Connections between Return Migration and Transnationalism
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Return Migration and Transnationalism: How Are the Two Connected?

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ABSTRACT

Return migration and migrant transnationalism are key phenomena in research on international migration. Here we examine how the two are connected. The article introduces a special section and draws partly upon this selection of papers and partly upon the broader literature. First, we argue that there is often a blurred boundary between mobility as a transnational practice, for instance in the form of return visits, and purportedly permanent or long-term return migration. Second, we examine the effects of transnationalism on return migration intentions and experiences. Third, we explore how migration trajectories, involving various forms of 'return' moves, create different forms of transnationalism. Examples include the 'reverse transnational' practices of returnees and the 'residual transnationalism' of migrants who have had an unsuccessful return experience and decided to settle permanently abroad. We end by considering how both return migration and transnationalism exist in the interplay between the personal and the social.

INTRODUCTION

Return migration and migrant transnationalism are two key phenomena in research on international migration. How are the two related to each other? This question inspired a workshop organized by the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in September 2012 within the framework of the research project *Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration (PREMIG)*. Revised versions of selected papers from the workshop are published jointly in this special section. In this introductory article, we integrate our presentation of the papers with a broader exploration of the connections between return migration and transnationalism.

First of all, the two are not always distinct phenomena. Return migration is sometimes an elusive concept that blurs into sustained transnational mobility. Since return migration need not be a permanent physical move, but rather something enmeshed in sustained transnational mobility, the two phenomena overlap. Much as migration decisions are open to future change, so are both considerations

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and decisions about return migration. The very notion of permanent and sedentary return has been questioned, especially in the context of refugee return (Markowitz and Stefansson, 2004).

Both return migration and transnationalism are phenomena that take a variety of disparate forms. The workshop papers attested to this diversity, which is essential to have in mind when the concepts are discussed in abstracts terms. The geographical contexts of the migratory flows and transnational connections that were analysed included Afghanistan–Iran/Pakistan (Harpviken, this issue), Burundi–Norway/UK (Sagmo, forthcoming), Chile-Sweden (Olsson, forthcoming), China–Canada (Ho, forthcoming), Greece–Germany/US (King and Christou, this issue), Iraq–Jordan/Syria (Iaria, this issue), Latvia–UK, (Lulle, 2014), Pakistan–UK (Bolognani, this issue), Peru–Japan (Takenaka, this issue), Poland–UK (White, this issue), and Senegal–Spain/Italy (Sinatti, 2014). The papers also covered different stages of migration trajectories including migrants' pre-return contemplations (Bolognani, this issue; Carling and Pettersen, this issue; Erdal and Ezzati, forthcoming; Olsson, forthcoming), the experiences of migrants who made a double return back to the country of destination (White, this issue), and the 'return' migration of ethnic minorities to their parents' or grandparents' country of birth (King and Christou, this issue; Takenaka, this issue). The research presented at the workshop illustrated the diversity of factors that affect decisions about return migration and transnational practice. Bolognani (this issue) presents a balance sheet of reasons for and against staying and returning, including several that can be labelled 'lifestyle reasons'. Iaria (this issue) and Harpviken (this issue) both show the interplay of security and livelihood considerations in contexts of wartime and post-conflict migration.

While the boundary between return migration and transnationalism is sometimes blurred, it also makes sense to see the two as distinct concepts, influencing each other. Most migrants do not have the opportunity to lead intensively transnational lives, but rather spend most of their time in either country of destination, or move back to the country of origin more permanently, or indeed move elsewhere. There are causal mechanisms in both directions, and connections in which it is difficult to establish the direction of causality. Return migration and transnationalism could thus be said to represent a 'nexus', along the lines of the migration–development nexus. In the following we nevertheless attempt to separate them, first addressing the impacts of transnationalism on return migration and subsequently exploring effects of return migration on transnationalism.

HOW TRANSNATIONALISM SHAPES RETURN INTENTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

For any international migrant, returning to the country of origin is a possible option. Some have a definite plan for return, and some have written it off completely. Many others, however, see it as a possibility in the future that is neither certain nor unthinkable. Jørgen Carling and Silje Vatne Pettersen examine such reflections by means of a survey of immigrants and children of immigrants in Norway, hailing from ten different countries of origin. They focus their analysis on a survey question about plans for return migration, or in the case of children of immigrants, plans for migration to their parents' country of birth.

