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A Final Rest at Origin? Disentangling Migrants' Post-Death Location Preferences through Return and Repatriation Intentions

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Abstract - Résumé

Abstract

Despite the growth of an aging migrant population planning to spend its late-life at destination, studies show that numerous migrants still desire to move back to their home country, with the perspective to have their final rest at origin. While a growing body of literature has documented post-death location preferences, it remains mostly qualitative and focused on burial practices, with little insight as to the way those preferences interact with return intentions. This article analyzes how these two dimensions intersect for immigrants in France. We use data from the Trajectories and Origins 2 survey (2019-2020) to explore three types of return and post-death location preferences: return to origin, settlement at destination, and postmortem repatriation. Our results point to significant differences across geographic origins. North African migrants have higher levels of preference for repatriation, while Portuguese migrants are more likely to declare return intentions. Although religion plays a significant role in postmortem repatriation intentions, our study shows that migrants' settlement and especially return and repatriation preferences are still structured by regional differences even when including variables measuring individual assimilation trajectories and transnational practices.

Keywords: *Return migration, Burial practices, Repatriation, Migrant origin, France*

Résumé

Malgré l'augmentation du nombre de personnes migrantes âgées prévoyant de finir leurs jours dans leur pays d'accueil, de nombreuses études montrent que beaucoup souhaitent toujours retourner dans leur pays d'origine, avec la perspective d'y être inhumées. Si la littérature sur les préférences de lieu de repos posthume s'est développée, elle reste majoritairement qualitative et centrée sur les pratiques funéraires, sans explorer comment ces préférences interagissent avec les intentions de retour. Cet article analyse l'articulation entre ces deux dimensions chez les immigrés et immigrées en France. Nous utilisons les données de l'enquête Trajectoires et Origines 2 (2019-2020) pour étudier trois types de préférences : le retour au pays d'origine, l'installation définitive dans le pays d'accueil et le rapatriement posthume. Nos résultats révèlent des différences marquées selon les origines géographiques. Les populations migrantes d'Afrique du Nord affichent une préférence plus forte pour le rapatriement, tandis que celles du Portugal déclarent davantage d'intentions de retour. Bien que la religion joue un rôle significatif dans les projets de rapatriement post-mortem, notre étude montre que les préférences en matière d'installation, de retour et de rapatriement restent structurées par des différences régionales, même en intégrant des variables mesurant les trajectoires individuelles d'assimilation et les pratiques transnationales.

Mots-clés: *Migration de retour, pratiques funéraires, rapatriation, origine migratoire, France*

Introduction

Starting with the seminal work of Bloch and Parry (1982), death has been studied as a set of practices and representations meant to maintain social order: a “good death” has the potential to transform passing – a sometimes frightening and unpredictable event – into a controlled cycle of continued life, a process in which geographic place plays an important role, particularly salient for migrants (Saraiva et al., 2012). By definition, migrants do not reside where they were born, making this question all the more important: should they find their final rest at destination or at origin? On the one hand, migrants’ wishes to rest in their region of origin have been investigated mostly through the lens of cultural and religious specificities in burial practices (Balkan, 2023; Chaïb, 2000; Cuzol, 2018; Haapajarvi, 2024; Hunter, 2016). On the other hand, the literature on return migration shows that a significant proportion of migrants eventually remigrate from the destination country, either returning home or moving to another third destination (Caron, 2024; Constant, 2020). While research has pointed out that the perspective of death is an important driver of return migration (Abraïdo-Lanza et al., 1999; Turra & Elo, 2008; Wallace & Kulu, 2014), little is known about the way return and post-death location preferences interact. Our study contributes to filling this gap by studying jointly attitudes towards return and post-death location for immigrants in France.

