

What Do We Know about the Subjective and Intangible Factors That Shape Migration Decision-Making?

A review of the literature from low and middle income countries



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1. Introduction

Research on migrant decision-making has long been dominated by economic models, viewing (non)migrants as rational actors who weigh up the socio-economic costs and benefits of moving versus staying (see Hagen-Zanker, 2008 for a review of this body of literature). Other, growing, areas in the literature have focused on understanding life and migration aspirations that underlie migrant decision-making (Aslany, et al., 2021; Carling, 2014; de Haas, 2010); meso-level factors, including the role of social networks, social and cultural contexts and the migration infrastructure (Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Jones and Sha, 2020; Massey, 1990); and the migration and non-migration policy landscape in host and origin countries, including education, social protection and labour market programmes (Fratzke and Salant, 2018; Hagen-Zanker and Himmelstine, 2013; OECD, 2017; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2020). The literature also no longer sees migrant decision-making as a one-time decision of whether (or not) to migrate, but increasingly pays attention to considerations of migration mode, journeys and destinations (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Crawley and Jones, 2020; Gladkova and Mazzucato, 2017; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016).

Related to the literature on migrant decision-making, research on ‘migrant selectivity’ – what is different about the people that choose to leave, compared to those who stay – remains a thriving research area. This literature looks at why some people choose to move, whilst others choose to stay put, focusing on factors such as differences in education and skill levels (e.g. Chiquiar and Hanson, 2005), health (e.g. Domnich et al., 2012) and wealth (e.g. Bylander, 2017). However, migrants may differ from non-migrants in more *unobservable* characteristics too. Some scholars argue that migrants are the most ambitious, risk-taking and motivated people (Polavieja et al., 2018). These characteristics are considered unobservable or intangible in that they cannot be systematically measured or observed by others. This area of research dives down to the most micro of levels, to inside a person’s mind and the ways in which they see the world and their place within it. It considers the interaction of personality and non-cognitive skills, which, broadly defined, are ‘patterns of thought, feelings, and behaviour’ (Borghans et al., 2008) which shape and inform migrant decision-making. These myriad subjective and intangible factors include psychological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors, as well as individuals’ personal and normative belief and value systems. By studying these, we can shed further light on migrant decision-making.

This literature review synthesises the literature on these subjective and intangible factors in low and middle income countries, drawing on 182 studies from the academic and grey literature. It draws out key findings in four areas, i) imagination, ii) personality traits and attitudes to risk, iii) emotions and feelings, and iv) beliefs and values, and also highlights key gaps in the evidence base.

The next section provides an overview of the evidence base in this area, presenting the number of studies we found, geographical context, methodology and aspect of decision-making. We then go onto describing and synthesising the evidence in the four areas of the literature. In the final section, we summarise the findings in the four key areas and reflect on areas for future research.

2. The Evidence Base

The literature review was conducted based upon a rigorous literature methodology developed by Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2013). We developed a detailed search protocol which included:

- Google Scholar and Google searches with search strings
- Google Scholar searches for studies that have cited relevant retrieved literature and searches of studies from reference lists of relevant retrieved studies
- Searches of relevant databases
- Searches of the following journals: *International Migration Review*; *Journal of Refugee Studies*; *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*; *Mobilities*; *Population, Space and Place*.

To develop search strings, we expanded our overriding research question – ‘What are the subjective and intangible factors that shape migrant decision-making?’ – into a series of research sub-questions covering different subjective and intangible factors. From these sub-questions, we drafted a series of search strings, containing key words based on our inclusion criteria and sub-questions. Searches were conducted between June and July 2020. All studies retrieved were scanned and only included in our database of relevant studies if they met the following inclusion criteria:

- **Reach:** no time or geographical restrictions, though studies focusing on high income countries were excluded from this paper
- **Language:** limited to English language studies
- **Study design:** quantitative and qualitative studies as well as literature reviews. PhD theses were included; MSc theses were excluded
- **Population:** all internal and international migrants (including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees) and non-migrants in origin, transit, or destination countries
- **Area of study:** subjective and intangible, micro-level, individual factors
- **Outcome:** whether to migrate, migration mode, destination preference.

Type of study	Type of subjective and intangible factor	Type of migration	
Qualitative: 97 (27 ethnographic)	Imagination: 40	Internal: 32	Out-migration: 135
Quantitative: 66 (7 experimental)	Personality traits: 40	International:	Onward/transit: 15
Mixed: 5	Emotions and feelings: 75	<i>Between LICs and MICs: 39</i>	Return migration: 26
Review: 19	Beliefs and values: 89	<i>Migration intentions in LICs/ MICs, without specifying destination preference: 16</i>	Re-migration: 9
		<i>From LICs/MICs to HICs: 86</i>	Irregular: 47
		<i>From HICs to LICs/MICs: 5</i>	Forced: 16
			Stay/immobility: 18

Table 1: Summary of the evidence base

Relevant studies were then recorded in an Excel file and coded based on study type, methods used, type of migration, geographical reach, and subjective and intangible factor(s) considered.

In total, we retrieved 342 studies which met the inclusion criteria outlined above. Our literature searches were initially global in scope. We decided however to focus predominantly on the literature of migration from low income countries (LICS) and middle income countries (MICS) to highlight a more underexplored area in the literature. As such, we excluded studies which considered migration between high income countries (HICS) only from the analysis here. As a result, 182 studies made it into the review. The studies span from 1981 to 2021. The evidence base is summarised in Table 1.

Of the 182 retrieved studies, the majority of studies (97) were qualitative, including 27 ethnographic studies. 64 studies were quantitative, including seven studies employing experimental methods and seven studies utilising longitudinal data. An additional five studies drew on mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative data. 19 studies, which reviewed existing literature and did not consider primary data, were retrieved.

In terms of geographical coverage, 39 studies consider migration between low and middle income countries. 32 studies considered internal migration, and another 16 studies considered migration intentions in countries, without specifying destination preference. By far the majority of studies consider migration from low and middle income countries towards high income countries, and a small minority look at migration from high to low and middle income countries.

The bulk of the evidence base considered out-migration – around 75% – with 14% looking at return migration, 8% onward, transit or secondary migration, and 5% re-migration. 10% explicitly consider immobility or stay intentions. Around a quarter of studies considered irregular migration explicitly, with 9% considering forced migration.

In terms of subjective and intangible factors considered, the focus of this review, the greatest number of articles were retrieved for Section 6 on beliefs and values (89), reflecting the breadth of factors grouped together under this heading. The majority of studies considered the role of personal religious beliefs (29) or normative values (37), with 16 studies looking at the role of self-confidence or efficacy and luck.

For Section 5 on emotions and feelings, 75 studies were retrieved. Notably, the majority of these studies (26) consider the role of place attachment, a relatively developed sub-section of the literature. Next are factors to do with imagination, described in Section 3, with 40 studies in total including imagination of future lifestyles and specific destinations. For Section 4 on personality traits, there are 40 studies. Notably, 27 of these refer to considerations of risk tolerance or aversion, with 11 articles assessing the role of five personality traits in particular – ‘the big five’.

3. Imagination

The cross-fertilisation of the sociology, anthropology, cognitive neuroscience, psychology, languages and culture studies and geography fields has given rise to a body of research around imagination, also known as ‘cognitive migration’ (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2016), ‘imagined mobilities’ (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020), ‘geographical imaginations’ (Thompson, 2017), ‘mental simulation’ and ‘mental time travel’ (Kyle and Koikkalainen, 2011), as well as ‘mental journeys’ (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020). These concepts refer to the psychological processes people undertake when contemplating migration, imagining and visualising themselves in a future time and place, with ‘our minds migrating before our bodies do’ (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2016: 12; Kyle and Koikkalainen, 2011). These imaginations can relate to all aspects of the decision-making process, including the mental thresholds of whether to migrate (referred to by van der Velde and van Naerssen (2011) as the ‘indifference threshold’), trajectory (how to travel) and location (where to go) (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2011). Most importantly, imagined mobilities have ‘real-life consequences’ and can slow down, accelerate or prevent mobility (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020; Raitapuro and Bal, 2016; Salazar, 2020). Critically, these imaginations may not be realised, and as a result ‘there are many more cognitive migrants than actual migrants’ (Kyle and Koikkalainen, 2011: 9). Cognitive migrants are those that are willing to potentially leave and are explicitly considering the option (ibid.).

There is a distinction to be made between imagination – the psychological process – and imaginaries – the products of individual and shared imagination. Imagination is gendered (Teo, 2003) and embedded in socio-economic structures, drawing on ‘archives’ (Gebresenbet, forthcoming), which consist of shared imaginaries as well as other factors and experiences, including own experience of (im)mobility (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020; Mata-Codesal, 2015). Salazar (2020) defines imaginaries as ‘culturally shared and socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with the personal imagination and are used as meaning-making devices, mediating how people act, cognize and value the world’ (Salazar, 2020: 2). This idea of cultural imaginaries shaping aspirations is also conveyed by Raitapuro and Bal (2016), who highlight the new self-images, ideals and notions of belonging produced by imaginaries. In other words, these shared ideas, images and stimuli, transmitted as information, stories, rumours etc. allow potential migrants to play with a range of future scenarios in their head. Some evidence focuses specifically on how these imaginaries are transmitted, discussed below in Section 3.2 on imagined destinations.

The rest of this section synthesises the literature focusing on two specific aspects of imagination: the role of mobility in imagined lifestyle and identity, and imagined destinations.

3.1. Imagined lifestyle and identity

Movements to another place are of course the ultimate opportunity to reinvent oneself. Hence, during the cognitive migration process, people may be imagining what a different lifestyle or altered identity could look like. A number of studies, discussed below, find that these imaginations precede and feed into the migration decision-making process.

A smaller number of studies look at the role of imagined lifestyles for internal migration. For example, for members of the indigenous ethnic minority Garos community in Bangladesh, cultural imaginaries focus on rural-urban migration enabling access to a ‘modern lifestyle’ and joining a ‘global community’ (Raitapuro and Bal, 2016). Likewise, for young Indians in the regional town of Darjeeling, exposure to the ‘exciting transformations globalisation is unleashing elsewhere’ forms part of imaginations mulling over internal migration (Brown et al., 2017).

Imaginations and imaginaries may also focus on identity. For instance, Salazar (2011) finds that the perception of a cosmopolitan identity acquired in the West is part of migration imaginaries in Tanzania. In their co-creative ethnographic study, Sjöberg and D’Onofrio (2020) find that migration is seen as part of a process of crafting selfhood, giving the example of a transgender Brazilian woman who imagined herself in Paris, where she would become the woman she had always dreamt of being, echoed in Vogel (2009)’s study on Venezuelan *transformistas*’ migration to Europe where imaginations focus on being able to complete their bodily transformation work through sex work.