Carling and Pettersen analyse return intention within what they call 'the integration–transnationalism matrix'. The use of a matrix is based on the idea that integration and transnationalism are intersecting dimensions. When each one is conceived as a scale from weak to strong, it is possible to identify different combinations of being weakly or strongly integrated and weakly or strongly transnational. Simply placing immigrants within this matrix, based on their characteristic, shows that integration and transnationalism are not competing forces (compare Erdal and Oeppen, 2013). Carling and Pettersen's analysis of return migration intentions shows that it is the *relative strength* of integration and transnationalism that matters. Unsurprisingly, the highest odds of planning return are among people who are strongly transnational and weakly integrated. And conversely, the people who are strongly integrated

and weakly transnational are the least likely to be planning return migration. In the middle, however, are two different groups with intermediate levels of return migration intentions: those who are *both* integrated and transnational, and those who are *neither*.

Marta Bolognani offers a complementary perspective on how relative attachments affect return migration plans. On the basis of ethnographic research among British Pakistanis, she analyses the different reasons that affect considerations about staying in the UK or returning to Pakistan. Importantly, the analysis reflects both positive and negative aspects of each country, as perceived by the interviewees. Consequently, the analysis does not use a 'push–pull' framework that explains migration, but rather a 'push/retain–pull/repel' framework that allows for balanced consideration of reasons for going and staying.

Return visits to the country of origin is a particular transnational practice, which in numerous ways interacts with possible return migration (Asiedu, 2005; Duval, 2004; King et al., 2013; Lulle, 2014; Mason, 2004; Oeppen, 2013; Oxfeld, 2004). In some cases, the short-term return experience accentuates a feeling of distanciation from the community of origin, creates awareness of the significant ties to the country of destination and quells desires for moving back. As Oeppen (2013) shows in the case of Afghan-Americans, return visits thus have the effect of letting migrants reassess their balance of belonging. In other cases, such visits are preparatory steps for permanent return. Moving back can also be a gradual process in which transnationalism softens the transition from living primarily in the country of destination to living primarily in the country of origin. Alternatively, return visits can become a substitute for a more permanent return migration altogether, either as a sustained transnational lifestyle, or as longed for annual breaks to re-engage social and cultural ties with family and friends (Lulle, 2014).

Considerations about return are affected not only by current transnational ties to the country of origin. Possibilities for post-return transnationalism can be equally important. That is, what would the opportunities be for maintaining connections to the destination after returning? Somewhat paradoxically, formalized attachment to the country of destination – in the form of citizenship, for instance – can be a trigger for return migration because it enables transnational mobility back to the destination country and serves as a safety valve in case of unsuccessful return (Mortensen, 2014). Post-return transnationalism can be important for livelihoods, for instance when returnees make a living through trade or tourism based on ties to their former country of residence.

Transnational practices and plans for return can simultaneously or sequentially reinforce each other. If migrants have strong transnational attachments that bolster the intention to return, it is also likely that this intention will affect transnational practices. For instance, it has long been recognized that remittance-sending can be motivated by plans to return, as an investment in social reintegration (Brown, 1997; Fokkema et al,. 2013; Gubert, 2002). An interesting complementary perspective on the same mechanism is offered by van Meeteren et al. (forthcoming) who show that returnees' reintegration experience is indeed affected by their transnational practices while they were abroad.

Studies of return migration sometimes reveal complex migration histories with multiple migrations and return movements. When we now turn to examining impacts of return migration on transnationalism, we therefore see return not as a one-off event, but as constitutive elements of migration trajectories.

HOW MIGRATION TRAJECTORIES AFFECT TRANSNATIONALISM

The transnational turn in migration studies has produced several classifications of 'types' of transnationalism. For instance, Smith and Guarnizo (1998) described 'transnationalism from below versus 'transnationalism from above', Itigzohn et al. (1999) mapped 'narrow' and 'broad' transnational practices, and Vertovec (2004) conceived of transnationalism as transformation in the

'socio-cultural', 'political' and 'economic' domains. What is perhaps less developed is conceptualization of the ways in which migration trajectories shape the temporal and spatial parameters of transnationalism and, by extension, the content and meaning of transnational practice. By bringing together five studies on return migration in disparate settings, we identify a number of ways in which migration pathways produce distinct forms of transnationalism.