While these aspirations do not always translate into actual moves (Carling & Schewel, 2018), they constitute an expression of attachment and modes of belonging that are central to migrants’ experiences (Bolognani, 2016; Caron, 2020). Migrants’ (living and post-death) location preferences are structured by both affective and power relations at multiple levels, including kinship, community, and nation (Byron, 2000; Cuzol, 2017; de Heusch, 2024; Hunter, 2011). In this study, we consider the differences between wishing to return living in one’s origin country and to rest there, on the one hand, or only to be transported there post-death, on the other hand. By doing so, we explore how migrants navigate a set of alternatives that is not only defined by “here or there” regarded as mutually exclusive alternatives, therefore shedding new light on the interplay of these relations. We analyze how migrants’ geographic origin differently shapes their return and post-death location preferences, taking into account the role played by assimilation trajectories, family configurations, religious practices and transnational ties.

Taking advantage of a rich dataset collected on immigrant populations in France (Trajectories and Origins 2, TeO2, 2019-2020 INED-INSEE), this study focuses on first-generation migrants living in metropolitan France at the time of the survey. While a large proportion of migrants is unsure about their remigration and burial prospects, the analyses presented here consider the mechanisms behind three types of intentions: return to origin, settlement at destination, and post-mortem repatriation. Our findings show significant differences across these patterns depending on migrants’ origin. North African and Portuguese migrants especially display marked specificities, the former with higher levels of preference for repatriation, the latter for return migration. Immigrants from Turkey and the Middle-East also stand out with relatively large probabilities of both return and post-mortem repatriation intentions. In line with previous studies, those differences stem in part from variation in the proportion of Muslims and Christians in each migrant group, as religion has a significant effect on preferences for settlement at destination and, repatriation. Our study however contributes to show that other important mechanisms structure regional differences, in addition to (or in interplay with) religion: first, including migrants’ religion changes little the effect of migrants’ geographical origin on their return intentions; second, even when including a large array of individual characteristics, significant regional differences remain, not only

for return, but for repatriation as well. Our results therefore call for further analyses investigating the role of infrastructures, political and geographical contexts, considering especially borders, distance between origin and destination, colonial histories and relations between nations.

Post-death location preferences as expressions of belonging

As return migration takes different forms and occurs at various times in individuals' migration trajectories and life course (Caron, 2024; Constant, 2020; Dustmann & Görlach, 2016), repatriation can be seen as a form of postmortem migration, included in those continued mobilities (Zirh, 2012). The now large literature on the topic has highlighted many important determinants that play a role in shaping return migration outcomes or intentions, underlining that their relation tends to vary across contexts and case studies. For instance, studies have found evidence of greater probabilities of returning for both migrants in precarious and privileged socioeconomic positions at destination (Abramitzky et al., 2014; Bijwaard & Wahba, 2014; Caron & Ichou, 2020; Constant & Massey, 2003). In France, the out-migration of immigrants displays a non-linear relation with their occupational characteristics, as both skilled white-collars and unskilled blue-collars have greater chance to leave, compared to skilled blue-collars (Caron, 2018). Similarly, while important research support the idea that migrants in poor health return to their home country to die there and/or to find support from family and friends (Abraído-Lanza et al., 1999; Turra & Elo, 2008; Wallace & Kulu, 2014), research focusing on late-life migration intentions has shown that staying can be the most frequent desire for retirees within some migrant communities (Bolzman et al., 2006; Hunter, 2011).

In this literature review, we draw from research stressing how migrants express desires to stay, return, or having their remains repatriated as a reflection of their feelings of belonging (Ahaddour & Broeckeaert, 2017; Akkaymak & Belkhdja, 2020; Bolognani, 2016; Caron, 2020; Kadrouch-Outmany, 2013). We focus on the relationship between return migration and post-death repatriation intentions with forms of attachment. Taking as a starting point the key role families and communities, states, and religious organizations play in structuring migrants' death-related practices (de Heusch, 2024), we translate existing knowledge on the links between those three dimensions and (post-death) location preferences into hypotheses with regards to differences between origin countries.