Imagination can also relate to an imagined social status. For disadvantaged urban men in a study on Guinea Bissau, migration to Europe is imagined to improve their social status, leaving social stagnation behind (Vigh, 2009, 2018). Similarly, Alpes (2014) finds that imaginations about migration amongst young anglophone Cameroonians focus on a quest for status and global inclusion.

Imaginations may also relate to social norms and gender roles (see also Section 6.8.2). The imaginations of rural girls in Burkina Faso of migration to Côte d’Ivoire are grounded in social norms and expectations of what it means to be a good wife and daughter, taking some inspiration from the migration practices of adolescent boys and men (Thorsen, 2010). Teo (2003) also emphasises the social and cultural embeddedness of imaginations about migration from China to Canada.

Moreover, imaginations of migration are not always positive: Gueye and Deshingkar (2020) find that some of the migration imaginaries of aspiring migrants in Senegal focus on the journey and potential death at sea or in the desert – reflecting on this and drawing comfort from religion, beliefs and ‘blessings’ of others helps them prepare for the decision and journey.

3.2. Imagined destinations

The vast majority of studies retrieved for this paper focus on the decision of whether to stay or migrate; the imaginations literature, however, is one of the few areas that engages with decision-making around destination. In these ‘geographical imaginations’, people reflect on what other places would be like, both compared to staying and to other potential destinations. Belloni (2020) refers to these comparisons as ‘cosmologies of destination’, the hierarchical representations of

geographic imaginaries, with some locations being imagined as ‘good destinations’. In her own research with Eritreans in Italy, she finds considerations such as a potential locations’ freedom/lack of it or moral righteousness/moral decay feed into these geographic imaginaries. Mata-Code-sal (2015) finds that, in rural Ecuador, imaginaries are historically laden; owing to a long history of migration to the USA, New York is such a prominent reference point in geographic imaginaries that other locations are only imagined in comparison to New York. Dannecker (2013) finds that in Bangladesh, labour migration to Malaysia is viewed more favourably than to Saudi Arabia, with Malaysia imagined as good, safe and Muslim, with many possibilities and more freedom. In Senegal, on the other hand, imaginations of Europe as a place of moral degradation and the wish to live and remain in a religious environment with Muslim values contributed to preferences to stay (Schewel, 2015).

More broadly, perceptions of potential countries and their ‘reputations’ feed into imaginaries. For example, amongst a set of studies looking at asylum-seekers and refugees, Germany is seen as welcoming and having a ‘good reputation’ amongst Syrians and other migrants (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Mallett and Hagen-Zanker, 2018); Finland is imagined as a safe country with human rights and a quick asylum process amongst Iraqi asylum seekers (Koikkalainen et al., 2020); and Australia is perceived as a highly functioning society amongst current and potential asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (McAuliffe and Jaysuriya, 2016). Sjöberg and D’Onofrio (2020) speak of ‘imaginative horizons’ and for the Egyptian respondents in their study, Italy, specifically Milan, was the place that occupied their imaginative horizons, representing a place of human rights, culture, freedom and fashion. Negative perceptions of imagined destinations can also shape decision-making – in a study with Mexican adolescents, perceived discrimination in the USA led to lower migration intentions, though only for those who did not feel pressure to support their family (Becerra, 2012).

The literature also considers how these geographical imaginations are formed. They draw on a multitude of sources: education, media, pop culture, personal experience and social networks (Thompson, 2017). The role of the media, particularly TV, comes out particularly strongly: for Albanians imagining life in Italy (Mai, 2004), with TV programmes promoting an urban lifestyle to rural Nepal (Piotrowski, 2010), and perpetuating images and ideas of migration to the West in Tanzania (Salazar, 2011), in Senegal (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; Willems, 2014), in Bangladesh (Dannecker, 2013) and the Gambia (Conrad Suso, 2020). A number of studies also highlight the role of social media on geographic imaginations (e.g. Koikkalainen et al., 2019; Kölbl, 2018). Post-colonial linkages may shape migrants’ imaginaries of destinations. For instance, colonial imaginations of the UK among Sri Lankan and Somalis influenced the decision to claim asylum in the UK, due to perceptions of a strong historical bond and shared linguistic and cultural understanding (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Finally, word of mouth and rumours can also fuel imaginaries (Belloni, 2020; Koikkalainen et al., 2020; Koser and Pinkerton, 2002).

4. Personality Traits

Is there such a thing as a migrant personality? Are migrants more risk-taking? This area considers the role of personality in migrant decision-making. It considers the effect of specific personality traits, such as curiosity, confidence in one's own abilities and extraversion, and other aspects of personality, including patience and adaptability. An individual's risk tolerance or risk aversion can also be key components in decisions of whether and how to migrate. The next sub-section focuses on specific personality traits included in the Big Five Personality Traits classification, before moving on to other personality traits. The final sub-section focuses on the role of attitudes to risk.

4.1. The big five

Personality traits are people's psychological dispositions, temperament and intrinsic characteristics. In social psychology, a common classification of personalities is the Five Factor model first developed by McCrae and Costa (1989). People are classified according to where they sit on the spectrum for the five big personality traits and the combinations of traits then make up a person's personality. They include:

- Openness to new experiences
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion (extroversion)
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism (emotional stability).

These five personality traits have been considered in a sizeable number of migration studies with relation to aspirations for migration and likelihood of having migrated, discussed below. Much fewer studies examine the links between personality traits and mode or destination of migration.

Openness to new experiences is an obvious trait to be associated with migration and indeed there are five studies showing a positive link. For example, those with higher levels of openness to new experiences are more willing to move aboard in a cross-national study of South and Central America using AmericasBarometer data (Canache et al., 2013). For a study on the Ukraine, openness to new experiences (and willingness to take risks) increases the probability of rural-urban internal migration (Ayhan et al., 2020).

Several studies find a greater sense of adventure or sensation-seeking, wanderlust, restlessness and curiosity amongst migrants or those aspiring to migrate. In a study of migration of Gambians via the 'backway' to Europe, Conrad Suso (2020) finds that migrants have a sense of curiosity and adventure motivating a desire to migrate, echoed in a study on Malian migration to Côte d'Ivoire and Saudi Arabia (Castle and Diarra, 2003). While on the one hand, a sense of adventure can be seen as a personality trait, it can also be experienced as an intrinsic motivation or goal (e.g. Beazley, 2015; Bredeloup, 2017) and a rite of passage (see also Section 6.8 below on attitudes towards societal expectations).

Two studies show that more sociable or extraverted people are more likely to migrate. For example, in a cross-national study of South and Central America using AmericasBarometer data, Canache et al. (2013) find extraversion had a modest positive influence on migration intentions, particularly for those with lower levels of education. However, extraversion was found to decrease the probability of rural-urban internal migration in the Ukraine, perhaps because extraverts have closer ties to their places of origin (Ayhan et al., 2020).

There are also some personality traits included in the Five Factor model for which the evidence base is smaller. For neuroticism (emotional stability), there is only evidence on migration from high income countries. Greater conscientiousness is linked to lower migration for rural-urban internal migration in the Ukraine (Ayhan et al., 2020), the only study we found in this area. The authors hypothesise that people who display high levels of conscientiousness are well-functioning and responsible and are less likely to be dissatisfied with their current situation.

4.2. Other personality traits

There are further aspects of people's personality, which are not included in the Five Factor model. The factors discussed in the literature are adaptability, optimism, patience, and perseverance.

Given that migration processes can be lengthy and the payoffs from migration often take some time to materialise, the link between patience and migration is an obvious one. Indeed, a number of studies find that more patient individuals are more likely to migrate. In an experimental design study, Goldbach and Schuster (2018) find that internal migrants in Ghana and Indonesia are more patient than non-migrant co-nationals. The likelihood of ever having migrated amongst the highly skilled from Tonga, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand is strongly correlated to patience (Gibson and McKenzie, 2011). Finally, in a study amongst potential migrants in Senegal, Arcand and Mbaye (2013) find that migration intentions and willingness to pay for a smuggler increase with an individual's intertemporal discount rate (i.e. they place less value on the present time and are more patient).

Finally, more optimistic people may be more likely to migrate. In a cross-country study of 34 countries including European and central Asian countries, Berlinschi and Harutyunyan (2019) find that among other values and attitudes, higher levels of optimism are linked to higher migration intentions. Gueye and Deshingkar (2020) find that aspiring migrants in Senegal may derive optimism from belief in god and fate, which can help in making a decision to migrate.

4.3. Attitudes towards risk

Migration can be risky, with hazards along the way, but more broadly with uncertainty about the outcome of the migration project. Broadly defined, risk is the likelihood of an event happening

and the severity or impact of that event. While risks are often reduced to negative outcomes (e.g. the risk of death crossing a border), outcomes can also be positive (e.g. being granted asylum). How migrants, aspiring migrants or non-migrants relate to risks is a growing area in the migration decision-making literature, drawing on the fields of economics, psychology, and sociology.

Risk attitudes can be defined as the aversion to or tolerance of risks, in other words the willingness to engage in risky behaviour. Risk attitudes are highly subjective (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006). The same risks are interpreted subjectively by individuals and what is most relevant is how individuals relate to risk (Gereke, 2016).

Personal attitudes to risks are dynamic, continuously evolving states of mind, formed both by individual character as well as *perceptions* of risk, that is, intuitive judgements about outcomes or events (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). Perceptions are also not static but should be seen as ongoing (re)assessments of the risks. Such judgments draw on personal experiences, which means that experience of adverse outcomes can change individual taste for risk-taking. For example, Bocquèho et al. (2018) find that experience of trauma influences risk attitudes.

Furthermore, risk perceptions are based on information about risk that is available and trusted, and interpretations of that information. Contrary to the popular misconception that migrants are ignorant of the risks of migration (Gereke, 2016), individuals planning to migrate actively engage with risk information – evaluating its source and assessing its relevance – when forming perceptions about risk (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). There is some evidence that migrants may even overestimate adverse risks (Bah and Batista, 2018). However, Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012) find that prospective migrants often relate to risk information in ways that downplay the dangers of migration by i) avoiding unfavourable information, i.e. ‘tunnel vision’; ii) discrediting the validity of risk information as unreliable or biased when it does not come through trusted channels or when there appear to be vested interests; and iii) accepting risk information but seeing it as irrelevant to their own personal experiences. Van Bommel (2020) has similar findings for young Ghanaians considering migration to Europe.

Individual information about risks, experiences of risk, perceptions of risk and resulting risk attitudes are socially constructed. Social and cultural factors shape how people understand and interpret risks (Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006). For example, in a more competitive environment, people may be more risk-tolerant (Hao et al., 2016), and social networks can normalise and familiarise risks (Ransan-Cooper, 2015).