Figures 1–4 provide schematic visualizations of the interaction of return migration and transnationalism in four of the case studies. We draw upon the migration history chart as a tool for displaying migration trajectories (Carling 2012). The two grey columns represent the origin and the destination, and the vertical axis represents time. Individuals' migration histories are displayed as lines that can be traced upwards through time and sideways between locations. We have added wave-like fields between the origin and destination to denote transnational practices at different stages of the migration trajectory. The time scale is not calibrated, since we are only interested in the rough sequential pattern, but each figure can be thought of as spanning several decades.

FIGURE 1
TRANSNATIONALISM IN IRAQI RETURN MIGRATION FROM SYRIA AND JORDAN

Vanessa Iaria examines post-return transnationalism among Iraqi refugees (Figure 1). This is a case of protracted displacement in Syria and Jordan, in many cases with migration histories dating back to the 1990s, although current migration was associated with the post-2003 war. In her analysis of post-return transnationalism, Iaria finds that transnational mobility is a necessary precondition for return in the first place. Her informants lead transnational lives, where legal permits to stay in the destination country are integral to their continued return mobilities, and where time is often shared equally between the two locations. However, livelihoods are being created in Iraq, and migrants invest a lot and take risks in order to build sustainable return through continued transnational mobility. The article discusses whether or not this may be seen as return, and what the nature of Iraqi refugees' post-return transnationalism is, in a context of sustained transnational mobility, and argues that many of the transnational livelihood strategies adopted, are in fact akin to those existing prior to flight, and can thus be seen as a continuation of previous mobilities. For Iraqi refugees leading transnational lives involving building livelihoods in Iraq, the possibility of re-migration, return, and continued mobility are all options under consideration, and to the extent possible, legal documents are secured to ensure the viability of all these options.

Kristian Berg Harpviken also examines conflict-driven migration to neighbouring countries, from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan (Figure 2). His analysis examines the ways in which households are transnationalized during the processes of flight and return. At various stages, security considerations and livelihood concerns interact to produce particular mobility outcomes. The figure illustrates a situation in which women and children are the first to escape the conflict, while men stay behind to tend to site-specific resources such as agricultural land, houses, and businesses. In the return phase, 'split return' can take several forms. The situation shown in the figure is one in which men have established livelihoods abroad during exile, and women and children are the first to return. The transnational household that emerges – with the male breadwinner supporting the family from abroad – is, of course, a common one in economically motivated migration. An alternative form of split return can occur when security remains poor in the community of origin, and vulnerable household members remain abroad while adult men return and attempt to recreate a local livelihood.

FIGURE 2
TRANSNATIONALISM IN AFGHAN RETURN MIGRATION FROM IRAN AND PAKISTAN
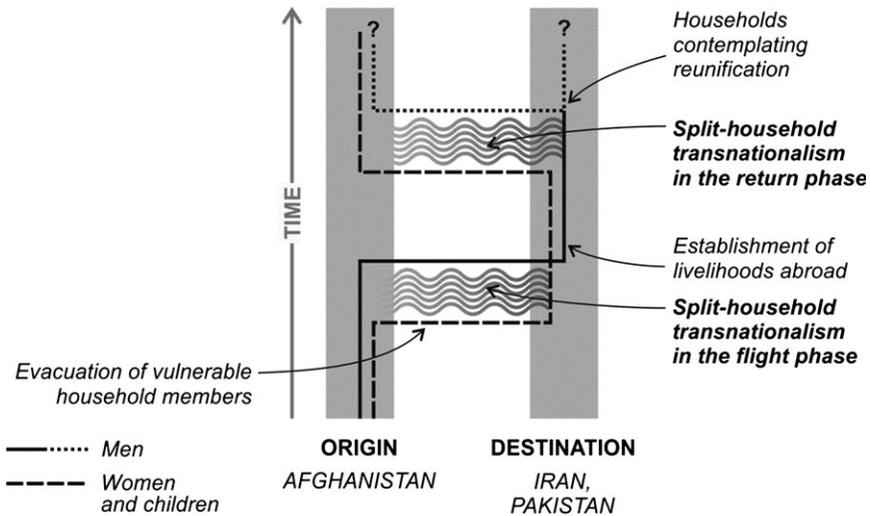
Split return is often intended to be a temporary measure, Harpviken writes, but the family reunification is easily delayed. In a post-conflict setting, economic progress can be unexpectedly slow and security concerns can persist long after the conflict has formally ended. Regardless of whether it is the breadwinner or the rest of the family that remains abroad, conditions for the household to reunite at the origin might not be there. Maintaining a transnational household also serves as a safety valve for the members who have returned, in the sense that it is easier to re-emigrate if conditions deteriorate.