Family and community ties

While literature shows that strong ties at origin and destination are not mutually exclusive (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), these two types of relational practices and attachments drive (post-death) location preferences in opposite directions. Continued relations with the origin country, especially when close relatives are still living in the area, are associated with higher chances to move back eventually (Carling & Pettersen, 2014; De Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Tezcan, 2019; Tiemoko, 2004). Combining data collected in metropolitan France and the French overseas departments (DOM), Haddad and Caron (2023) show that Caribbean and Reunionese migrants are more likely to return when their parents reside at origin. Homeland ties – as measured for instance by frequent visits to the origin country (Carling & Hoelscher, 2013; Fokkema et al., 2013; Oeppen, 2013) – might indeed reflect an attachment to fulfilling cultural and social obligations (Bolognani, 2010) and a strong sense of belonging to the home region (Mortensen, 2014), fostering

returns. Following such mechanisms, migrants seek proximity to their families or communities while they are alive, but also in death: their willingness to perpetuate their lineage (Déchaux, 1997) can then go in opposite directions, either wishing to rest close to their ancestors at origin, or to be buried at destination, where their children born or raised there are more likely to stay and to visit their grave (Hunter, 2016).

As migrants' relational networks at origin and destination evolve over time, the latter often gaining in importance, age and length of stay are usually negatively correlated with return aspirations: migrants who stay the longest at destination are, by definition, also the ones who did not return before, which might reflect lesser initial return projects, but could also have given them opportunity to build a life that roots them at destination (Bolzman et al., 2006). In the French context, length of stay is a key factor in explaining differences in return wishes between Portuguese immigrants, whose arrivals in France are on average more recent and who display higher return intentions, and Spanish and Italian immigrants, who have been in France longer and display lower return intentions (Dos Santos & Wolff, 2010). Kinship plays an important role, as having children and grand-children who were born and grew up at destination is a strong deterrent of returns (Byron & Condon, 1996; Dustmann, 2003), but ties and their potential growth over time extend much beyond. Migrants are more likely to build new networks and find a sense of community in spaces where their diaspora is already strong, as suggested by the role of community structures in explaining the higher return intentions of retired migrants from Spain compared to Italy in Switzerland (Bolzman et al., 2006). In their study, Bolzman, Fibbi and Vial (2006) have access to indicators such as the number of trade unions, social services or immigrant associations, but the wider Italian network more broadly reflects the long history of Italy-to-Switzerland migrations, while Spanish migrations to Switzerland are more recent (Bertrand, 1983). As a result, we can expect that, even when controlling for family configurations and transnational practices at the individual level, differences between origin countries capture differences in diasporic structures shaping community ties.

H1: Migrants from countries with an older history of immigration in France display more settlement intentions than migrants from communities arrived more recently.

Territorial and national affiliations

Migrants' sense of belonging draws from symbolic and sensorial repertoires of meaning that political contexts or even more precisely political actors mediate. In other words, the way migrants define what is "their land" and how they give value to it is inseparable from national discourses shaping the border of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). Migrants who wish to rest in their origin country often rely on symbolic representations that give a sacred meaning to the land (Balkan, 2023; Snellman, 2017). Interviewing Guadeloupean migrants in metropolitan France, Pourette (2002) refers to the notion of sacrality to analyze their preference for burial in the "warm" Caribbean soil, rather than in the "cold" metropolitan land. Such meanings are politically framed (de Heusch, 2024), especially when the origin country develops services and legal provisions that use burial practices to maintain migrants within the borders of the national community (Balkan, 2023; Chaïb, 2000). Tunisia for instance guarantees to all its nationals living abroad the right to post-mortem repatriation through an entirely publicly-funded scheme (de Heusch et al., 2022). Wishing to rest at origin as a way to perform symbolic and political attachment to the homeland is likely to be more common in countries that have faced colonization and developed a strong national mythology through the process of independence.

