving birth to the cognitive migrant
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26 via cognitive migration and subsequently, the immobile cognitive returnee through the
27
28 phenomenon of cognitive return migration. The methodology section that follows, is
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30 designed to find empirical support for this theorising of cognitive return/emplacement.
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33 34 **Methodology**

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36 This study explores the experiences of cognitive migrants and the process of
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38 returning their minds in situ to invest in a homeward future. It adopts a phenomenological
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40 perspective. Study participants come from Accra and Kumasi because of the population
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42 and urbanising features of the two cities. Accra is the capital city of Ghana and houses all
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44 diplomatic missions in Ghana. Kumasi, on the other hand, is the second largest city in
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46 Ghana. The people from Kumasi are steeped in the culture of migration. In a study of
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48 remittances from abroad to Ghana (Mazzucato et al., 2008) found out that, the Greater
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50 Accra and Ashanti Regions were the most recipients of foreign remittances. Based on
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52 this, they concluded that “most Ghanaian migrants located outside Africa come primarily
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54 from these regions” (p.111). Other scholars have also established Kumasi as a hub for
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4 international migration in Ghana; with most Ghanaian diasporan populations tracing their
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6 root to the city (Dankyi et al., 2015; Manuh, 2000; Manu et al., 2010; Setrana & Tonah,
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8 2014). Others have also established that inhabitants of Kumasi played a pioneering role in
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10 international migration from Ghana to other parts of West Africa, Western Europe and
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12 North America in the second phase of migration of outmigration from Ghana in the 1970s
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14 and 80s (Anarfi et al., 2003). Interestingly, the term “burger”, that has gained popularity
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16 for referring to Ghanaian return migrants from overseas, originated from Kumasi. Thus,
17
18 most youth in the region aspire to travel outside the country in search of greener pastures.
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22 Participants were recruited through personal networks and contacts using different
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24 nodes of recruitment to ensure sample diversity (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Consistent
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26 with techniques for researching hard-to-reach populations, I used the purposive sampling
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28 method and snowball sampling techniques. In a study of failed migrants in Accra, Setrana
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30 (2021) used the snowball technique to recruit her participants. She surmised that the
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32 failed potential migrants are hard to reach because the topic of failed migration is
33
34 sensitive and difficult to talk about. To be included in the study, a participant should
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36 have desired travelling abroad in search of livelihood options and considered this desire
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38 or dream unfulfilled as a result of either failing a visa application, or being deported after
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40 reaching the destination country. The imagined destination should also require an entry
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42 visa.
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46 In all, lived experiences of eleven (11) male participants with average age of 42
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48 years formed the analytic base for this study. The study is both retrospective and
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50 introspective study about individuals who have ever aspired or imagined to travel, got
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52 frustrated with the process and abandoned their migration dreams in favour of making a
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54 living in Ghana. In this regard, some of the participants’ age of first attempts was in their
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56 early 20s making them youthful. The demographic profile of migrant aspirant in Ghana
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4 includes the highly educated and averagely well-off individuals. All participants were
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6 married except one. Average number of children for participants was 2. They were all
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8 gainfully employed; four worked for government, 4 work for private entities and three
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10 were self-employed. Seven imagined destinations in North America/Canada while the
11
12 rest imagined destinations in Europe/UK. The average number of times they attempted
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14 travelling abroad and failed was 2.5. Two had secondary level education while majority
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16 had graduate level education with one of them postgraduate. All of them professed the
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18 Christian faith and were predominantly Akans, the largest ethnic group in Ghana (Ghana
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20 Statistical Service, 2021).
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23
24 I used flexible in-depth biographical life-history interview guide to conduct all
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26 interviews because it provided data on the experiences, perceptions, emotions, beliefs,
27
28 and behaviors of participants (Teye, 2012). The interviews were conducted between
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30 November 2019 and February 2020 in two Ghanaian cities as previously mentioned. With
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32 the participants' permission, they were audio recorded. The interviews were 60 to 120
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34 minutes long and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were held face-to-face pre-COVID-19
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36 in homes, shops, church auditoriums and via phone (two interviews) in the wake of
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38 COVID-19. The University of Ghana Ethics Committee for the Humanities reviewed the
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40 study and approved it with reference number ECH 010/19-20. Pseudonyms, instead of
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42 interviewees' real names, have been used.
43
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46 Data analyses followed a rigorous process of listening to the audio tape after
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48 every interview, transcribing them verbatim and listening to the audios again to
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50 crosscheck all transcripts. This was to ensure trustworthiness and fidelity to my
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52 participants' voice and lived experience; where there were omissions, I inserted them. I
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54 coded the entire transcripts using the QDA Miner free edition. I examined the codes and
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56 grouped them under preliminary themes. This was followed by further titration towards
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4 global abstraction, where some themes were excluded or merged as new ones were
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6 developed. It was an intensely iterative process. In the end, economic, sociocultural,
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8 social support, posttraumatic growth and self-regulation emerged as the enabling themes.
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Cognitive migration or displacement

Imagining life abroad results in anticipatory behavioural changes that would make acculturation manageable. Some cognitive migrants change the way they talk; they slang purposefully. The appearance of cognitive migrants, changes; convinced of their trip abroad, some cognitive migrants such as Richie, invest in not only buying clothes, but actually adorning themselves in these clothing:

That's why I am saying that almost every day I am wearing t-shirt; the little money I got, I would go and buy canvas [sneakers], American polo shirt and dress like them. I was even behaving like an American because I made [up] my mind that when I go to America that's the way I was going to behave. Because if the guys come, our friends who travel, aha when they come you will see them wearing this canvas [sneakers] and these things so ahaa that's my mind.