The phenomenon of split return may also be found in the context of deportations, when families are involuntarily transnationalized. Berger Cardoso et al. (2014) report that in the United States, a quarter of deportees are parents of US-citizen children. In this context, it is likely that split return increases the remigration desires of deportees. It also creates particular settings for transnational practices. Coerced separation of families and the transnational agonies that follow are commonly associated with conflict-induced migration. Deportations can have similar effects. More commonly, however, split return is a strategy that is engaged in voluntarily, for instance motivated by considerations about children's education (Botterill, 2014; Nukaga, 2013; Waters, 2005).

Anne White examines migration between Poland and the United Kingdom and identifies the phenomenon of second returns back to the UK after an unsuccessful return to Poland (Figure 3). This

move was thought of as return, White writes, because the migrants had come to identify strongly with the UK during their first stay, and felt that they were 'returning home'. For different reasons, life in Poland failed to meet expectations. The move back to the UK was often thought of a final decision of permanent settlement, not simply the next step in a back-and-forth trajectory.

FIGURE 3
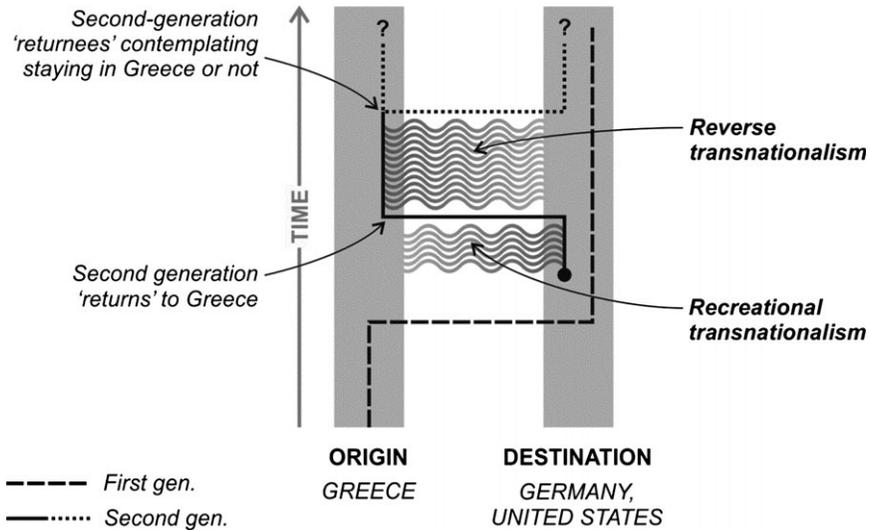TRANSNATIONALISM IN POLISH RETURN MIGRATION FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM
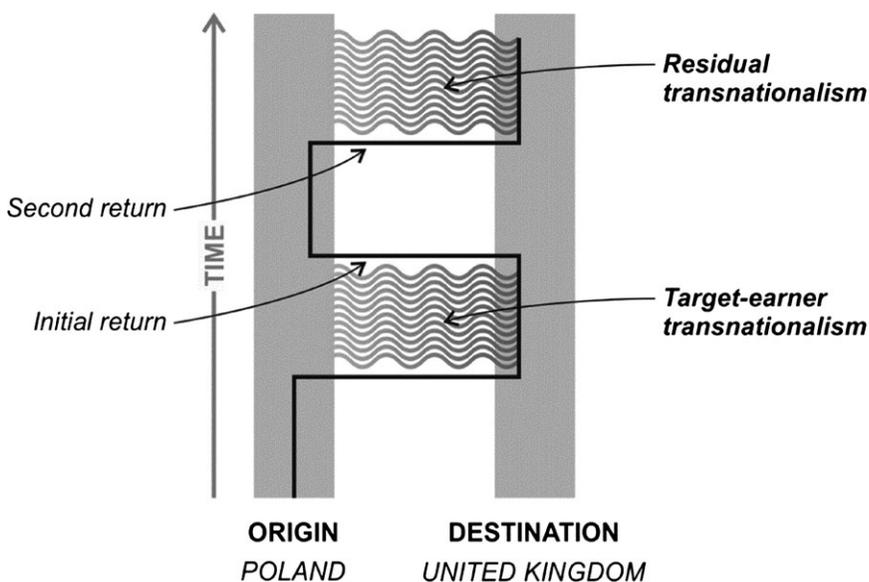
White's analysis highlights the contrasts between transnationalism during the initial stay in the UK and after the second return. In the first period, transnational practices conformed to the expectations for labour migration. The migrants saved their UK earnings with a view to invest in Poland, made frequent return visits, and watched Polish TV. After the double return to Poland and back, the migrants reoriented their lives, and for instance sold property in Poland in order to buy in the UK. They paid less attention to children's Polish language skills, and spent holidays in third countries. Transnational ties at this stage could be described as 'residual transnationalism' and was focused primarily on maintaining ties with family in Poland.