Conversely, research shows how contexts of reception – co-ethnic communities, as mentioned above, but also governmental and societal reception (Luthra et al., 2018) – shape migrants' trajectories. Experiences of discrimination and racism are especially important in understanding migrants' sense of belonging at destination: those who faced such experiences are more likely to declare they intend to return to their origin country and to actually return (Di Saint Pierre et al., 2015; Yilmaz Sener, 2019). In France, return intentions are more likely among immigrants who declare having suffered from unfair treatments or discrimination in the last five years and less likely among those who feel seen as French (Caron, 2020). Furthermore, immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa, where the French colonial presence was strong, more often report experiences of discrimination, compared to the rest of first-generation migrants in France (Safi & Simon, 2014). Even when they provide for different faith and cultural needs, death professionals play a role in othering migrants by assuming they are exclusively attached to their place of origin, a process that reproduces colonial and imperialist hierarchies (McClymont, 2018). For migrants from predominantly Muslim countries in particular, religion does not only influence post-death location preferences through the channel of individual practices, but also through othering processes at destination: Akkaymak and Belkhodja (2020) show that, regardless of Muslim migrants' level of religiosity, legal and institutional challenges at destination increase repatriation intentions.

H2a: Racialized migrants display less settlement intentions, especially when they come from former French colonies.

Contexts of reception also entail legal provisions that constraints immigrants' international mobility to different degrees. In the last decade, migration policies have become increasingly restrictive – or rather, selective (de Haas et al., 2018) – in Europe and in France most specifically. While such policies aim at controlling who enters the country, quantitative research demonstrates that they also encourage migrants to settle more permanently at destination. Migrants will chose to stay, even when that may encompass precarious legal status, when they fear they will not be able to come back once they leave the destination society (Beauchemin et al., 2020; Flahaux, 2017). Qualitative research underlines the negative effect of border closure on returns through the lens of family relations. Returning can mean depriving children left behind of the opportunity to migrate themselves, as having a parent at destination can help access residence permit (de Haas & Fokkema, 2010). It can also mean leaving close ones at destination, including children and wives, with uncertain prospects of visit when borders are restricted (Adebayo, 2020; de Haas & Fokkema, 2010). Contexts of reception also entail welfare provisions influencing return opportunities, including the portability of retirement pensions that often depends on bilateral social security agreements. In France however, anyone who is entitled to a retirement pension from the French pension system can receive it abroad. While migrants from Europe face less racism in France compared to migrants from Africa or Asia, they also benefit from free movement through the EU legal provisions, at a time when other migrants face increasingly restricted access to permits and visas. We can expect the effect of such migration policies to counter the aforementioned effect of experiences of racialization.

H2b: Migrants from EU countries display more return intentions than migrants from other countries.

The multilevel role of religion

Religion plays a direct role on post-death location preferences, prescribing ways to bury the dead, and an indirect role, through family and symbolic attachments.

Muslim migrants are especially likely to wish to be buried in their home region, as Attias-Donfut and Wolff (2005) have shown surveying 45- to 70-year-old immigrants in France. This specificity first stems from the religious dimension of burial practices. Muslim rituals are often difficult to respect in destination countries, including in France where it is impossible to be buried within 24 hours and coffins are mandatory (Afiouni, 2018; Haapajärvi et al., 2020; Maddrell et al., 2023). French cities have leeway to handle burial practices and are encouraged to provide for a diversity of faith, but they face tensions related to the French secularist model of *laïcité*: as a result, Islamic plots develop without legal and formal status (Ahaddour & Broeckart, 2017; Cuzol, 2017). The relation between such practical constraints and the religious dimension of post-death location preferences is however complex and nuanced: it interacts with the family, community, territorial and national modes of belonging described above.