Bashiru believes that holding a face towel and a branded bottle of water is sufficient proof of his "social becoming" and views this behavior as a status symbol, hence doing so is a step towards reaching his "wannabe-status": "I could just fill an empty Voltic bottle with pure water and take [a] face towel". The lifestyle changes also affected the eating habits of some cognitive migrants. The presence of William's wife; a white British lady in Ghana, alienated him from his cultural delicacies of kenkey, hot pepper and fried fish: "because she was here, I couldn't eat kenkey, you know, we ate rice, fried rice, small salad, chicken and then we all take one coke that's all". William's experience with drinking water was recounted with deep sadness:

To cast my mind back, the most painful aspect was that when you had a wife, a white woman who said I will not drink your water and I will not drink ordinary water so you needed to take a soft drink like mineral or coke or something or flavoured water whereby you were using your money as a young growing man, you were using your money to buy all these things. The woman was taking all these things without water and you apply for [a] visa and you're refused. See, it's frustrating.

Mindsets: cognitive migrants versus immobile cognitive returnees

One feature differentiating cognitive migration from cognitive return migration is the mindset of cognitive migrants and immobile cognitive returnees. I compare the mindsets of cognitive migrants and immobile cognitive returnees to show the centrality of the mind in the displacement and emplacement of prospective migrants. To highlight the transformative nature of the dis(em)placement process, I compare previous cognitive migrants with those who have now become immobile cognitive returnees. Table 1 below, shows the then and now mindsets of previous cognitive migrants who are now immobile cognitive returnees. The mindsets of Richie, William, Matthew, and Victor before return provide empirical support for the cognitive migration hypothesis. As their narratives show, their minds were not in Ghana; in other words, they had foregrounded their consciousness abroad. Their minds, as Koikkalainen and Kyle (2016) posited travelled ahead of them. They were completely disinvested in Ghana; everything they were involved in was to facilitate their eventual embodied migration to the imagined destination. In contrast, when they made the “return journey” home in situ, their focus changed. Matthew for example, had to literally “go for his mind” after “fixing” it into images he was encoding from movies and pictures abroad, to be able to emplace and be reintegrated through his own agency and support he had from friends.

Table 1: Mindsets of cognitive migrants and immobile cognitive returnees

	Cognitive migrant (displaced mind)	Immobile cognitive returnee (emplaced mind)
Richie	All my mind since I was a young man has focused on one thing: travelling to America; the word America was enough inspiration because I used to watch a lot of American movies; seeing their hairdo and the way they dress	So, you see, the mind, at that time you couldn't tell me anything to change my mind because I wanted to go outside and make it
William	Yes, my mind, my soul, everything was there; I was just waiting to board the plane and be there	I decided not to venture into that thing
Bashiru	As for traveling abroad, in fact, it was like I was here but my mind wasn't here. My mind was abroad, it was my body that was in Ghana. During the run up to the 2016 elections, I told my aunty that fire should engulf Ghana so we all become refugees and leave Ghana. There should be outbreak of war in Ghana so that we can all flee Ghana on the grounds of being refugees so we can settle in someone else's country because I didn't have hope.	When the thought of traveling to abroad was strong, I thought one was worthless, if he did not travel to abroad. But today, when you attack Ghana, you attacked me. I'm building, I'm building. Presently, if someone tells me there are no jobs in Ghana, I look at that person quietly and says "you don't have vision
Victor	I thought that you had to travel to be successful and even amongst all the other countries I felt that it was America that you had to go to be very successful in anything you want to be.	I think that I was being boyish at the time, probably following people and they the idea they had about travelling
Matthew	When I was preparing, my mind wasn't here at all, let me be frank. I was reflecting on how the place was, how I would even sit in class probably with my colleagues, how the environment there would be like. That was what I was thinking about. From pictures I see to movies I watch...fixing yourself into these images was what was going through my mind.	So, I had to go for my mind. I needed to bring my mind back here. Let me just say It was tedious because you have seen yourself at a certain height and now you are no more there. You need to reorganize yourself

Enablers of Cognitive Return or Emplacement

Although imagination (Chambers, 2018; Ingold, 2013; Smith, 2006; Zittoun, 2020) or projectivity (Emirbayer & Mische, 2002) drives cognitive return and reintegration, it does so within the structural constraints of a given context. The act of cognitive return and reintegration reflect the agency-structure conundrum in the social sciences. Enabling factors remain the same for both cognitive migration and cognitive return migration. It is the direction of the mind's mobility that determines their instrumentality. The category immobile cognitive returnee, clarifies the spatial/physical immobility (i.e., "that they never left") and the mental or cognitive mobility experienced. Again, return enablers do not only "tie" migrant aspirants to their home communities; they "untie" them from their home communities as well depending on where their mind or consciousness is foregrounded making migration in a spatio-temporal-cognitive phenomenon (Bekoe, 2021).

There are five (5) enablers of cognitive return/emplacement namely economic, sociocultural, social support, posttraumatic growth and self-regulation. These enablers work within the different temporalities and unfolding multiple contexts that cognitive immobile returnees as social actors embed.