On the whole, individual risk attitudes appear to be a strong predictor of migration (aspirations). The vast majority of studies show that more risk-tolerant individuals are more likely to aspire and to actually migrate internally and internationally. Huber and Nowotny’s (2020) large-n cross country study of 30 transition countries found that risk aversion has a negative impact

on willingness to migrate internally and internationally. Gibson and McKenzie (2011) found that risk seeking, and patience, was linked to highly skilled migration from Tonga, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. Bocquèho et al. (2018) found that asylum seekers who made it to Luxembourg are less risk averse with respect to gains and more risk averse with respect to losses, compared to other populations.

With regards to internal migration, Goldbach and Schülter (2018) found that both stated risk aversion and risk preferences revealed through an experiment were associated with a lower propensity for internal migration in Ghana and Indonesia. A greater willingness to take risks (and openness to new experiences) increased the probability of internal migration in the Ukraine (Ayhan et al., 2020). A number of studies found a link between risk aversion and a greater likelihood of not migrating internally (Akgüç et al., 2016; Dustmann et al., 2017; Hao et al., 2016).

Hao et al. (2016), however, found that risk attitudes between movers and stayers only differ with regards to 'strategic uncertainty', where outcomes also depend on the actions of others. They explain that migrants are more risk-taking in a competitive environment and more likely to believe in their own chance of success, compared to others. These findings resonate with a study by Conroy (2009) on internal migration by women in Mexico. It found that while, in general, more risk-averse women are less likely to migrate, in areas of high income variability, risk-averse, single women were more likely to migrate. In other words, they are willing to override their risk aversion to escape risks they cannot otherwise control.

A small number of studies also considered the link between risk attitudes and mode of migration. For Senegal, Arcand and Mbaye (2013) find that the willingness to pay a smuggler is linked to decreasing risk aversion, however they find no correlation between risk attitudes and likelihood of choosing irregular migration. Bah and Batista (2018) find a positive correlation between risk tolerance and willingness to migrate irregularly. In an experimental study of willingness to migrate irregularly from Jamaica, Schwartz et al. (2016) distinguished between two types of irregular migration: illegal entry (false documents) and illegal work (without documents). They find that aspiring migrants with higher risk tolerance are more accepting of both types of irregular migration. In a comparison of irregular and regular returnees in Albania, Ruedin and Nesturi (2018) find that unauthorised migration is linked to risk taking, where being young and male is considered a proxy for being risk taking.

5. Emotions and Feelings

The role of emotions and feelings in decision-making is another area where the number of studies has expanded rapidly in recent years, adding further dimensions to cost-benefit type analyses. There is a growing understanding that economic and emotional motives are intimately linked (Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015; Khan, 2018), that decision-making is emotionally charged (Brown et al., 2017) and that to genuinely understand decision-making it is important to bring emotional dimensions into the analysis (Mai and King, 2009). Taking aspirations as a specific example, aspirations involve a specific object (e.g. better job, safety), but are also dispersed within emotional layers of ‘vague expectations and unarticulated implications’ (Collins et al., 2014). Chakraborty and Thambiah (2018) argue that emotions are both expressive and instrumental in decision-making, an outcome of the migration experience and a driver of mobility respectively; the latter is of interest in this review.

The terms ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’ are distinct – emotions are nervous system responses, including joy, fear, anger or surprise, while feelings result from abstract thinking, from individuals’ subjective interpretations or meanings given to situations and sensations, such as shame (Burkitt, 2014, cited in Morse, 2017). Like much of the literature, we will use these terms interchangeably.

Emotions might be used by migrants to make sense of the broader context, the journey and aspirations for the future (Khan, 2018). Emotions may play into migrants continuing onwards on journeys, even when things do not work out, and the social and economic costs are high. Belloni (2019) writes about the concept of ‘entrapment’, borrowed from gambling psychology, documenting the emotions of Eritrean asylum-seekers for whom their felt duty to move ahead becomes more compelling precisely because of the accumulating emotional and social costs along the journey. Emotions might also be a trigger for migration, as argued by Kalir (2005). The Kalir (2005) study, looking at seemingly spontaneous migration from Ecuador to Israel, argues that people have a ‘migratory disposition’ formed by the social and physical environment around them. The migratory disposition involves an affective process in which potential migrants may develop a deep feeling toward leaving or staying. For example, being constantly confronted by displays of migrant wealth may lead to feelings of frustration and jealousy and could trigger a decision to migrate.

More specifically, discrete emotions such as hope or jealousy may spur migrants to embark upon and continue journeys, whilst feelings of shame may prevent a migrant from returning to their families. Individuals’ sense of belonging and identity or their emotional attachment to a particular place – such as their historic homeland – may also influence decision-making. Finally, subjective feelings of inequality, injustice or status anxiety can also shape decision-making. The following sections synthesise the studies examining the role of emotions.

5.1. (Lack of) Hope

Hope is a motivational feeling, which may encourage staying, leaving, continuing with a journey, or returning, or may push migrants towards specific destinations. Koikkalainen et al. (2020) highlight that there are two aspects to hope: ‘subjective hope’, which is part of one’s identity and social personality, and ‘objective hope’, which draws on perceptions of the external world and opportunities/limitations, similar to how risk attitudes are formed (see Section 4.3). One way that hope can facilitate migration decision-making is that it helps people mediate uncertainty (Hernandez-Carretaro, 2017; Ransan-Cooper, 2015; Grabska, 2020).

A number of studies find that hope can be part of the decision to leave. For internal migrants in the Philippines, hope is implicated in migration decisions and key to coping with the uncertainties and risk involved (Ransan-Cooper, 2015). Likewise, Hernandez-Carretaro (2017) finds that hope in a better future in Spain helped migrants confront uncertainty involved in the migration process – and was in fact preferred to hopeless certainty, and for Eritrean women facing uncertainty about onward mobility in Sudan (Grabska, 2020). Koikkalainen et al. (2020) show that hope can be both a motivational emotion, facilitating departure for Iraqis leaving behind chaotic and harsh circumstances, but can also reinforce imaginations about a destination, in this case, Finland.

Müller-Funk (2019) finds that *lack* of hope in a future in Syria makes refugees more likely to stay in Turkey. Staniforth (2014), too, finds that absence of hope for a better future at home was a motivation for leaving for Sub-Saharan migrants who had migrated to France and Spain. In a recent study of irregular migration from Ethiopia, Gebresenbet (forthcoming) details how feelings of hopelessness and being socially ‘stuck’ as a result of widespread unemployment are pervasive among young people. Migration towards Saudi Arabia is imagined as a path to becoming unstuck. Hope may also shape decision-making on the journey. For Afghan refugees in Turkey and Greece, hope is a key element in continuing their journey (Kuschminder, 2018). This is echoed by Koikkalainen et al.’s 2020 study on Iraqi refugees and by Hagan (2008) on undocumented Guatemalan and Mexican migrants making the risky journey to the US. The latter study finds that that hope is drawn from faith and religion, see also Section 6.1 on the role of religious and spiritual beliefs.

5.2. Shame, jealousy, and fear

Several studies note the influence of emotions such as shame, jealousy, fear and other social anxieties on migration behaviour. Emotions such as shame and jealousy might result from individuals’ experience of societal norms and peer pressure in contexts where there is a ‘culture of migration’, in which migration is normalised or even expected as a ‘rite of passage’. In areas of high out-migration, there may be a fear of being ‘left behind’ among adolescents, which plays an

important role in shaping migration intentions. Emotions such as frustration and anxiety may arise from one's current living situation (van Bommel, 2020), or from one's migration experience, such as the strong feelings of loneliness among older Albanian migrants in Italy linked to return migration intentions (Cela, 2017).

Several studies find that in areas of high out-migration, emotions that result from social pressures to migrate foster migration. In an ethnographic study of migration between Cambodia and Thailand, Bylander (2015) recounts how an individual who chose to stay and had asserted he would never migrate had experienced disrespect from peers as a result, which evoked emotional responses of disappointment, anger and jealousy – in a follow up visit two years later, this individual had left for Thailand. Among Tunisian young men, being jealous of peers who have migrated and social anxieties to escape a 'social death' were found to be linked to aspirations to make the (risky) journey towards Europe (Zagaria, 2019). The social prestige associated with migration in Gambia generates 'emulative jealousy' that influences migration ambitions amongst youth (Gaibazzi, 2010) and in Mali (REACH and MMC, 2020). In a study of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, Belloni (2019) found that peer pressure from fellow refugees living together in a refugee camp facilitated a shared emotional atmosphere or 'collective effervescence' conducive to further migration. For migrants in transit, societal expectations of migration may lead to fear of disappointing families at home (Belloni, 2019), which may foster onward migration. In a study of West African migrants (including from Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso) who have migrated in the direction of Europe, North, Central and Southern Africa, Bredeloup found shame to be 'an extremely effective emotion [...] to avoid social death' (2017: 145).

In the face of unsuccessful migration, shame plays a crucial role in staying versus return migration. Shame may discourage migrants from returning before having seemingly achieved 'success' abroad, as for Indonesian migrants (Chan, 2018). Feelings of shame when imagining returning home without success fostered onward migration among Senegalese in Europe (Hernandez-Carretaro, 2017). Prospective student migrants in Ghana would prefer to continue to another country if they do not succeed in their first destination rather than be a failed returnee due to fear of shame or stigma from family and communities (Dako-Gyeke, 2016). Among unsuccessful migrants in France and Spain, feelings of shame and the fear of being ostracised by home communities discouraged return migration to Sub-Saharan African countries of origin (Staniforth, 2014). In a study of Gambian migrants in China, the shame felt by those who returned empty handed increased their resolve to re-migrate to achieve success abroad (Carling and Haugen, 2020). Failure to succeed upon returning may also foster re-migration, as among women in the Philippines (McKay, 2005). In an ethnographic study in Côte D'Ivoire, Newell (2012) details how shame from a failed migration attempt spurred one deportee to continue attempting to migrate to Europe, concerned for his and his family's reputation. Scalettari et al. (2019) find that many young Afghan men who left Afghanistan for Europe when they were transitioning into adulthood immediately begin a new cycle of movement after deportation, in the face of social shame.

Closely connected to shame is guilt. For instance, migrants' feelings of guilt due to not fulfilling moral obligations of care to left behind family members might influence decisions to return (Baldassar, 2015). In an ethnography of Filipina and Indonesian returnee migrant women from Hong Kong, Constable (2014) details how the guilt and shame returnees experience after failed migration experiences, especially in the face of gendered social stigma due to behaviour whilst abroad deemed immoral such as single motherhood, drives re-migration. Constable coins this form of re-migration as 'the migratory cycle of atonement' – re-migration is perceived as a means to absolve moral transgressions, escape stigma and achieve social acceptance. Evidence of the migratory cycle of atonement was also found among migrant women in the Gulf, who viewed migration as a space to unburden themselves of the guilt and shame placed on them by their families (Mahdavi, 2016).