First, managing death represents an opportunity to revive family and religious traditions, even when the migrants themselves are not or only little religious (Cuzol, 2017). Second, the importance of Muslim practices varies depending on migrant community, notably based on the political framing of emigration and death-related practices in origin countries (Balkan, 2023; Chaïb, 2000). For Algerian immigrants in Marseille, aspirations to be buried in Algeria reflect a desire to rest in a “Muslim country”, where death is less commodified, muezzins can be heard and cemeteries visitors respect Muslim customs, but for Turkish immigrants in Berlin, this rest at origin relates more to the sacrality of the land (Balkan & Masarwa, 2022). Last, beyond the predominant focus on Muslim communities, religion matters also for non-Muslim migrants, but is a lesser driver of preferences for a final rest at origin: Hunter (2016) shows that Middle Eastern Christian migrants in Europe rely on religion to justify indifference to the question of burial location, or even preference for burial at destination, when Christians face precarious situations as religious minorities in their origin country.

H3: Migrants from predominantly Muslim countries display higher post-death repatriation intentions, even among Muslim migrants.

Data and method

We use data from the “Trajectories and Origins” (TeO2) survey, conducted by the French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED) and the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) (Beauchemin et al., 2023). This nationally representative survey, carried out between 2019 and 2020, includes 21,761 individuals aged 18 to 60 and living in France. This survey, whose focus is to study immigrants and their descendants in France, oversamples these groups of population. In this paper, we focus on first-generation immigrants, that is individuals born abroad and who are not French by birth. By definition, TeO2 collects data only on individuals residing in metropolitan France at the time of the survey: we have no information on immigrants already returned to their origin country, which constitutes a selective population (Caron, 2018). Our ambition is thus not to give insights on the entire population of immigrants who ever migrated to France, but rather on a representative sample of first-generation migrants living in mainland France at the end of the 2010’s.

Our dependent variable combines two questions on immigrants’ location preferences. The first question relates to the perspective of re-migration: “*Do you think you will live one day in a DOM, TOM or a country other than France?*”. Those who answered “yes” or “maybe” could indicate one or two destinations.

We consider that migrants wish to return when they answer “yes” or “maybe” and mention their country of birth. Individuals who express no desire to leave France and those who aspire to leave but do not mention their origin country as a prospective destination are coded in the same “no” category for return intentions. The survey questionnaire does not provide any information on how long these immigrants plan to stay in their expected destination: the responses that we categorize as return intentions may therefore refer to either a permanent return to the origin country or a more temporary living situation (e.g., a couple of years to take care of an ill elder). The second question relates to post-death location: “Where do you wish to be buried or to have your ashes scattered?” (*In metropolitan France, in a DOM or a TOM, in another country, you don’t mind*). When migrants answer “another country”, we assume they mean their origin country. Combining these two questions, our final dependent variable includes four categories (see Table 1): *settlement* (individuals who do not wish to return and who want to rest in France), *return* (individuals who both wish to return and to rest in their origin country), *repatriation* (no return intentions but want to rest at origin), and *other*. This final “other” category includes all the other cases, that is: when migrants display return intentions but wish to rest in France (N=152), when they have no preference regarding their post-death location (N=2,935), and when they are undecided regarding post-death location (N=1,670). Despite its heterogeneity, this category groups together immigrants who share a certain lack of decisiveness with regards to their potential return and/or repatriation.

It is important to underline that we focus in this paper on migration and location preferences: whether these preferences turn into subsequent behaviors or not, we argue that these attitudes towards return migration and post-death location provide in any case valuable insights on the way individuals engage with their current country of residence (France) and their region of origin (Carling & Collins, 2018; Caron, 2020). As such, attitudes towards migration and final rest location could even be more relevant than actual behaviors: being less conditioned and shaped by economic resources and legal barriers, they could more genuinely enlighten individuals’ sense of belonging with the different territories that matter in their life-course trajectory.

Table 1: Dependent variable combining return and post-death location preferences (unweighted N)

		Return migration preferences	
		No	Yes
Expected post-death location	France	Settlement (2,010)	Other (152)
	Elsewhere	Repatriation (2,139)	Return (1,072)
	No preferences	Other (2,393)	Other (542)
	Unknown	Other (1,413)	Other (257)

Source: TeO2 (INED-INSEE, 2019-2020).