Economic enablers

Economic enablers comprised gainful employment and further education. Participants recounted being gainfully employed as the most important factor that facilitated their cognitive emplacement. Meanwhile, in their earlier state as cognitive migrants, where imagination of abroad seem to have "overwritten" their here-and-now

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4 experience, they rejected opportunities to work or further their education in Ghana.
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6 Bashiru articulates the view of most participants in this regard:
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9 There was a time I applied for a job and I was called but because my mind
10 was not in Ghana, I told them I had not applied for any job why should I
11 come for an interview because then I had a week to attend an interview at
12 the Royal Norwegian Embassy at Labone, Accra. So, then my mind was
13 there so when I was called for the interview, I told them I hadn't applied for
14 any job because I knew I was going abroad; all did not amount to anything.
15

16
17 Participants' economic opportunities were enhanced as they ventured into pursuing
18 further education in Ghana. Employment was a key factor ensuring cognitive return.
19

20 Current employment status comprised working for self, government entity and private
21 companies. For some participants, the search for employment was a tedious process
22 characterised by show of industry and failure before landing a government job. Bashiru
23 after trying many times and failing, was introduced to a friend's mother who imported
24 merchandise from Togo to sell in Ghana. He also tried his hands at poultry with a friend
25 and run at a loss because of lack of support. When he had reached his wits' ends and was
26 about to retire to the village for the second time, an elder sister connected him with
27 someone who worked in Ghana's security apparatus, underscoring the strength of dyadic
28 ties (Granovetter, 1973). This interaction eventually secured him a job in a government
29 agency. The life-changing moment offered by securing this job is aptly described by
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43 Bashiru as follows:
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45 So, we were there waiting for some time then a number called me "are you Bashiru?"
46 I said "yes", "ok your letter is ready for medicals" the caller added. I had also heard
47 that once you were called for medicals, it meant you had the job. I also knew I had
48 no HIV and I didn't have any other health condition. So as soon as they called me, I
49 said "oh thank you God". I had earlier told God that if He blessed me with a job, I
50 would offer my first pay as a sacrifice unto Him. So, when they called me for the
51 medicals and I went through, then I realised at the time that I was going to pursue
52 my livelihood in Ghana.
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4 Richie also recounted how a friend he met during the term of office of Kufour former
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6 president of the Republic of Ghana:
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9 I changed my mind that I won't travel again during Kufuor's time. I met
10 one of my friends who knew I had done some computer training so he
11 asked me to go and do some installation at ministries. So, I went there and I
12 did all the installation and as a result of that we won a contract and so from
13 there I decided not to travel and then things started for me. I didn't want to
14 travel because the man removed the travel from my mind.
15

16 For Matthew, a disappointment from one friend for money to buy food instigated him to
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18 deeply reflect about his condition and resulted in him calling another friend through whom
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20 he eventually got a teaching appointment in a private school that enabled his cognitive
21
22 emplacement
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25 He said to me there was one person who has left and if I could teach the subject he
26 was teaching, then he could help me get employed there. I told him not to worry,
27 that even if I couldn't, I would read to broaden my knowledge. Then he asked me to
28 write my application letter and bring it the next day. So, I went and submitted it on
29 Friday and I was called for an interview on Monday morning. I was called later in
30 the evening that I had been employed. So, I went the next day. At that point, I began
31 to reorganize myself.
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34 35 **Socio-cultural factors** 36

37 For some immobile cognitive returnees, cognitive emplacement was enabled by
38
39 socio-cultural factors such as place attachment and benefits derived from their social
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41 embeddedness within kin relations. Place attachment has received attention in the early-
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43 21st century as an important emotional and functional bond between people and place
44
45 (Chang et al. 2023) Place-sensitive research perspective (Gieryn, 2000) reasons that
46
47 "position in life" (WHOQOL, 1995, p. 1403) must be conceptualized within an
48
49 environmental context that privileges the social and material qualities of places where
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51 people are residing and how these matter to their lives. Peter, for instance, compares his
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4 received knowledge about the UK and his lived experience of Ghana and explains how his
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6 place attachment to Ghana facilitates his cognitive emplacement. Peter:

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10 Look at where we are sitting here, you look around beautiful scenery, the wood,
11 the plantains and what have you. Me and you know what happens there, hardly
12 would you see plants. I remember when my nieces came to Ghana in 2013 for the
13 first time, umm Tammy the eldest said we should give her one of the chickens to
14 take to UK because she's not seen chicken before. They only see chickens on TVs
15 and games and what they eat in the house but live chicken, birds walking around
16 they've not seen some before.

17 Whether finding a job, receiving emotional and physical support, moving abroad, or
18 adjusting to a host society, the message is clear: being optimally connected to others or
19 being properly embedded in interpersonal relations can offer a significant payoff (Hyun-
20 soo Kim, 2016, p, 233). Immobile cognitive returnees' social embeddedness (Granovetter,
21 1985) within kin relations yielded some benefits that could not be attained abroad making
22 the emplacement of the future into Ghana a worthwhile undertaking. Bashiru, after
23 assisting his friend whose father died in his absence without having the opportunity to
24 customarily bid his father goodbye and had to put in the morgue for more than three
25 months against the father's wish due his inability to travel back to Ghana reflected:

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31
32 I have my freedom; I can see my family and my mother to comfort her. Kwaku
33 was advising me to stay but I said he shouldn't because I had seen everything.
34 You're staying among your kinsmen you're not welcome, go and try it abroad

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41 Reflected in the narratives of immobile cognitive returnees was the desire to live in close
42 proximity with aging parents. This, they believed, would afford them the opportunity to be
43 of service to their aging parents at the time they need them most. John captured this
44 concern so well:

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50 Me not travelling or having taken my mind off travelling or work outside is
51 because of 2 things; my mum and my grandmother. My 71-year-old mum and my
52 91-year-old grand mum and you know just the 25th of October my 75-year-old dad
53 passed on. I want to be around so if anything, they call me I am there personally. I
54 know everything is in the God's hands but I want to offer the help that is within
55 my power; when it comes to finances, bring this or that, I am there to pay.
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4 Akyeampong says finding his wife and making children have been a blessing and
5
6 attributes this to his not being abroad “finding a wife and making children, if I had been
7
8 abroad, I wouldn’t never have found my wife now (laughs) so that has been a blessing”.
9