However, fear and other related emotions may be linked to immobility. In an area of high out-migration in Mexico, fear of the actual journey including the possibility of death in high risk migration may be a reason for staying – as Tucker et al. (2013) found among women in Mexico. In an ethnography of Indonesian high out-migration villages, Chan (2018) shows that stories of failed migration journeys mobilise a fear and (gendered) shame, which discourages migration. Among climate IDPs in Bangladesh, IDPs who felt emotionally empty and meaningless were immobile (Ayeb-Karlsson et al., 2020).

5.3. Love and intimacy

Several qualitative – and predominantly ethnographic – studies consider the role love and intimacy play in migrant decision-making. Love – or an emotional and intimate attachment – can be for a person, whether it is romantic love for a partner, familial love, or love for a friend. Love might also relate to an emotional attachment to a place, which is explored in Section 5.4 on 'place attachment'. Love and intimacy are intertwined with economic and political factors in migrant decision-making (Mai and King, 2009; Vogt, 2018).

Love and intimacy can be a key factor in the decision to move, for instance to join loved ones in a place (Mai and King, 2009). A handful of studies consider the role of romantic or familial love as a pull factor. In one small scale study of Chinese women married to Muslim men (from the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia), the strength of emotional attachment and stability within the marital relationship were crucial elements in the decision to migrate to their husband's country (Sha, 2019). In a study of decision-making of Brazilian women to move (or not) to live with their Dutch partners in the Netherlands, Assunção (2016) found that women prioritised maternal love over romantic love for their partners, although this differed depending on having children and at different life stages.

The decision to migrate might be guided by a quest for romantic love or intimacy (Mahdavi, 2016). In her ethnographic study of migration in the UAE and Kuwait Gulf, Mahdavi (2016) notes that the search for love, as well as adventure or freedom, may be as salient a push factor

in migration decisions than economic motivations. Frohlick (2009) details how Western female tourists decided to become migrants and stay in Costa Rica due to falling in love with sexual partners, linking the quest for love to a search for a sense of belonging. Sexual desire may also shape migration decisions; this might especially be the case for those who feel they cannot fully explore their sexual desires in their country of origin, and seek a more tolerant environment, for instance for Peruvian gay men (Del Aguila, 2014).

On the reverse, the emotional toll of leaving loved ones behind may factor strongly in decisions. In her study of Mexican migration towards the US, migrating with or without their children, Boehm (2012) describes these decision-making processes as ‘complicated, ongoing, and inevitably anxiety-producing’ (2012: 119–120). Meanwhile, a study of return decision-making of married Nigerians in China found that despite desiring to return to Nigeria to improve their lives, Nigerian women choose to stay in China to avoid separation from their families (Adebayo, 2019). Nigerian men whose family are left behind in Nigeria consider return in part due to concerns about separation and ‘absentee fatherhood’ (ibid.).

The influence of love on migrant decision-making interacts with economic forces and structural constraints of migration in the particular context. For instance, an individual’s desire to improve their family’s economic well-being cannot be separated from feelings of love and loyalty (Mai and King, 2009). In contexts in which migration is more a matter of necessity than choice, feelings of love and responsibility towards children may factor more greatly upon an individual’s decision to migrate. For instance, Abrego (2014) details how, for one Salvadorian mother, the thought of leaving her daughter was paralyzing and caused her to postpone her migration trip. The woman ultimately migrated, pushed by ‘sheer desperation’ (ibid.: 26).

Lastly, emotions are not static and change over time. The migration experience itself in turn has an impact on individuals’ intimate lives, transforming notions of ‘family’ or ‘home’ and transforming individuals’ relationships (Mahdavi, 2016), which then may influence onward or return migration decisions. For some Central American transit migrants in Mexico, intimate relationships forged with smugglers during journeys subsequently shaped their migratory trajectories (Vogt, 2018).

5.4. Place attachment

Place attachment is a psychological concept, defined as the ‘emotional bond that people develop with a given place’, including feelings of identification with place, sense of pride and desire to care for it (Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska, 2020: 4). Place attachment includes feelings of loyalty as an emotional tie to a particular location, as well as feelings of nostalgia (Razum et al., 2005). The emotional connection may be to an ancestral or historic homeland, which involves a strong sense of belonging, (ethnic) identity and loyalty (Kunuroglu et al., 2018). The emotional bond may also be linked to cultural or religious beliefs, such as attachment to birthplace or

ancestral residing place in Iran (Khatir and Razaei-Moghaddam, 2014) or for Malaysian Indians who migrate from plantations to nearby towns and who feel a deep affective and metaphysical connection to the plantations, believing that it has a demi-god energy and force (Chakraborty et al., 2018). Place identity might be localised – for instance to a certain neighbourhood or city – in other words a ‘local identity’ (Du and Li, 2012). The emotional bond includes a sense of belongingness, being important to one another and sharing a common fate (Simões et al., 2020).

There is a vast literature from high income countries, which overwhelmingly finds that place attachment is linked to the determination to stay and not migrate. The evidence base from the low and middle income countries is relatively small, and more mixed. In Taiwan, Liao (2004) found that emotional attachment to local communities was linked to stay intentions. However, community attachment, measured by a self-perceived belonging to local community, was not a statistically significant predictor of stay intentions for rural youth in Iran (Khatir and Razaei-Moghaddam, 2014).

A handful of studies link migrants’ emotional place attachment to place of destination as transforming temporary or circular mobility into long-term settlement (Du and Li, 2012). Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska (2020) find emotional attachment to Warsaw is decisive in Ukrainian migrants’ settlement. Among internal migrants in China with temporary status – the ‘floating population’ – stay intentions were linked more to affection towards the city (Guangzhou), than the particular neighbourhood (Du and Li, 2012), and considered relative to feelings towards the origin city (Tan et al., 2017).

Place attachment to place of origin – measured by levels of love towards one’s hometown – was not a statistically significant predictor of return migration decisions of Vietnamese internal student migrants (Nguyen, 2020). More concrete evidence exists for the influence of place attachment to parents’ place of origin or *imagined* homeland for second and third generation migrants, see also Section 3.2 for a discussion of imagined destinations. A strong sense of ‘homeland attachment’ was found to be linked to return migration decisions of Turkish first, second and third generation migrants from Western Europe (Kunuroglu et al., 2018). Similarly, the return of Iraqi Kurdish migrants from Europe and North America was found to be shaped by emotional attachments to Kurdistan and Kurdish culture and identity (Baser and Toivanen, 2018), which was influenced by parents’ trauma and narratives of their homeland and exile (Keles, 2019).

A couple of studies from the transnationalism and integration literature find that the role of place attachment to place of origin is relative to place attachment in place of destination in return migration decision-making (e.g. Carling and Pettersen, 2014). This relativity differs depending on the individual, who may view place attachment and migration as complementary, contradictory (mutually exclusive) or in equilibrium (Gustafson, 2001). For instance, Erdal (2014) notes that for return migrants there are four options in locating ‘home’: ‘here’ – in the country of settlement,

‘there’ – in the country of origin, ‘both,’ or ‘neither.’ This is shaped by developments in communication technology which facilitates transnational communication. Indeed, Li and Frieze (2013) question whether place attachment is as important a factor in migrant decision-making with the ability to bridge psychological distances between two places with the internet. This is an area for future research.

5.5. Feelings of discrimination and inequality

It is well established in the migration literature that income differentials are a key driver of migration. A more recent body of literature has started to look at whether how people *feel* about inequality, inequities and discrimination shapes their decision-making.

How people feel about vertical inequality and income differences can shape their decisions about mobility. One study finds that Latvians felt emotionally disempowered, inferior and deprived as a result of inequalities and this significantly influenced their migration decisions (Ķešāne, 2019). Vacchiano (2018) finds that North African youths’ feelings of marginalisation and exclusion from lifestyles that confer respectability and status are linked to mobility aspirations.

Gereke (2016), in an experiment with young men in Thailand, finds that amongst aspiring migrants, feelings of relative deprivation increase their willingness to take risks – this could affect both the likelihood of migration, as well as migration mode. Mo’s 2018 study, drawing on an experiment and survey in Nepal, also finds that feeling relatively deprived can increase willingness to take risks and engage in more risky migration.

A small number of studies considered feelings of discrimination, dignity and feelings of belonging to society. Perceived racial discrimination and the feeling of ‘racial stuckness’, of not being able to advance in society because of race, contributed to decisions to migrate to Dubai for EU citizens of North African heritage (Alloul, 2020). Using micro-level Gallup World Poll data from 143 countries, Ruysen and Salomone (2018) find that women who do not feel treated with respect and dignity have higher aspirations to migrate abroad (although this was not significant for actual migration, which was more dependent on household income, network effects and family obligations). Feelings of isolation, discrimination and stigma due to sexual orientation contributed towards the migration of queer Puerto Ricans (Asencio and Acosta, 2009), together with experiences of discrimination for Peruvian gay men (Del Aguila, 2014). For Crimean IDPs in Ukraine, feelings of alienation from native Crimea and emotional aversion to Russian imagery in public spaces influenced their decisions to move (Charron, 2020).

Finally, a number of studies look at how perceived discrimination influences return migration, all focused on Turkish immigrants. Kunuroglu et al. (2018) find that having experienced and felt discrimination played a role in decisions to return to Turkey from Germany, France and the

Netherlands. Perceived discriminatory attitudes amongst Turks in Germany strengthened return intentions (Tezcan, 2019), as did strong feelings of being discriminated against of Turks in a number of European cities (Groenewold and de Valk, 2017) and Turks from Germany, but not the United States, where most respondents did not mention discrimination and those that did said it did not contribute to their return decision (Yimaz Sener, 2019).

6. Beliefs and Values

To what extent do migrants' particular religious beliefs, moral values, political opinions or cultural traits shape migrant decision-making? Are migrants more liberal, more self-confident, more materialistic or more independent? Are some individuals more susceptible than others to (gendered) social pressures that mandate staying as the norm, or migrating as a rite of passage? The influence of individuals' beliefs and values on migrant decision-making remain understudied in the literature (Docquier et al., 2020), however, an increasing number of studies have begun to assess the mediating influence of individually held beliefs and values on migration decision-making, summarised in this section.