Russell King and Anastasia Christou present a study of transnationalism in the context of second-generation 'return' to Greece (Figure 4). Their informants are children of Greek migrants in Germany and the United States, who grew up with what we might call 'recreational transnationalism'—family holidays and cultural activities that served to maintain an identification with the country of origin. As adults, the informants decided to move to Greece. This was a move that represented initial migration for the individual, but return migration in the context of family migration history. King and Christou examine the ways in which the return decision was framed in the returnees' narratives. The idea of returning to one's 'roots' was a prominent theme, bolstered by a strong preservation of Greek ethno-national identity during childhood in Germany or the United States. For some, however, especially young adult women, return also served as a form of escape from parental control.

Most of the second-generation returnees, King and Christou write, were frustrated and disappointed with their experience of living in Greece. Corruption, chaos, and xenophobia were central themes in the expressions of disillusionment, and sometimes anger. Partly as a reaction to these negative experiences, the returnees reappraised Germany and the United States as affective homelands. The

FIGURE 4
TRANSNATIONALISM IN GREEK RETURN MIGRATION FROM GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

second-generation returnees' orientation towards their diaspora communities constitutes what King and Christou refer to as 'reverse transnationalism'.

The second-generation return migration also affected transnationalism in another way. As Figure 4 shows, the period of reverse transnationalism was one in which the first and second-generation family members were separated from each other. This transnationalization of family ties strengthened the diasporic family's links with the ethnic homeland.

The fifth study, Ayumi Takenaka's article on Japanese-Peruvian diasporic bonds, is not displayed graphically because it deals less with individual migration trajectories and more with aggregate community dynamics. Peru, like Brazil, has a Japanese minority population that dates from migration in the early decades of the twentieth century (Takenaka, 2003). Ancestral return to Japan was induced by a policy change in 1989, whereby the Japanese government allowed people with Japanese ancestry within three generations to enter and work in Japan. Tens of thousands of Japanese-Peruvians migrated in the 1990s, and found work mainly as unskilled labourers. Social and economic integration in Japan has been limited, and the ancestral return migration from Latin America is now seen largely as a failure by Japanese policy makers and commentators. Increasing numbers of Japanese-Peruvians have returned to Peru.

Takenaka shows that from the perspective of the Japanese state, the Japanese-Peruvians are seen primarily as a problem when they are in Japan, but as an asset when they are in Peru. Even before ancestral return to Japan began, the Japanese government supported Japanese institutions and cultural events in Peru. As part of the Japanese diaspora, the community represented a diplomatic asset. These diasporic ties have, to some extent, been invigorated by the return migration experience. Although many individuals felt disappointed with their stay in Japan, and with the discrimination they experienced, they return to Peru with personal connections with Japan that were rare in the community before 1989.