10
11 According to Schewel (2019), embeddedness in a setting has both social and
12
13 economic dimensions producing social retaining factors such as family and community
14
15 relations in origin countries that are important drivers of the preference to stay. These
16
17 retain factors help explain why people may come to see “home” as a better place to be
18
19 than “elsewhere.” Victor’s return was enabled by a deepening social capital he could now
20
21 leverage at his base in Kumasi. Heading the branch of a private company that had set up in
22
23 Kumasi, he had the rare opportunity to meet the overlord of the Ashanti Kingdom, the
24
25 Otumfuo. He wondered how this could have been possible if he had not returned his mind
26
27 to invest in a homeward future:
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29

30
31 Exactly, exactly! I mean the very first time that I sat in a meeting with Otumfuo
32
33 Uhuh I was like how this could happen that I find myself in the presence of Otumfuo
34
35 not just in his presence, but I shook his hands ok.

36
37 Put together, the socio-cultural enablers born out of greater community
38
39 engagement are noted for reinforcing the aspiration to stay. In the United
40
41 States, Myers (2000) introduces the concept of “location specific religious capital”
42
43 to explain his finding that involvement in a religious community discouraged
44
45 migration over time. Irwin et al. (2004) argue that certain configurations of local
46
47 community-oriented institutions foster a greater likelihood of staying: the presence
48
49 of churches, local gathering places, and local businesses are all associated with
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51 higher probabilities that individuals will remain where they are.
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Social support

Social support, an external resource obtained from our relationships, enhances our ability to cope with difficult work transitions (Harrison et al., 2019; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). Social support comprised interpersonal relationships and relationship with network abroad and their feedback loop. Immobile cognitive returnees' embeddedness in positive interpersonal relationships helped them deal with the traumatic sequelae of their visa failure that signaled the end of their migratory dreams. These interpersonal relationships soothed their pain and enabled their cognitive emplacement. Richie's girlfriend offered him succor and courage when he was denied a visa. As he put it:

My girlfriend at the time I was 'bounced' gave me courage; she was the one talking to me and saying I should forget. She encouraged me that I should not think about the thing too much.

William's pastor and a female stranger who later became an acquaintance, a girl friend and a wife, were also very instrumental in William's ability to cognitively emplace. William explains:

I got over it when I met my new wife Adiza.... one day she came to me, sat by my side and said today whether you like it or not you need to respond to whatever I was saying. So that's where I started to have confidence and she started telling me that I should be by myself, this is not the end of the road. I told her about my experience and she said it is not the end of the road.

Relationships with networks abroad and the feedback participants got from them facilitated their emplacement. Schewel's (2019) repel factors – negative perceptions about the migration process and imagined destinations that diminish the aspiration to migrate – often gleaned from migrant networks (Mabogunje 1970), is crucial in the decision to stay. In the formation of prospective migrants' imagination, feedback from relations abroad as well as news about the happenings in the destination were very important constitutive elements (Sladkova 2007).

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4 While some narratives are positive, others are negative. For some prospective
5
6 migrants, however, the resolution of this conflict is in favour of staying because
7
8 these negative aspects of life in other places dampens the allure of leaving
9
10 (Sladkova 2007; Mata-Codesal 2015). Forty-eight-year-old Bensson explains
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12
13 I can tell you about 4 people I know who travelled and did not return.
14 When you look at the work they do, and also whenever you speak to them,
15 they tell you they are stressed out.
16

17 Some cognitive returned migrants vicariously learned from the experiences
18
19 of returned migrants. Capito's encounter with a friend's brother who returned after
20
21 many years in the UK was enough repellant:
22
23

24 Just about two weeks ago one of my friend's brothers who has been in the
25 UK for more than twenty years came down. When I saw him, you could see
26 he is a total waste for someone coming from the UK; they had to buy a
27 ticket for him to come to Ghana.
28

29 **Posttraumatic growth**

30
31 This theme captures participants' realisation that their negative experience has
32
33 resulted in something positive. This theme comprised participants' acknowledgement of
34
35 the role of God in their experiences, consciousness that rejects travelling abroad and the
36
37 development of insight that results in re-writing the narrative of self and place from
38
39 worthlessness to worthiness. Posttraumatic growth "is the tendency on the part of some
40
41 individuals to report important changes in perception of self, philosophy of life, and
42
43 relationships with others in the aftermath of events that are considered traumatic in the
44
45 extreme (Tedeschi, 1999, p. 321). Posttraumatic growth, as used here, comprised the
46
47 factors cognitive return migrants or immobile cognitive returnees identified as enabling
48
49 them to cognitively return. Most participants attributed their turnaround circumstances to
50
51 God. Transcending the pain of their botched migratory aspiration would not have been
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53 possible but for God who intervened. According to participants, their reliance on God
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4 enabled their cognitive emplacement. Although the entire experience of failing their
5
6 migratory ambition was traumatic, their reliance on God turned what would have been a
7
8 miserable situation into a good one. They therefore do not regret returning their mind from
9
10 abroad and investing in a homeward future. Kwadwo was sure that the God he knew had
11
12 come through for him:
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14

15
16 When I encounter something that will worry me too much, I just go to my closet and
17
18 tell God to help me quickly. Others who don't know what I know that when you
19
20 come to that crunch, I have to turn to God and talk to Him and when it happens like
21
22 that, He always listens to me to be honest with you. Oh, to be honest with you it does
23
24 not matter how bad the situation is, I'll leave it to God. Once I pray that prayer, I
25
26 know that something will happen. So that's what has saved me. So, the God factor,
27
28 I don't joke with it.
29