Our variable of interest is migrants’ country of origin coded into ten categories: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, Sahelian Africa, Other Africa, Portugal, Spain and Italy, Other Europe, Turkey and Middle-East, Other Asia, Other. We isolate specific countries and group others based on the size of each migrant group in France, the dominant religion in the country, and the history of colonial relations and migrations to France. We focus on Algeria as our reference category for different reasons. First, Algerians represent the largest migrant group in France.

Second, Algeria is a Muslim country, but also a former French colony which gained independence facing particularly murderous repression from the French authorities. The two countries have since then maintained political and economic relations, but not without tensions and ambiguities. Morocco and Tunisia constitute an interesting comparison point with Algeria, as they are also Muslim countries and former colonies in North Africa with large migrant flows towards France since the 1960's, but with lesser colonial presence and conflict. Sahelian Africa regroups Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad (former French colonies), Gambia (former British colony) and Guinea-Bissau (former Portuguese colony), where Islam is the predominant religion. Migrants from Senegal and Mali have also built important diasporas in France since the 1960's, though flows have increased more recently. Spain and Italy are among the oldest countries of immigration to France, with flows dating back to the end of the 19th century. They share with Portugal a still lively practice of Catholicism and the mobility opportunities granted by belonging to the EU, but Portugal-to-France flows are more recent. While Islam is the majority religion in both Turkey and the Middle-East, countries such as Lebanon or Egypt have historically also important Christian communities.

We estimate four nested multinomial logistic regressions, with the aim of understanding mechanisms driving territorial disparities in immigrants' post-death location preferences. The models are specified as follow:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log} \left(\frac{\mathbb{P}(\text{Return})_i}{\mathbb{P}(\text{Other})_i} \right) &= \alpha_1 X_i + \varepsilon_{1i} \\ \text{Log} \left(\frac{\mathbb{P}(\text{Repatriation})_i}{\mathbb{P}(\text{Other})_i} \right) &= \alpha_2 X_i + \varepsilon_{2i} \\ \text{Log} \left(\frac{\mathbb{P}(\text{Settlement})_i}{\mathbb{P}(\text{Other})_i} \right) &= \alpha_3 X_i + \varepsilon_{3i} \end{aligned}$$

Where X_i is a vector of individual characteristics, α_1 , α_2 , and α_3 are the associated coefficients for each outcome, and ε_{1i} , ε_{2i} and ε_{3i} are the error terms. By using our "other" category as the reference category in the multinomial models, the following analyses offer to study the mechanisms that lead migrants to emphasize certain attachments through declared intentions, compared to migrants who answer with less clear-cut wishes.

In addition to migrants' country of origin, Model 1 only includes sex and age group (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59). Model 2 additionally includes two variables on religion: the respondent's religion (no religion, Christian, Muslim, other religion), and how important religion is in their daily life at the time of the survey (no religion or not important at all, a little, medium, very important). When respondents answered "yes" to the question "*Do you currently have a religion?*", they could then state which religion and the interviewer reported exactly the answer given. The full answers were then coded into categories that we further regrouped for those analyses, since our sample size prevents us from breaking down further the heterogeneous category of "other religion". The question "*How important is religion in your life today?*" followed just after. Model 3 introduces variables related to migrants' assimilation trajectories in France (length of stay, homeownership in France, perceived discrimination in the last five years, education, occupation,

whether they are in a relationship with a native, and the number of children living in the household). Finally, a fourth model further includes transnational practices (homeownership abroad, contacts with relatives abroad, visits to the origin country). All these regressions are run on a final analytical sample composed of 9,978 individuals. Our empirical setting does not allow to account for unobserved heterogeneity, limiting our ability to assess the presence of causal relations. We rather measure the correlation between migrants' country of origin and their (post-death) location wishes, focusing on the interplay between this variable and other migrants' characteristics progressively added to the model. While sex and age are control variables, religion, assimilation trajectories and transnational practices are most likely to play a mediating role: they represent channels through which origin can influence (post-death) location preferences, even if they do not only depend on migrants' origin. Using nested models therefore enable us to capture direct and indirect effects of migrants' origin on (post-death) location preferences, discussing the factors explaining its residual effect once including a large array of potential mediators.