6.1. Religious and spiritual beliefs

Several studies consider internal religiosity – or personal religious beliefs – as a subjective and intangible factor shaping migrant decision-making. Religious or spiritual beliefs might guide when, where and whether to migrate. Faith can give the hope required to embark upon the migratory project, especially in the face of high risks and dangers, and strength and resilience to continue in difficult circumstances. As such, the role of religion and faith is deeply personal, subjective and intangible and tangled up with decision-making. In her study of Guatemalan and Mexican migrants embarking on the (risky) journey to the US, Hagan notes that: 'At some stage the decision-making moves from a rational, real-world level to a very private, religious, even mystical plane' (2008: 23).

A handful of studies find a link between strong personal religious beliefs and individuals deciding to migrate. Among West Africans (including Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso) migrating to Europe, North and Southern Africa, Christian and Muslim religious beliefs were found to be a means of legitimating migration decisions – hope and determination to move were grounded in beliefs (Bredeloup, 2017). One quantitative study of Catholic high school students in Mexico found that a strong belief in God as a protector increased intentions to migrate to the US (Hoffmann et al., 2015).

There is evidence that fatalist beliefs – or 'the belief that human outcomes are preordained by forces outside an individual's control and that actions by individuals have no power to change these preordained outcomes' (Thornton et al., 2020) – guide migrants' decisions to leave. Several ethnographic studies find a strong role for fatalist beliefs in seemingly irrational or high-risk decisions to migrate (Gueye and Deshingkar, 2020; Chan, 2018; Prothmann, 2018; 2019; Bastide, 2015). There is also quantitative evidence that finds a link between fatalist beliefs and decisions to migrate. Longitudinal data from Nepal shows that those with stronger fatalist beliefs – rooted in Hinduism and the caste system – are more likely to migrate (Thornton, et al., 2020). Conversely, another quantitative study finds no or only a weak link between fatalist beliefs and migration intentions in Egypt, Ghana, Morocco and Senegal (Van Dalen et al., 2005). A couple of studies envisage fatalistic beliefs as being on one end of a continuum, with

self-determination or self-efficacy at the other end (e.g. Van Dalen et al., 2005; Thornton et al., 2020), see Section 6.6.

Several studies find that religious and/or fatalist beliefs are linked to high risk and irregular migration. For instance, for some Ethiopians, the belief that life is pre-determined means that the risky decision to irregularly migrate to the Middle East will not affect their destinies (Minaye and Zeleke, 2017). The ultimate risk of death during the journey is viewed as unrelated to the migration decision, and rather as a preordained destiny (Gebresenbet, forthcoming). Religious beliefs may serve as a means of coping with and minimising the known dangers of migration journeys pre-migration and in transit. Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012) outline three ways in which migrants' religious beliefs serve as a lens for interpreting the risks involved in high risk migration, hence shaping decision-making. They are:

- 1. Religious practices as part of strategies to minimise probability of adverse outcomes.** Religious risk-reducing strategies for young Senegalese ahead of their journey to Europe include prayers, amulets, and sacrifices (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012).
- 2. Religious beliefs affect migrants' assessment of the magnitude of adverse outcomes and possibility of death.** Religious beliefs shape migrants' evaluation of the decision to migrate (and high risk of failed migration attempts). For instance, death may be viewed as a part of life given by God and not something to be feared (Gueye and Deshingkar, 2020). Islamic morality and the related masculine identity of being a 'good man' seeking to improve the lives of one's family means that potential death en route is conceptualised as a morally good death – one of sacrifice as a martyr (Pandolfo, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 2016).
- 3. Faith in a divine destiny challenges the very notion of risk as it is up to God what the outcome will be.** The decision-making process of staying put or knowingly leaving for irregular and risky international migration is guided by a strong belief in destiny – danger or even death from high risk migration journeys are considered an integral part of life and are not to be feared as one's fate is up to the judgement of God, for instance among Indonesian labour migrants in Java, Malaysia and Singapore (Bastide, 2015).

A further study looks at the role of superstitious beliefs, namely from Chinese astrology, in internal migration decision-making in Vietnam (Gereke and Zhang, 2016). Using a natural experiment from Vietnamese census data, the study finds mixed evidence on the importance of culturally-specific astrological beliefs on migrant outcomes.

A handful of studies find that higher levels of religiosity *constrain* rather than foster mobility. In a comparison of Nepalese migrants in the Persian Gulf and non-migrants in Nepal, Williams et al. (2014) found that migrants were less committed to religion; individuals who reported praying

often were 40% less likely to be migrants than those who did not. For some Senegalese respondents, their preference to stay in Senegal was explained as a submission to God's will for their lives (Schewel, 2015). Finally, there is evidence of *lower* levels of religiosity being linked to *higher* migration aspirations, including in Islam-majority MENA region (Docquier et al., 2020).

A couple of studies also find a link between higher levels of religiosity and return intentions. Placing a high importance on religion in life was linked to greater return migration intentions of migrants in Norway (Carling and Pettersen, 2014). The authors interpreted this as a desire to return to an environment of more religious or traditional values, see Section 6.3. Similarly, higher levels of religiosity among second generation Turkish migrants in European cities was linked to increased return migration intentions, together with strong feelings of being discriminated against (Groenewold and de Valk, 2017), see also Section 5.

Just one study finds that spiritual beliefs may influence destination preference. In Nepal, migrants with stronger fatalistic beliefs are more likely to move to destinations with lower barriers to entry such as India, and less likely to move to destinations with higher barriers of entry, where finding a job and acclimatising is comparatively more difficult (Thornton et al., 2020).

Lastly, one study finds that personal religious or spiritual beliefs may influence mode and time of travel. For Ghanaians travelling irregularly towards Europe, some deliberately travel during Ramadan due to the belief that the risks might be smaller (van Bommel, 2020). Meanwhile, those with a strong belief in sorcery feared spirits more than the high-risk journey, meaning that they would not share travel plans with others, believing that spirits disguised as humans could negatively affect their journey (ibid.).

6.2. Political opinions

A small number of studies suggest that those who make the decision to migrate are more politically liberal or capitalist minded, whereas others find no evidence for this. Etling et al. (2020) find that, for young people in Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, perception of democracy and the ability to shape government policies are important determinants for migration intentions. Those who are fonder of democracy are more likely to want to leave than stay. In studying return and staying of Chinese scholars and students in the US, Wang (1998) found that Chinese migrants who have rejected the Chinese collectivist ideology and accepted the individualist ideology of the US tend to stay in the US. Those who hold on to the collectivist ideology tend to return.

Using survey data from 34 countries (including Eastern European and post-Soviet states), economic liberalism (including views on inequality competition, nationalisation, markets, public goods) was not a significant predictor of emigration intentions, although the study did find that those who intend to migrate are more politically active and more critical of governance and

institutions (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan, 2018). Among Syrian refugees in Turkey and Germany, democratic rights and liberties such as freedom of belief and speech did not feed into the consideration of potential return to Syria (Al Husein and Wagner, 2020). Two studies from Falco and Rotondi (2016a; 2016b) use ArabBarometer data to consider the role of radical political views on migrant decision-making. The authors find that more radical individuals (those with views that Islam should guide social and political life) in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen are less willing to migrate.

Just one article considers the role of political beliefs on *how* migrants move. Dibeh et al. (2019) compared the regular versus irregular migration intentions of youth in Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, and found that a belief in democracy increases the probability to migrate regularly over irregularly.

6.3. Individual modernity and traditional values

As referred to in Section 3.1, an (imagined) more modern lifestyle influences migration aspirations and destination choice (Belloni, 2019). But in which values are those that choose to migrate more modern in their outlook than those who prefer to stay put? A few studies attempt to measure individual modernity via proxies and find some evidence of a link with increased migration intentions.

For instance, one study finds that one of five individual modernity variables¹ – interest in world news – was an important indicator of migration intentions from India to Canada (Winchie and Carment, 1988). Another study found that modernity, measured by a proxy of attitudes towards single women migrating, was a determinant of migration aspirations in Ghana, Senegal, Morocco and Egypt (Van Dalen et al., 2005).

Whilst not explicitly referring to modernity, a handful of studies consider the influence of more ‘modern’ attitudes, namely gender egalitarian views on migrant decision-making. Gender ideology can be conceptualised on a continuum with egalitarian beliefs on one end and patriarchal beliefs on the other (Hofmann, 2014). In MENA countries, Docquier et al. (2020) find gender egalitarian attitudes towards women’s rights – equal rights, the opinion that women should be allowed to hold any job, and that women can initiate a divorce – are linked to migration aspirations to OECD countries, although only among young, single women from countries with a Sunni majority. Meanwhile, Dibeh et al. (2019) show that belief in gender equality was not an important driver of irregular migration in North Africa and the Middle East.

1. Based on a short form version of Inkeles and Smith’s (1974) individual modernity scale, five individual modernity variables were: concern about public issues; preference for new people; understanding about others; need for religion; and interest in world news.

One study suggests that more traditional values may be linked to migrant decision-making. In a study of return migration intentions of Turkish migrants in Germany, Razum et al. (2005) conceptualised some returnees as ‘cultural traditionalists’ – motivated to return by a preference for Turkish traditions, rooted in Islamic moral values.

6.4. Individualism and family orientation

Are migrants more self-centred or individualistic? There is a small, quite mixed body of evidence in this area. Individualism – manifested in a quest for individual freedom, escape and a search for self-realisation – is a salient aspect of ‘lifestyle migration’ (Robins, 2019), see also Section 3.1. One study of middle-class Brazilian migrants found that individualistic outlook and related ideals of anonymity and social mobility played strongly in decisions to migrate to London (Robins, 2019). Another study of internal child migrants in Indonesia found that children were strongly influenced by global ideas of individuality, freedom, and modernity – rural-urban internal migration was linked to a pursuit of personal freedom, outside of family control (Beazley, 2015).

A small number of quantitative studies conceptualise individualist values on one end of a spectrum with family-oriented values at the other. In the Chitwan valley of Nepal, Nepali migrants in the Persian Gulf were found to place more importance on their families than their individual needs, compared to Nepali non-migrants (Williams et al., 2014). However, a study of internal migration in Thailand found that those with stronger family values were the *least* likely to move (De Jong et al., 1996). The influence of family values on migration was gendered, only statistically significant for men (ibid.). The authors note this difference is due to the different socio-culturally constructed gender roles in Thai society.

Individualism and family values may also shape destination choice. Placing greater importance on family life was also linked to the choice of internal and/or circular migration over international migration for some respondents in Indonesia (Yen et al., 2015). A study again from the Chitwan Valley of Nepal considered the influence of individually held attitudes toward fulfilling family obligations and found the effects of family obligation attitudes are gendered and influence destination choice (Hughes et al., 2020). For men, those with strong family obligation attitudes were more likely to migrate internationally to neighbouring India than domestically.² For women, the effects of strong family obligation attitudes were weaker and more mixed: putting family first constrained migration, whilst believing adult children should care for adult parents was positively related to migrating to India.