30
31 The rupture of failure, as traumatic as some participants put it, engendered a re-
32
33 awakening process that rejected travelling abroad in favour of pursuing a homeward
34
35 future. Failure thus, became a cathartic conduit, not only bringing time into sharp focus,
36
37 but becoming an act of resistance, empowerment and agency (Palladino, 2018) to confront
38
39 their displacement in placed or enforced immobility. William:
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41

42
43 Yes, looking back and now I have changed. When I had the disappointment, I was
44
45 growing lean and lean whilst I was eating. People thought "what is wrong with this
46
47 guy?" I couldn't think straight, there was frustration everywhere. But now when I
48
49 said no travelling anymore, now I can say that now I am the William whom people
50
51 used to know
52

53
54 Victor shared similar sentiments with William, "I felt if I had to keep trying and while I
55
56 was getting bounced and stuff, I would become an old man and probably not get to the
57
58 university. Right. So, I needed to just forget about the travelling"
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51
52 The cognitive emplacement process is enabled by the development of an insight
53
54 that re-writes the story about self and place. For the cognitive returned migrants, their
55
56 before and after narrative about self and place support the fact there has been some
57
58 posttraumatic growth experience.
59
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4 Ivan:

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6 This is a developing country and we have so many advantages; I tell people you can
7 do so many things here you can do so the perception is about becoming an opposite
8 of what I used to have that you can rather be here and make it big than even being
9 there because it looks like the development there is come to a point that you need to
10 do extra work in other to be noticed
11

12 **Self-regulation**

13
14 There are several ways to define self-regulation. In its most basic form, it entails
15 exerting control over one's actions, feelings, and thoughts in order to achieve long-term
16 objectives. Emotional self-regulation more particularly refers to the capacity to restrain
17 impulsive and disruptive emotions. The themes pertaining to self-regulation in this paper
18 capture the agile micro-level agentic maneuverings of immobile cognitive returnees that
19 drove their emplacement. These include their capacity to identify and draw upon inherent
20 strengths and revise their goals within the life course.
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29 Existing strength was deployed to further education, classroom work and farming.
30 Victor remembered that he had always been a good student and that he could leverage this
31 strength to continue his education. Victor exhibited a conscientious disposition which
32 concerns the ways in which people characteristically manage their behavior. Conscientious
33 behaviour emphasizes competence/self-efficacy, orderliness, dutifulness, achievement
34 striving, self-discipline, and deliberation/cautiousness. All these reflect behavioural
35 tendencies characteristics of successful self-regulation. Victor:
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44
45 I remember one thing that actually pushed me to going to the university was while I
46 had taught for almost close to about 4 to 5 years, we were agitating for a pay rise,
47 and the proprietress of the school had a meeting with us and she said if we wanted
48 more pay, we should produce big certificates for that, "you have to produce the
49 corresponding certificate for what I can pay you". That actually pushed me, that
50 actually pushed me and I said I am not dump, I can study so let me go and do the
51 study, get the certificate and come and get the more pay.
52

53 The narratives also showed considerations for growing old and losing work
54 opportunities in deciding to return their minds to a homeward future. The reality of
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4 persisting in their effort at travelling abroad overtime without success and losing out on
5
6 some opportunities both at home and abroad because of aging, aided their cognitive
7
8 emplacement. Matthew for example thought this way: “I felt I was growing up and I had
9
10 to leave home to find a place of my own. I had to struggle to find a job at that time. So, I
11
12 began to teach in a private school”. Kwadwo too was perceptive about growing out of
13
14 opportunities:
15

16
17
18 Don't forget that day-in-day-out, we're growing and time is going. If you don't get it
19
20 and you don't sit to quickly realise and get the reality and set yourself here then it
21
22 means that you will get behind because time will be moving and you see that your
23
24 educational career what you have to get, the certificate you have to get to enable you
25
26 have a job will be delaying and it will cost you.

27
28 Growing out of opportunities was not limited to education. Age requirement for some job
29
30 opportunities abroad meant that if participants did not make a U-turn, their future would
31
32 elude them by the time they succeeded in traveling abroad to pursue their dreams. Victor
33
34 was concerned:

35
36 I felt if I had to keep trying and while I was getting ‘bounced’ and stuff I would
37
38 become an old man and probably not get to the university. I needed not to waste
39
40 any more time because I felt at a point in time if I had the opportunity to go to
41
42 America and had my education and decided to pursue my passion of becoming a
43
44 soldier at the time, the likelihood there would be a clause that would put me
45
46 beyond the age limit for recruitment would be high

40 **Conclusion**

41
42 The paper has clarified how immobile cognitive returnees emplace their
43
44 minds home to invest in a homeward future. Firstly, I elucidated the theoretical
45
46 anchorage of the concept of cognitive return migration and clarified that failure
47
48 instigates the process of returning the mind home. Cognitive return migration starts
49
50 from a macro emigration-immigration context that fires migration imagination and
51
52 results in cognitive displacement to an imagined destination. Nevertheless,
53
54 prospective migrants are refused physical entry into their imagined destinations
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4 turning them into cognitive migrants with heightened consciousness of abroad at
5
6 home. At the meso-level, however, networks at home and abroad facilitate the
7
8 emplacement process by assisting cognitive migrants cope with the trauma of
9
10 failure and connect them to livelihood opportunities and in the process, enabling
11
12 them to emplace their minds home. At the micro-level, the biographical experience
13
14 of visa refusal and agentic maneuverings of immobile cognitive returnees help
15
16 them to leverage opportunities that the rupture of failure opens up.
17
18