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for these independent variables by outcome of our dependent variable. Almost half of immigrants have no clear-cut intentions or preferences regarding return and post-death location (48% in the "other" category). Immigrants who do not plan to return but wish their remains to be repatriated are twice as numerous as those who have "return preferences" according to our categorization (23% vs. 11%). Immigrants with return preferences primarily come from Morocco and Tunisia (20%), Portugal (17%) and Turkey and the Middle-East (12%). While the proportion of immigrants with repatriation intentions coming from Morocco and Tunisia is also important (28%), it is not the case for those from Portugal, Turkey and the Middle-East. Algeria stands out among North African countries: this country is both underrepresented among immigrants with return intentions and overrepresented among those with repatriation preferences. Looking at religion, immigrants with repatriation preferences are predominantly Muslim (70%). Other characteristics seem to be in line with the literature: immigrants with return intentions are less often homeowners in France (only 30% vs. 41% for those with settlement preferences), while those who plan to more permanently settle in France have been there longer (54% for more than 20 years, while this proportion does not reach 35% in the other three groups). Similarly, migrants with experiences of discrimination are underrepresented among those with settlement intentions. Descriptive statistics for the rest of the independent variables are available in Table A1 in Appendix.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics by outcome (weighted %)

	Return preferences	Repatriation preferences	Settlement preferences	Other	Total
Geographic origin					
Algeria	8.4	23.2	9.3	11.9	13.7
Morocco, Tunisia	20.0	27.9	11.8	15.7	18.3
Sahelian Africa	11.1	7.0	2.1	4.8	5.5
Other Africa	8.4	8.9	18.1	16.5	14.1
Portugal	16.9	3.6	7.9	7.7	7.8
Spain, Italy	4.1	2.6	3.5	4.4	3.8
Other Europe	9.4	9.3	21.0	19.4	16.2
Turkey, Middle-East	11.6	8.6	6.5	4.8	6.7
Other Asia	7.7	4.7	14.1	9.6	9.0
Other	2.4	4.2	5.6	5.3	4.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Religion					
No religion	13.3	9.7	29.1	27.5	22.1
Christian	31.7	17.9	40.6	33.6	31.0
Muslim	52.2	70.4	24.7	35.2	43.4
Other	2.8	1.9	5.5	3.6	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Importance of religion					
No religion or not important	16.6	13.6	37.3	34.6	28.2
A little	19.0	15.8	21.7	21.3	19.8
Medium	25.3	27.4	17.3	20.3	22.0
Very important	39.1	43.2	23.7	23.7	29.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Length of stay (in years)					
Less than 5	10.9	14.6	5.7	10.2	10.5
5-9	21.3	20.6	11.8	19.5	18.6
10-14	17.3	17.0	11.7	16.0	15.6
15-19	19.0	18.0	16.9	19.8	18.8
More than 20	31.5	29.8	53.7	34.5	36.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Homeownership in France					
No	70.0	78.2	58.9	64.8	67.4
Yes	30.0	21.8	41.1	35.2	32.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Perceived discrimination in the last 5 years					
No	73.5	75.0	79.9	74.5	75.4
Often	2.9	4.3	3.4	4.0	3.8
Sometimes	23.6	20.7	16.7	21.6	20.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Homeownership abroad					
No	73.9	83.0	90.4	85.8	84.7
Yes	26.1	17.0	9.6	14.2	15.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
%	10.9	23.3	17.5	48.3	100
N	1,072	2,139	2,010	4,757	9,978