2. Other international destinations included were the Persian Gulf and ‘WWA’ – Europe, Australia, US, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand.

6.5. Self enhancement

A small body of evidence suggests that migrants value self enhancement more, in terms of possession of material goods, achievements or power, than non-migrants.

Two studies, both from the Chitwan Valley of Nepal, suggest that materialism – or individual attitudes towards the importance or value of owning material goods – may differentiate migrants from non-migrants with a similar socio-economic background, and influence migrants' destination choice (Thornton et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2014). Williams et al. (2014) compare Nepali migrants in the Persian Gulf and Nepali non-migrants and find that migrants are more likely to value the ownership of material goods. Thornton et al. (2019) similarly find that general material aspirations are positively associated with Nepali out-migration. Notably, those with higher material aspirations migrate to countries with higher earning potentials, including Malaysia, as opposed to neighbouring India or the Persian Gulf.

The evidence base on the influence of achievement and power on migrant decision-making in low and middle income countries is small and inconclusive. Achievement – a 'recurrent concern to surpass one's own standard of excellence or to do something challenging and unique' – and power – 'concern about having control over or impact on others' – are included as two of three 'motives' that belong to Boneva and Frieze's concept of a 'Migrant Personality', which hypothesises that individuals who possess these motivations are pre-disposed to migrate (Boneva and Frieze, 2001: 482). The Migrant Personality has not been widely tested in low and middle income country contexts.

Winchie and Carment (1988) found that achievement motivation was a weak predictor of migration intentions in India, although they note that this may be due to operationalisation issues relating to their self-reported indicator of achievement, which they deemed inadequate. More recently, Polavieja et al. (2018) have explored 'achievement-related motivational orientations' (ARMO), measuring orientations to socio-economic success, risk, and money in a cross-national study of migrants in different locations in Europe, compared to non-migrants in origin countries. The ARMO scale is only statistically significant for Brazilian migrants in Portugal and male Andean migrants in Spain. As such, they call into question the idea that migrants are 'always the most motivated and ambitious individuals of their home countries' (Polavieja et al., 2018: 538).

6.6. Self efficacy and luck

Interrelated concepts of self-confidence, internal locus of control, agency, self-determination and self-efficacy – that is, one's belief in their capabilities to perform a behaviour (Bandura, 1977) – have been found to play an important role in migrant decision-making. The literature sometimes describes self-efficacy (and related concepts) as a personality trait, sometimes as a belief, or as a feeling, and other times more broadly as a psychosocial factor (Groenewold et al., 2012).

We include these studies under the (broad) category of beliefs and values in this section, but acknowledge these studies could sit elsewhere in the review. Several social and cognitive psychological models which have been applied to explain migration behaviour incorporate self efficacy, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour (e.g. Cui et al., 2016), Health Belief Model (Groenewold et al., 2012) and the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (Syed Zwick 2019, 2020). In quantitative studies, a high level of self-efficacy is often conceptualised at one end of a continuum, with individuals' belief in fate and/or destiny (e.g. Thornton et al., 2020; see Section 6.1) or luck (Winchie and Carment, 1988; De Jong et al., 1983) at the other end.

Several studies find a correlation between high levels of self-efficacy and migration intentions. Schewel and Fransen (2018) find that feelings of self-efficacy – measured by the self-professed confidence in the ability to overcome obstacles – was one of the strongest predictors of aspirations to migrate internally and internationally among Ethiopian youth, alongside higher education levels. They conclude that general aspirations for the future and confidence to achieve them are the key driving forces behind migration aspirations. Self-efficacy is also found to be linked to internal/ international migration intentions in the Philippines (De Jong et al., 1983), transit migration in Egypt (Syed Zwick, 2020) and willingness to migrate internally amongst youth in Iran (Yazdan-Panah and Zobeidi, 2017). In a recent study of youth *stay* intentions in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Vietnam, self-efficacy (alongside education and employment) was linked to leaving intentions and had the strongest effect on diminishing the stay intentions among the poorer respondents (Schewel and Fransen, 2020).

Two studies offer weaker support for the link between self-efficacy and the decision to migrate. A study of migration intentions in Morocco, Senegal, Egypt and Ghana found a weak effect between self-efficacy and migration intentions for the former two nationalities and no effect for the latter two nationalities (Van Dalen et al., 2005). However, a later study using the same data found that self-efficacy was a predictor of migration intentions in Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Turkey (although only marginally), but not in Egypt (Groenewold et al., 2012).

In a study of fatalistic beliefs and migration in Nepal, a low belief in fatalism – which the authors equate to self-determination – is linked to destination choice (Thornton et al., 2020). A lower belief in fatalism (higher self-determination) is linked to increased odds of migrating to destinations with higher barriers of entry such as Australia, Europe and Japan, and lower odds of migrating to Malaysia and the Gulf, which are comparatively easier countries to access.

A related concept is an individual's belief in personal luckiness. One study found a connection between personal belief in luckiness and embarking on risky migration (Gereke, 2016). Among Thai prospective migrants (to South Korea), those who believed in their own good luck were significantly more willing to accept a (hypothetical) risky labour migration offer to Saudi Arabia – suggesting those who believe themselves to be luckier are more willing to take risks.

6.7. Sense of purpose

A belief in one's purpose may too be a factor in migration decision-making. A sense of purpose is closely linked to place attachment, see Section 5.4. One study found that a strong sense of purpose – defined as 'noneconomic, emotional and life–philosophical considerations' – influenced migrant decision-making in committing highly skilled Tanzanian doctors to serve their home communities (Emmanuel et al., 2019: 317). A feeling of loyalty and commitment to Senegal's development was also linked to choosing to stay in Senegal (Schewel, 2015).

Among Kurdish migrants in the UK, a feeling of obligation to return to Kurdistan to contribute to the development of their parental historic homeland's institutions and economy was central to the decision to migrate (Keles, 2019). Baser and Toivanen (2018) similarly found an altruistic and nationalist feeling to serve their country among Iraqi Kurdish returnees.

6.8. Normative values

The literature acknowledges societal norms as meso-level factors which shape migrant decision-making. These include norms around migration such as a 'culture of migration' in which a society recognises migration as a 'core value' (Belloni, 2019), or the opposite, a 'culture of permanence' in which staying is the norm (Mata-Codesal, 2015). It is the subjective and intangible extent to which individuals are open, agreeable and susceptible to these social influences – or the extent to which they possess these 'normative values' – that is of interest to us in this review (Ryo, 2013).

The literature is starting to focus on the role of individual values and attitudes in amplifying or decreasing the effects of social norms upon migrant decision-making (Hughes et al., 2020; Bakewell and Bonfiglio, 2013). Indeed, individuals from the same communities with the same societal expectations behave differently: not all individuals in areas with high out-migration and strong cultures of migration migrate. Individual perceptions and attitudes towards these expectations at the micro-level can hence play a role in decision-making.

6.8.1. Norms around migration

Very few studies consider the role of *individual* normative values in migrant decision-making. For students in Nanjing, *perceptions* of peer and parental pressures to stay were directly and indirectly linked to stay intentions (Cui et al., 2016). Two studies investigate the role of normative values – namely personal morality, legitimacy of authority and social norms – in *irregular* migration decisions. Ryo (2013) found that normative values around border crossing and legitimacy of immigration law in the US – including the belief that disobeying the law is sometimes justified, the belief that it is okay to migrate illegally in search of economic opportunities beyond

basic survival, and more – were part of Mexican respondents’ subjective cost benefit analysis in irregularly migrating to the US. In an experimental study of irregular migration intentions in Jamaica, Schwartz et al. (2016) found that perceived legitimacy of immigration laws was linked to supporting working abroad without papers, but not linked to support for migrating with false documents, which was driven by perceived necessity.

Normative values around migration might also influence destination choice for migrants (Belloni, 2020; Scalettari et al., 2019). A couple of studies have found that certain destinations (in this case in Europe) are socially valued over others, or sit higher on a moral hierarchy of destinations, which is linked to onward migration in pursuit of a more socially valued country of destination (ibid.), see also Section 3.2.

6.8.2. Norms around gender roles

Migrant decision-making is also influenced by a ‘knotty set of gendered cultural considerations’, including gendered expectations of social roles, morality and responsibilities (Broughton, 2008). As mentioned above, in this review we are particularly interested in the extent to which individuals are open, agreeable and susceptible to these gender expectations. Women’s and men’s gender identity shapes their perceptions of legitimate behaviour and subjective evaluations of their options, with direct implications for migrant decision-making (Hoang, 2011).

Gender role expectations related to family responsibilities and morality, together with socio-economic factors, create structural constraints which individuals must navigate during migration decisions. In her study of Mexican migration to the US, Boehm (2012) finds that individuals migrate specifically to fulfil their culturally understood role as parents and providers, and that expectations are markedly gendered. Gender ideologies together with class positions inform migrants’ decisions, justifications, and feelings of guilt surrounding migration (Abrego, 2014).

Several studies consider how women negotiate gender role expectations of motherhood in their decisions to go. For instance, in a study of migration from El Salvador to the US, Abrego (2014) finds that, bound by traditional notions of motherhood to stay and care for the family, but forced by severe situations to leave (and leave behind their children), women negotiated and redefined motherhood to make migration acceptable. Paul (2015) refers to this as ‘negotiated migration’, in which women negotiate expectations to frame their decision as one of familial loyalty and self-sacrifice. In the Philippines, women migrants frame the decision to migrate within the boundaries of normative gender roles as the ‘altruistic mother,’ ‘martyr mother’ or ‘dutiful daughter’ (Tacoli, 1996; Paul, 2015). Constable’s (2014) concept of ‘migratory cycle of atonement’ is also relevant here. For Indonesian and Filipina returnee migrant mothers from Hong Kong, women who society has judged to have failed their gender roles as mothers in their actions abroad are driven to re-migrate to ‘atone’ in a hope for moral and social redemption.

On the reverse, a handful of studies consider how men negotiate and redefine gender role expectations of providers in their decisions to stay. Pressure to migrate to fulfil the role of ‘breadwinner’ is present in many contexts including Mexico (Broughton, 2008), Sri Lanka (Attanapola, 2013) and Cambodia (Bylander, 2015). In the context of migration from Cambodia to Thailand, young men frame their staying decision – which conflicts with the gendered expectation to migrate – as linked to being a ‘good man’ in both their own minds and to appease societal opposition (Bylander, 2015).