19
20 Secondly, factors that enabled the return or emplacement process have been
21
22 clarified. These factors, namely economic, socio-cultural, social support,
23
24 posttraumatic growth and self-regulation, worked together to facilitate the mind's
25
26 journey back home. Economic enablers included job opportunities and access to
27
28 higher education that improved immobile cognitive returnees' livelihood options.
29
30 Cognitive return was also made possible through socio-cultural factors. These
31
32 comprised affinity to place or sense of community, marriage and proximity to kith
33
34 and kin. These factors were so strong to offset the downside of failing to travel
35
36 while simultaneously facilitating the return of the mind home to invest in local
37
38 livelihood opportunities. Social support was a critical enabler that comprised
39
40 interpersonal relationships and networks abroad. To be able to emplaced, immobile
41
42 cognitive returnees leveraged varied interpersonal relationships to help them cope
43
44 with the traumatic consequences of the failure as well as secure jobs. Feedback and
45
46 narratives from network abroad also emboldened their return decision. Failure, in
47
48 spite of its deleterious effects on immobile cognitive returnees, positively
49
50 instigated their minds' return home. Through the phenomenon of posttraumatic
51
52 growth, failure awoken the consciousness of immobile cognitive returnees to the
53
54 passage of time in the life course, the need therefore to do something urgently out
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4 of their inability to travel and subsequently foregrounded their consciousness home
5
6 to pursue a homeward future in hope. The last enabler was self-regulation, which
7
8 highlighted immobile cognitive returnees' control over their actions, feelings and
9
10 thoughts that facilitated their emplacement. Their agility in the face of failure to
11
12 deploy their inherent strength to emplace.
13
14

15
16 The above limitations notwithstanding, some theoretical and policy
17
18 implications can be drawn from the study. Cognitive return migration or
19
20 emplacement can help theoretically contribute to bridging the gap between
21
22 immobility (Carling, 2002; Lubkemann, 2008; Schewel, 2019) and cognitive
23
24 migration (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; Koikkalainen et al., 2018; Womersley,
25
26 2020; Zittoun, 2020) strands of research. Researchers working on the immobility
27
28 strand do not forcefully highlight the cognitive. On the other hand, scholars
29
30 researching migration aspirations and imaginations who engage the mind in
31
32 explicating how future thoughts transform would-be migrants into mobile subjects,
33
34 to mentally travel across both emigration and immigration, fail to incorporate
35
36 failed migration projects. The suggestion that migration should be conceived as an
37
38 "intrinsic part of broader social processes of development, social transformation
39
40 and globalisation" (Castles et al., 2014, p.51) requires the inclusion of all whose
41
42 lives are structured by migration. This includes immobile cognitive returnees
43
44 whose experience completes the corpus of migration literature.
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52
53 Much appreciation goes to my dissertation committee for reviewing drafts of this article.
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Declaration of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest

For Peer Review

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Response to comments from the Editors and Reviewers

Editors' Comments:

This article has potential but still some way to go before it merits publication. Both reviewers are broadly speaking supportive, but there is a clear difference in their overall evaluations. We think that it is important that the article speaks to and addresses the points made by the critical reviewer (as well as the favourable one which are also well made!). We support and uphold the reviewers' insightful and critical, please engage in detail with these. We also add that the point about including only one female respondent needs discussing - e.g. how can we then speak about gender, would it not make sense to make this about male (non)migrants and just keep the sample to them? Whatever you decide we need to know why. Generally, you tend in places to overstate your claims, it would be better to tone down. Another important issue is that the image of people who have not achieved migration you offer fits the stereotypes that Western governments produce about all people being desperate to come to the West (which is not the case - factually few move). Such viewpoints also fit some of the international NGOs' policies addressing migrants. We think it is important that you contextualise and discuss this matter - after all you have a very small sample, how representative is it? Although this requires some work, we think that revision is achievable and will improve the article and so is worthwhile. At resubmission, please include a letter that documents how you have dealt with each point that they have raised in your revisions. We look forward to receiving your revision in due course, best wishes and good luck!

Response to Editors' Comments

Only one female respondent: The only one female respondent has been removed and the necessary adjustment made.

Overstated claims: Overstated claims have been toned down or completely revised.

1st Reviewer

Comments to the Author

This paper is a good contribution to the extant literature on both involuntary immobility by scholars such as (Carling, 2002) and mental immobility by scholars such as Koikkalainen et al. (2020) and Womersely (2020). The author has made a strong case for directing the focus of scholarship in migration studies to the unique circumstances around cognitive immobility and what he refers to as "immobile cognitive returnees". He provides extracts of lived experiences by individuals in Ghana (11 men and 1 woman) who narrate instances of failed physical migration while being mentally migrated to destinations in the Global North. Circumstances that support those individuals to come to terms with the reality that they are unable to migrate physically are characterised as cognitive return. The author relies on an elaborate conceptual framework to situate his arguments.

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Reviewer 1 comment 1:

I am wondering why the author arrived at only one woman as an interviewee and then makes a recommendation that future studies should include more female migrants "to explore the power dynamics between left behind wives and their husbands abroad". To start with, I am not sure of the link between the discussion on recognitive returnees and left behind wives and their husbands. This seems to be a deviation and it should either be removed or situated properly. The author should also note clearly that he is using pseudonyms rather than real names of interviewees.

Author's response:

Single female participant deleted and appropriate adjustment made

Reviewer 1 Comment 2:

Also, much as the paper expands our knowledge on physical versus cognitive return, I am not sure that I agree with the assertion by the author that his study constitutes a watershed moment in migration studies. I suggest that he softens his claim to novelty as others have explored similar discourses, and the paper quotes some of those scholars.

Author's response:

Overstated claims deleted

Reviewer 1 Comment 3:

Finally, there are a few grammatical errors which the author should address through a careful editorial exercise.