The five case studies we have considered here illustrate the multitude of possible patterns even with a simple frame of origins and destinations. Migration trajectories and transnational ties can be more complex, of course, when we consider transnationalism in situations of transit (Schapendonk 2013), transnational ties between destinations (Sperling 2013), and transnational webs between the near and far diaspora that is a common pattern of conflict-driven displacement (Van Hear 2006).

The analysis of migration trajectories reflects a more general, important point: connections between return migration and transnationalism and *change over time*. This concerns migrants' consideration of return as a possibility, migrants' post-return experiences of transnationalism, and the forms of transnationalism that are associated with onward migration or re-emigration to previous destinations (e.g. White, this issue). Changes in considerations of return during life abroad are aptly illustrated by Hunter (2011) who writes about North African labour migrants in France who had nourished the dream of return while working, but who, on retiring, decided to remain in France. Drawing on analysis of migrants' considerations about settlement and return, Erdal and Ezzati (forthcoming) find that the temporal dimensions: length of stay in the destination country, age at initial migration, and life-cycle stage, play a profound role in migrants' reflections, across very different origin contexts, thus highlighting the potential for foregrounding temporal dimensions in migration research. With time people change, and so new forms of transnational engagement develop, sometimes replacing the dream of return, while for the 'second generation' transnational ties may on the one hand, gradually be severed, or on the other hand, be at the focus of attention, leading to ethnic return migration (King and Christou, this issue; Takenaka, this issue).

PERSONAL TRAJECTORIES AND SOCIAL FIELDS

Return migration and transnationalism are both phenomena which are embedded in social relations, stretched across transnational social fields, and so interconnections between the two are manifested in multiple geographic locations, and in local and transnational relational spaces. Migrants' reasoning about return migration, for instance as reflected and interpreted with regard to return visits, is something which is noticed and which can be seen as a marker with political or moral implications (Mortensen 2014). For instance, in the case of Burundi, Sagmo finds two contrasting positions on the idea of return to Burundi, which are developed based on return visits, and which in turn are significant for migrants' positioning in destination countries, vis-à-vis other Burundians, but also the wider society (2014). Transnational practices beyond return visits are also connected to return migration, as a possibility and a reality, for instance with regard to negotiations over remittances or transnational marriages, which might in different instances make return migration more or less likely, which in turn could sustain or alter transnational practices.

Connections between return migration and transnationalism are also personal. Individual migrants navigate their own emotions, while managing commitments and demands which they are more or less able to influence. In the context of Chinese re-migration Ho (forthcoming) finds that migrants' emotional management is an important factor for how immigration, return and sustained transnationalism develop. A similar point can also be made for migrants' considerations about the possibility of return, where Carling and Pettersen (this issue) point out that return intentions are important beyond their relationship with actual return migration decision-making, in that return intentions are reflective of migrants' attitude to the migration experience as a whole, and can have the potential to affect both integration processes and transnational practices. Considering the connections between return migration and transnationalism in terms of a matrix, personal reflections and actions which shape identity-construction processes, such as sense of belonging, ambivalence or alienation, also come into play, and can affect either return migration plans, transnational practices, or the interplay between the two.

CONCLUSION

While return migration and transnationalism sometimes blur together, we find that distinguishing between the two, and examining their influence on each other offers insights that can help guide

future research. First, as we have shown, transnationalism interacts with return intentions, actual plans for return migration, post-return experiences, and future remigration. This series of interactions underlines the significance of both temporal and spatial dimensions of migration. Transnational ties and practices may change over time, and so may return intentions, plans and experiences. The spatial contexts where transnationalism affects return include both countries of destination and origin, but they are intertwined with integration processes, as much as they are focused on return migration itself.

Second, we have shown how migration trajectories produce a number of particular forms of transnational practices. This is a contribution to the way in which we conceptualize and analyse the diversity of transnationalism. The forms we have identified and illustrated in Figures 1–4 include enabling transnationalism, split-household transnationalism, target-earner transnationalism, residual transnationalism, reverse transnationalism, and recreational transnationalism. These are all result of particular migration trajectories, defined by personal moves between locations and in relation to other people, embedded in transnational social fields. To what extent these different forms of transnationalism are context-specific, or connected with particular forms of migration, or whether these forms of transnationalism are more generalized phenomena, remains an empirical question open to investigation.

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