7. Conclusion

In this review we have retrieved and synthesised the new and rapidly growing body of evidence on the subjective and intangible factors contributing to migrant decision-making in low and middle income countries. We retrieved 182 studies through journal and google searches. Much of this literature focuses on how personality types and attitudes to risk are related to migrant decision-making. A further set of studies is concerned with how individual beliefs and values – such as religious and spiritual beliefs, and self-confidence – shape migration decisions. More recently, the literature has also focused on feelings and emotions, acknowledging that decision-making is ‘emotionally charged’ (Brown et al., 2017). The literature has also started to reflect on the role of imagination – the mental journeys one might have prior to migration – and the real-life consequences imagined mobilities can have (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020).

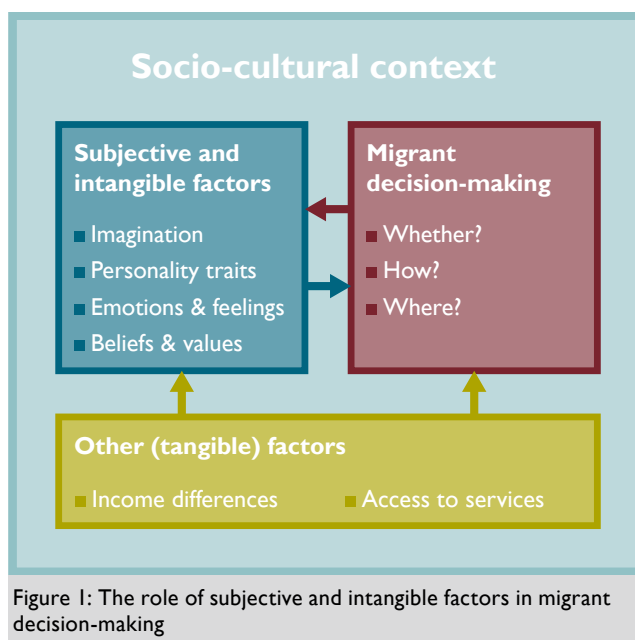
This is a truly inter-disciplinary area. The study of the subjective and intangible factors in migrant decision-making originate in psychology and sociology, with economic models soon borrowing ideas from these fields. We also found studies from anthropology, geography and languages and culture studies as well as more recent neuroscience studies. These studies build on the theoretical literature in migration studies, drawing on socio-psychological models such as the De Jong and Fawcett 1981 value-expectancy model. More broadly, many concepts used are linked and overlapping, hard to define and often used in an interchangeable way, and boundaries between concepts are blurred.

So how do subjective and intangible factors shape migrant decision-making? We propose that these factors influence decision-making just like other more *tangible* factors and that these factors constantly evolve through feedback loops.

Figure 1 shows a basic model of the role of subjective and intangible factors in migrant decision-making. Migrant decision-making is on the right and consists of the decision of whether to migrate – remembering that the majority of people have no aspirations to migrate – and decisions about the migration journey and destination. Tangible factors play into this process, for example considerations around income differences, job opportunities or access to education. Additionally, subjective and intangible factors impact on decision-making. In this review, we have identified four main groups of factors:

- **Imagination** – the mental pictures people make when contemplating migration, imagining and visualising themselves in a future time and place
- **Personality** – specific personality traits such as extraversion, patience and adaptability, as well as individuals’ risk tolerance or risk aversion
- **Emotions and feelings** – the layers of emotion dispersed in the decision-making process, including (lack of) hope, love and intimacy, place attachment and feelings of discrimination/inequality
- **Beliefs and values** – internalised norms and individual beliefs, including religious or political beliefs, and values, such as family orientation.

As mentioned above, these terms are often used by authors in an interchangeable way. The ‘fuzzy’ nature of these terms means they are hard to define and the same factor can arguably be included in several categories. For instance, placing importance on achievements and power can be classified as an individual value but could also be considered part of someone’s personality. The categories introduced here should therefore not be seen as mutually exclusive, but as overlapping.



Moreover, these factors also influence each other. For example, emotions might play into imagined lifestyles and identity and how risks are perceived. Likewise, personality might determine to what extent people feel comfortable with emotions driving their decision-making. Furthermore, these subjective and intangible factors are not static, they are constantly evolving. Given the dynamic interaction and constant evolution of these factors, it would be far too simplistic to say that some people are pre-disposed to migrate, and others are not. Understanding who is more likely to migrate requires getting to grips with these dynamic interrelationships.

There is also a feedback loop from migration aspirations, decisions and experiences (and other life experiences) to subjective and intangible factors. For example, migration attempts of individuals and others can shape their perceptions of risk and hence aversion/tolerance of risk (Bocquèho et al., 2018); they can also affect the content of migration imaginaries. (Self-perceived) failed migration attempts may lead to feelings of shame that spur further re-migration (Carling and Haugen, 2020).

These decision-making factors and processes are formed by specific socio-cultural contexts, for example beliefs and values that are significant and acceptable to people within a specific context are shaped by societal expectations. Individuals’ normative values, for instance around the

acceptability of irregular migration, are also shaped by the social- cultural context (Ryo, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2016). Imaginations of migration are also embedded in socio-economic structures and are culturally transmitted (Raitapuro and Bal, 2016; Teo, 2003; Thorsen, 2010).

We now summarise the key findings from the literature for each category of subjective and intangible factors, before drawing attention to gaps in the evidence base.

7.1. Key findings on imagination

The area of imagined mobilities delves into the mental journeys regarding the idea of migration, ways of migrating and potential destinations that form part of the decision-making process before migration takes place. Imagined mobilities can in fact slow down, accelerate or immobilise mobility (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020; Raitapuro and Bal, 2016; Salazar, 2020). The literature considers both the imagination of migration – the psychological process – and imaginaries – the products of individual and shared imagination. Imagination is gendered (Teo, 2003), drawing on shared imaginaries as well as other factors and experiences, including own experience of (im)mobility (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020; Mata-Codesal, 2015). These imaginaries are culturally shared and socially transmitted (Salazar, 2020), with social networks and the media identified in the literature as important sources of imaginaries. These shared ideas, images and stimuli, transmitted as information, stories, rumours etc. allow potential migrants to play with a range of future scenarios in their head, before potentially acting upon them.

Broadly speaking, this body of literature can be divided into two themes. The first concerns imaginations about lifestyle and identity. These include imaginations about a more modern, global lifestyle amongst internal migrants in Bangladesh and India (Raitapuro and Bal, 2016; Brown et al., 2017), a cosmopolitan/global identity acquired in the West (Salazar, 2011; Alpes, 2014), improved social status (Alpes, 2014; Vigh, 2009, 2018) and bodily, lifestyle and identity transformation for transgender women in Brazil and Venezuela (Sjöberg and D’Onofrio, 2020; Vogel, 2009). However, imaginations are not always about radical change and are grounded in social and cultural norms and expectations (Teo, 2003; Thorsen, 2010).

The second theme focuses on imagined destinations. These so-called ‘geographical imaginations’ reflect on what other places would be like, both compared to staying and to other potential destinations. Such comparisons are often morally charged (Belloni, 2020; Dannecker, 2013; Schewel, 2015), with some destinations imagined as ‘good’ because of their (religious) values and freedoms and others seen as suffering from moral degradation, or having high levels of discrimination against immigrants (Becerra, 2012). More broadly, perceptions of potential countries and their ‘reputations’ feed into imaginaries, for example the perception of Germany as welcoming and having a ‘good reputation’ amongst Syrians and other refugees (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Mallett and Hagen-Zanker, 2018).

7.2. Key findings on personality traits

Personality traits are people's psychological dispositions, temperament and intrinsic characteristics. A sizeable body of literature considers the role of personality in migrant decision-making, including specific personality traits and individual risk tolerance or aversion. Many studies consider one or more of the five personality traits included in the sociological Five Factor Model. More specifically:

- The literature finds a strong link between openness to new experiences, and relatedly curiosity, sensation-seeking and sense of adventure, and willingness to move (e.g. Ayhan et al., 2020; Canache et al., 2013; Conrad Suso, 2020; Castle and Diarra, 2003; Bredeloup, 2017)
- Some studies show that more sociable or extraverted people are more likely to migrate (Ayhan et al., 2020; Canache et al., 2013)
- One study links greater conscientiousness to lower migration, hypothesising that people who display high levels of conscientiousness are well-functioning and responsible and are less likely to be dissatisfied with their current situation (Ayhan et al., 2020).

The literature also considers further aspects of people's personality, not included in the Five Factor model. Given that migration processes can be lengthy and the payoffs from migration often take some time before materialising, the link between patience and migration is an obvious one. Indeed, a number of studies find that more patient individuals are more likely to migrate (e.g. Goldbach and Schuster, 2018; Gibson and McKenzie, 2011; Arcand and Mbaye, 2013). Finally, one study also links adaptability, persistence and optimism with higher migration intentions (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan, 2018).

How migrants, aspiring migrants or non-migrants relate to risks is a growing area in the migration decision-making literature. Individual attitudes to risks are dynamic, continuously evolving states of mind, formed both by individual character as well as perceptions of risk (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). On the whole, individual risk attitudes appear to be a strong predictor of migration (aspirations). The vast majority of studies show that more risk-tolerant individuals are more likely to aspire to migrate and to actually migrate internally and internationally (e.g. Huber and Nowotny, 2020; Bocquèho et al., 2018; Hao et al., 2016). A small number of studies also find a link between risk-tolerance and more risky migration modes. For instance, Arcand and Mbaye (2013) find that the willingness to pay a smuggler in Senegal is linked to decreasing risk aversion, however they find no correlation between risk attitudes and likelihood of choosing irregular migration. Bah and Batista (2018), on the other hand, find a positive correlation between risk tolerance and willingness to migrate irregularly, as do Schwartz et al. (2016).

7.3. Key findings on emotions and feelings

The migration literature has only recently taken an ‘emotional turn’ – decision-making, far from being purely the product of deliberations by rational economic agents, is emotionally charged (e.g. Boccagni and Baldassar, 2015). Indeed, emotions are instrumental to migrant decision-making (Chakraborty and Thambiah, 2018), woven into all aspects of decision-making processes. Emotions drive mobility; for instance, a feeling of frustration or jealousy can trigger a migration decision (Kalir, 2006), whilst a feeling of hope may spur onward migration for migrants in transit. A deep emotional connection to a place – of current residence, or a ‘home’ far away – may be linked to immobility, or prompt return migration. A feeling of marginalisation may also spur individuals to migrate.

In reviewing the literature, we found a handful of studies that considered hope – or lack thereof – in migrant decision-making. Hope is linked to migrants’ imaginations of elsewhere and can motivate the decision to leave. In the context of high-risk migration, hope can help people mediate uncertainty (Ransan-Cooper, 2015; Hernandez-Carretaro, 2017) or inspire onward migration for those in transit (Grabska, 2020; Koikkalainen et al., 2020; Hagan, 2008). Meanwhile, hopelessness in a current situation is also linked to decisions to leave (Gebresenbet, forthcoming) and lack of hope for the future of one’s homeland may discourage return migration (Müller-Funk, 2019).