Author's response:

Identified grammatical errors corrected

2nd Reviewer

Comments to the Author

The article offers a portrayal of twelve Ghanaian failed migrants who, in different ways, have come to terms with their involuntary immobility, and are orienting themselves fully towards their lives in Ghana. The study potentially contributes to the existing scholarship on migrant aspirations and the anthropological literature on migrant hope and despair, although not articulated as such. Conceptually, the article attempts an innovative approach to "cognitive migration", i.e. imagined but unrealized migration, by suggesting the idea of "cognitive return migration", i.e. the reorientation of a person's interests and efforts from migrant aspirations to a life at home. To this reader, however, this conceptual framing is not only an exercise in a kind of speculative pseudo-psychology but also a less nuanced derivation of a rich scholarship on migrant aspirations and hopes.

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10 2nd Reviewer comment 1:

11 To salvage the analysis, I would therefore recommend a complete reframing that abandons the
12 idea of “cognitive migration” as its centre-piece, and a fronting of the empirical material,
13 especially any evidence of the idea that people who aspire to migrate are completely “mindless”
14 (as the author puts it) at home, and entirely devoted to, or “obsessed” (as the author puts it) with
15 a potential life abroad.
16

17 Author’s response

18 Cognitive migration is at the heart of the paper and therefore cannot be abandoned. I have
19 instead adduced evidence in support of the phenomenon by introducing two empirical sections
20 titled “Cognitive migration or displacement” and “Mindsets: Cognitive migrants versus
21 immobile cognitive returnees”
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23 2nd Reviewer comment 2:
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25 Conceptual framework

26 In my view, most of the building blocks of the study’s conceptual framework rely on a flawed
27 and superficial reading on the existing scholarship. This concerns, most importantly, the notion
28 of “cognitive migration” which, admittedly, is credited to other authors; the notion of “cognitive
29 return migration”; and the derived notion of “cognitive return enablers”. The understanding of
30 ‘cognitive migration’ (cf. Koikkalainen & Kyle 2016:759-60) as a process of aspiring migrants
31 ‘visualising themselves in a future time and place prior to making the actual move’ (quoted on
32 page 3) seems very close to the considerable scholarship on both migrant aspirations (with
33 Carling and others referenced in the text) and on hope in migration (e.g. Thorsen & Kleist 2016).
34 Perhaps particularly since there is no empirical illustration of this process, it is unclear how such
35 an orientation can preoccupy the life of an aspiring migrant to the extent that they achieve a
36 complete split between body and mind, with the body-less mind in an undefined exile elsewhere
37 and the “mindless” (as the author puts it) body remaining at home. This seems as an unnecessary
38 exaggeration which is then used (in the conclusion) to suggest that the existing scholarship on
39 migrant aspirations and involuntary immobility is lacking. I would suggest that the contribution
40 of the text is reframed as an empirically driven one, with this literature as the central conceptual
41 reference.
42

43 Author’s response:

44 Cognitive migration has been empirically illustrated. The idea of a “mindless” body and a
45 “disembodied” mind does not suggest a complete separation between mind and body. Bodies and
46 minds are not separable, most especially, for the Akans whose ontology is relational. The
47 separation is for conceptual clarity since understanding relationality requires analytical
48 distinction what Valsiner (1998, 2001) calls inclusive separation. Consequently, the notions of
49 “mindless” body and “disembodied” minds have been completely abandoned without losing the
50 analytical distinction between cognitive migration and cognitive return migration as a
51 dis(em)placement process.
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10 2nd Reviewer comment 3:

11 The notion of “cognitive return migration” takes this analytical misreading a step further,
12 primarily because it is premised on the insinuation that “There are people whose obsession with
13 migration commits them to living in a liminal space sandwiched between the imagined
14 destinations (cognitively) and the country of origin (physically)” (page 5). Outside of European
15 right-wing rhetoric, I do not think I have ever come across such an exaggerated and categorical
16 generalisation. This is not suitable of migration scholarship, and certainly not for a reputed
17 journal such as the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

18 Author’s response:

19 This category does not represent the generality of Ghanaian migration; most Ghanaians desiring
20 a move away from home, look to destinations with Africa. Nevertheless, the word “obsession:
21 has been removed.
22

23 2nd Reviewer comment 4:

24 Finally, this false premise also undermines the idea of “return enablers” which are essentially a
25 listing of different factors that tie aspiring migrants to their home communities. Even if people a
26 preoccupied with travelling, I find it hard to believe that these “enabling” ties or connections
27 were ever cut; even if we grant the simplistic idea that people are “returning in their mind”, they
28 still never left. There is no attempt to empirically demonstrate how the aspiring migrants related
29 to these “enablers” while they were “mindless”, and the theoretical/philosophical speculation is
30 not convincing.
31

32 Author’s response:

33 Enabling factors remain the same for both cognitive migration and cognitive return migration. It
34 is the direction of the mind’s mobility that determines their instrumentality. This lends credence
35 to the mobility of the mind; first as it migrates to an imagined destination and second, returning
36 home when embodied migration fails. The category immobile cognitive returnee, clarifies the
37 spatial/physical immobility (i.e., that “they still never left”) and the mental or cognitive mobility
38 experienced.
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42 Reviewer 2 comment 5:

43 Even if this above critique of the conceptual building blocks is ignored, it is difficult to see how
44 the conceptual framework allows us to learn anything valuable about the study’s subjects. For
45 example, in the conceptual section on cognitive return migration (on page 5), it is suggested that
46 this concept relies on a schematic distinction between success and failure, with success
47 representing “reaching the destination country of your choice” and failure representing the
48 opposite. This level of generalisation and simplicity goes against the considerable evidence that
49 most migrants do not engage in such two-dimensional trajectories, but rather proceed step-wise
50 through multiple transits and often end up in other places than originally envisaged. There are, in
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8 other words, a lot of possibilities between these two ideal states and, I would argue, this is where
9 migration scholarship has something to offer.