The literature also considers the influence of emotions such as shame, jealousy, fear and anxiety upon migrant decision-making. Many of these studies focus on the emotions which arise from socio-cultural context. For individuals in areas of high out-migration with a culture of migration and/or in societies where migration is considered a rite of passage to adulthood, for those who have not (yet) migrated, social pressure to do so can lead to emotions of social anxiety, jealousy (Zagaria, 2019; Gaibazzi, 2010), disappointment and anger (Bylander, 2015), which in turn can foster migration aspirations. For migrants in transit, socio-cultural expectations may invoke fears of disappointing families back home (Belloni, 2019) or shame in lack of success in one’s migration project (Bredeloup, 2017), both feelings powerful in driving onward migration or discouraging return migration (Hernandez-Carretaro, 2017). Feelings of shame resulting from an individuals’ (perceived) failed migration attempt may spur re-migration (Scalettari et al., 2019).

The literature also considers the role of love and intimate bonds in migrant decision-making. Romantic or familial love may be a powerful pulling factor to join loved ones in a particular place (Sha, 2019). The search for love might also inspire migration (Mahdavi, 2016). Bonds of love may also be immobilising as individuals find themselves unable to relocate if this means leaving loved ones behind (Adebayo, 2020).

A more established sub-section of the literature refers to place attachment or the emotional attachment individuals attribute to a particular place, which can include a sense of belonging

(Kunuroglu et al., 2018), of pride (Toruńczyk-Ruiz and Brunarska, 2020), or of sacredness (Chakraborty et al., 2018). The literature from low and middle income contexts is relatively limited when compared with that from high income contexts, with some evidence that place attachment to place of origin is linked to stay intentions (e.g. Liao, 2004) and return intentions (Nguyen, 2020), and place attachment to place of destination is linked to settlement intentions of temporary migrants in China (Du and Li, 2012; Tan et al., 2017). Place attachment to a historic (sometimes imagined) homeland is also linked to return or ancestral migration, including for those who have been forcibly displaced (e.g. Keles, 2019). A handful of studies suggest that, for migrants, place attachment of place of destination is relative to place of origin, and for some, these can coexist (Erdal, 2014).

Lastly, a small and recent subsection delves into the emotional processes behind the economic migration driver of income differentials, well established in the economics literature. Feelings of relative deprivation (Gereke, 2016; Mo, 2018), marginalisation (Vacchiano, 2018) or alienation (Charron, 2020) shape migration decisions. There is also evidence of feelings of isolation, being discriminated against or stigmatised due to race (Alloul, 2020), gender (Ruysen and Salomone, 2018), and/or sexuality (Asencio and Acosta, 2009) fostering migration and also return migration (e.g. Groenewold and Valk, 2017).

7.4. Key findings on beliefs and values

A growing body of literature seeks to understand the link between a variety of individually held beliefs and values that influence migrant decision-making. Beliefs and values often emerge from the socio-cultural context, such as family values or religious beliefs, yet the focus of the literature here is on the individual, for instance an individual's attitudes towards fulfilling family obligations or personal levels of religiosity and faith.

The literature suggests that for those with strong intrinsic religious beliefs, their beliefs may have a significant influence on their decisions around whether, how, where and when to migrate. Strong personal religious beliefs may be a source of resilience (Hoffmann et al., 2015) or a source of hope or faith in the face of an uncertain journey (Bredeloup, 2017). Belief in fate or destiny or that everything in life is pre-ordained and outside of the individual's control has been found to foster irregular, high-risk migration decisions (Thornton et al., 2020; Minaye and Zeleke, 2017). Religious beliefs – including fatalism – might act as a lens for interpreting and coping with the known dangers and risks involved in high-risk migration (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). On the reverse, in some contexts, stronger religious beliefs constrain mobility, and it is the least religious who migrate (Docquier et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2014).

A recent group of studies consider the influence of political opinions on migrant decision-making, with some suggesting that migrants are more politically liberal (e.g. Etling et al., 2020) and

less politically radical (Falco and Rotondi 2016a, 2016b), with others, however, finding limited influence of political opinions (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan, 2018; Al Husein and Wagner, 2020). One study considers the link between political beliefs and *how* migrants move, suggesting a link between belief in democracy and regular over irregular migration intentions (Dibeh et al., 2019).

Some evidence considers whether individuals with a more ‘modern’ outlook may be more inclined to migrate than those with a more conservative standpoint (e.g. Van Dalen et al., 2005). There is a weak link between belief in gender equality and migration intentions in two studies (Docquier et al., 2020; Dibeh et al., 2018), and no link between ethnic tolerance and migration intentions (Chuvashov, 2014). More conservative or traditional values have been found to encourage return migration (e.g. Razum et al., 2005).

The evidence as to whether individualism influences migration decision-making is mixed. The pursuit of individualism, personal freedom or anonymity might motivate migration decisions (Robins, 2019; Beazley, 2015). The impact of prioritising individualist values over family-oriented values is unclear in the literature, with some evidence that those who place more importance on families are more likely to migrate (Williams et al., 2014), migrate internationally (Hughes et al., 2020) or migrate internally and on a temporary basis (Yen et al., 2015), whilst other evidence suggests family values are linked to stay intentions (De Jong et al., 1996).

The literature suggests that migrants might be more materialistic – placing higher value on owning material goods – (e.g. Thornton et al., 2019), however the evidence around the influence of other self-enhancement values such as achievement and power is less clear cut. Some evidence questions the assumption that migrants are always the most ambitious and motivated individuals (Polavieja et al., 2018).

The literature considering the role of high levels of personal self-confidence or self-efficacy establishes a link with migration intentions (e.g. Schewel and Fransen, 2020; Syed Zwick, 2020; Groenewold et al., 2012). A belief in self-determination – as the polar opposite to fatalistic beliefs – is linked to choosing a destination further afield (Thornton et al., 2020), whilst believing in personal luckiness might increase willingness to embark upon risky migration endeavours (Gereke, 2016).

A small number of studies consider the effect of a sense of purpose or duty in migration decisions. A strong sense of purpose to serve and/or develop one’s country is found to be linked to stay intentions (e.g. Emmanuel et al., 2019) as well as return intentions (e.g. Keles, 2019).

Lastly, a growing body of the literature considers the role of normative values – or the extent to which an individual internalises societal norms and expectations – for migrant decision-making. A handful of studies suggest that believing (non)migration is a normative expectation is linked

to stay or migration intentions (e.g. Cui et al., 2016). Normative values around legitimacy of authority and migration laws shape irregular migration decisions (Ryo, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2016). Gendered norms around migration – for instance, the norm that men should migrate and women stay at home – also influences individual migration decisions. In contexts in which men are expected to migrate, men have to negotiate social pressures in order to justify their stay decisions (Bylander, 2015). Women too must frame their migration decisions according to gendered scripts where the norm is to stay (Paul, 2015).

7.5. Research gaps

The vast majority of the literature in this area focuses on either internal migration in low and middle income countries or international migration from low and middle income countries towards high income migration. Hence, there is a clear need to study the role of subjective and intangible factors in low and middle income countries, in particular between low and middle income countries or ‘South-South’ migration, which represents the highest proportion of the world’s migration flows.

The literature is also skewed towards a focus on the decision of whether to migrate, including migration intentions, aspirations, probabilities and rates. Much less is known about how decisions on how and where to migrate are related to subjective and intangible factors, with some exceptions including attitudes to risk and imagined destinations. There is thus a clear gap to focus much more on understanding how these factors relate to decisions made about migration mode, journeys, trajectories, pathways and destination preferences.

Much of the evidence in this area has focused on personality traits and attitudes to risk. Other subjective and intangible factors are understudied in comparison. For instance, apart from ‘place attachment’, the evidence on emotions is quite fragmented. There seems to be a pattern that subjective factors, which are somewhat easier to ‘measure’ and ‘categorise’, such as where an individual scores on a personality trait spectrum in a standard psychological personality test, have been covered to a greater extent in the literature. However, this review has also shown that through in-depth qualitative work and innovative experimental approaches, it is possible to gain insights into more intangible factors (for example, attitudes to risk). Future research should continue this trend and continue to heighten our understanding of the emotive and imaginative aspects of decision-making, as well as how individuals relate to normative and other values.

None of these factors are fixed or static. For instance, a person’s personality is subject to environmental influences at any stage, including experiences, culture and beliefs (Dweck, 2008) and also the migration experience itself (Li and Frieze, 2013). Likewise, risk attitudes are not static; they are continuously evolving states of mind, formed both by individual character as well as perceptions of risk (in turn, based on experiences) (Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). Hence,

whether a study draws on interviews with individuals who have not yet migrated, or on those post-migration, can significantly affect the findings (Li and Frieze, 2013), something we have not explored systematically in this review. The model of the role of subjective and intangible factors in migrant decision-making we laid out earlier in this conclusion drew attention to the dynamic interrelationship between these factors and migrant decision-making, the socio-cultural context and other more tangible factors, as well as between each other. This is an area that very little is known about and that future research should focus on.

We have also shown that decision-making factors and processes are formed by specific socio-cultural contexts. This is touched upon in many of the studies, especially those of a qualitative nature, but should be explored further in future research. There is a particular gap in understanding how individuals relate in their subjective micro-level decision-making processes to societal norms and values, for example to norms around migration and gender values. While the literature has long acknowledged these meso-level norms, such as a ‘culture of migration’, the subjective and intangible extent to which individuals are open, agreeable and susceptible to these social influences is understudied. ■

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What Do We Know about the Subjective and Intangible Factors That Shape Migration Decision-Making?

Long dominated by economic models, research on migration decision-making has begun to acknowledge the myriad unobservable and intangible factors. This includes psychological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors, as well as individuals' personal and normative belief and value systems, that also shape migration decision-making. This review synthesises the new and rapidly growing inter-disciplinary body of evidence on the subjective

and intangible factors contributing to migration decision-making, with a focus on low and middle income countries. A total of 182 studies are included in the review. The studies are grouped under four broad categories: 1) imagination – the mental pictures people make when contemplating migration, imagining and visualising themselves in a future time and place; 2) personality traits – traits such as extraversion, patience and adaptability, as well as

individuals' risk tolerance or risk aversion; 3) emotions and feelings – the layers of emotion dispersed in the decision-making process, including (lack of) hope, love and intimacy, place attachment and feelings of discrimination/inequality; and 4) beliefs and values – internalised norms and individual beliefs, including religious or political beliefs, and values, such as family orientation.

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