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11 Author's response:

12 Failure is defined in this paper as inability to reach the imagined destination. This definition is
13 mindful of the step-wise character of migration and does not seek to flatten the very convoluted,
14 complex and contentious character of migration trajectories

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17 Reviewer 2 comment 6:

18 There is a lot more to be said about the conceptual framework but to be brief, I would completely
19 abandon it, including the unhelpful figure on page 7, and prioritise a more empirically grounded
20 analysis that begins by exploring the notion of "cognitive migration" empirically, and then
21 proceeds to consider what happens when aspiring migrants reorient their priorities in the face of
22 migration failure.

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25 Author's response:

26 The figure has been deleted.

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29 Reviewer 2 comment 7:

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31 Methodology

32 This brings me to a few remarks on methodology. I have no objections to a qualitative study
33 based on 12 informants but the author could do more to explain the selection of what seems to be
34 relatively old (a 42-year average) and well-off (all are employed and most are highly educated)
35 failed migrants. This selection seems to be quite specific and not representative of the average
36 (aspiring) migrant in a Ghanaian/West African context, where young people make out the largest
37 demographic category. Furthermore, it seems to me that the experience of migration failure takes
38 a particular form among people whose chances of migrating are considerably higher (due to their
39 level of education and socio-economic status) than the vast majority. These characteristics are
40 not considered and could, in fact, be made quite central to the overall framing of the analysis.
41 Furthermore, it is mentioned, but not explained, that migrant aspirations to a country requiring an
42 entry visa was a selection criterium.

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44 Author's response:

45 The study is both retrospective and introspective study about individuals who have ever aspired
46 or imagined to travel, got frustrated with the process and abandoned their migration dreams in
47 favour of making a living in Ghana. In this regard, some of the participants' age of first attempts
48 was in their early 20s making them youthful. The demographic profile of migrant aspirant in
49 Ghana includes the highly educated and averagely well-off individuals.

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51 Reviewer 2 comment 8:
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Given that most migration in West Africa takes place within the subregion, it would be important to qualify this selection further. In line with my overall reservations, it is stated without any evidence that “most youth in the [Kumasi] region aspire to travel outside the country in search of greener pastures” (page 9). If this is the case, documentation is needed. I would speculate that the answer depends very much on how the question is posed, inspired by the nuanced scholarship on migrant aspirations and capabilities by Carling, de Haas and others, that the study would benefit greatly from.

Author’s response:

The Ashanti region is characterized with a culture of migration. In a study of remittances from abroad to Ghana (Mazzucato et al., 2008) found out that, the Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions were the most recipients of foreign remittances. Based on this, they concluded that “most Ghanaian migrants located outside Africa come primarily from these regions” (p.111). Other scholars have also established Kumasi as a hub for international migration in Ghana; with most Ghanaian diasporan populations tracing their root to the city (Dankyi et al., 2015; Manuh, 2000; Manu et al., 2010; Setrana & Tonah, 2014). Others have also established those inhabitants of Kumasi played a pioneering role in international migration from Ghana to other parts of West Africa, Western Europe and North America in the second phase of migration of outmigration from Ghana in the 1970s and 80s (Anarfi et al., 2003). Interestingly, the term “burger”, that has gained popularity for referring to Ghanaian return migrants from overseas, originated from Kumasi.

Reviewer 2 comment 9:

Finally, the author claims to be studying the “lived experiences” of failed migrants but only relies on semi-structured interviews. I would argue that the material represents the narratives of failed migrants of their experiences and reflections around migration, not their lived experience. This is consequential for the analytical claims made, because no one is able to articulate the full extent of their lived experience.

Author’s response

“Lived experiences” has been changed to “experience”

Reviewer 2 comment 10:

Empirical material

With these comments in mind, the paper’s empirical material is its unquestionable strength. It is interesting and enriching to take part in the reflections of the interlocutors, and the empirical material could be elaborated and given a more central place in the text. Many of the early quotations (pages 12-16) are engaging and rich, and actually illustrate people who were far from “mindless” in their lives in Ghana prior to acknowledging their migration failure. They were engaged in education, work, building and maintaining social connections, and religious devotion. Why would the author reduce this richness to the idea of being cognitively elsewhere? This

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supposed absence, is completely missing from the empirical material, apart from a passing mention (on page 19) of the general idea that aspiring migrants “live our lives like we are already there”. To me, this is a good illustration of the difference between a narrative and lived experience. The phrasing carries weight as a narrative of a failed migrant but hardly represents the full richness of lived experience.

Author’s response:

Being cognitively elsewhere does not suggest a complete separation between mind and body as already clarified in an earlier response.

Reviewer 2 comment 11:

Conclusions

While the empirical section offered the most engaging part of the text, the conclusion returns to the simplistic conceptual framing of the first nine pages, with unwarranted claims that the existing scholarship does not combine attention to immobility and aspirations, which the works cited in the text (Carling,) disprove. The final paragraph takes off into a gratuitous rant about how the exclusion of the narratives of failed migrants is a symptom of “Western or Global North narratives in migration studies”. I could think of a long list of omissions that support a similar claim, but the attention to involuntary immobility is not one of them. Again, I would advise the author to go back to the empirical material, and tell an analytical story that is as true to those voices as possible. This would mean starting over on the analytical parts of the text and elaborating on the empirical material. Whether or not this is feasible, and whether or not such a text would be suitable for this journal, is not for me to judge.

Author’s response:

The final paragraph has been deleted