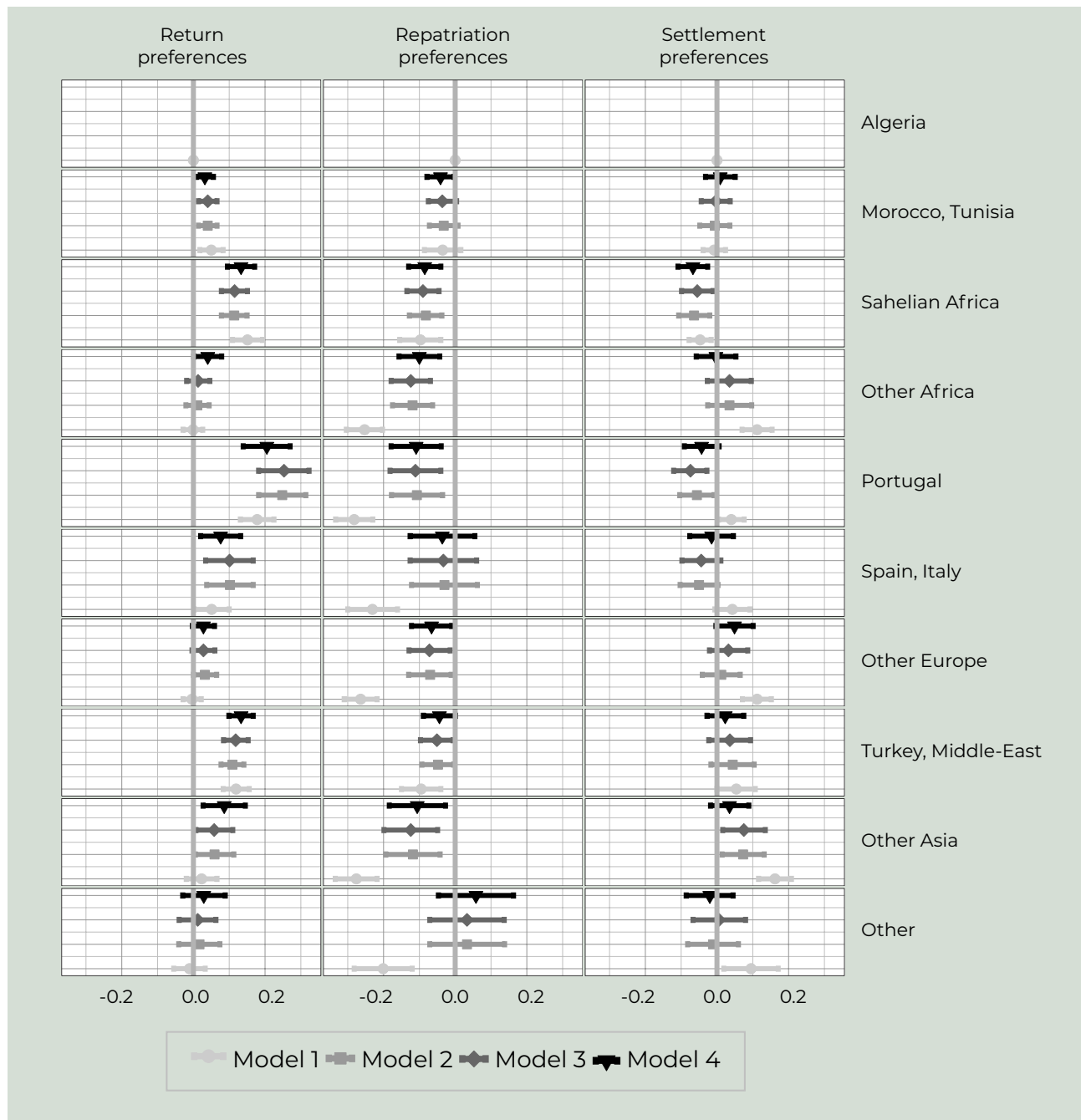
Source: TeO2 (INED-INSEE, 2019-2020).

Note: Among migrants with return migration preferences, 8.4% come from Algeria. 10.9% of migrants in our analytical sample (N=9,978) have return preferences, 17.5% are categorized as “settlement preferences”, 23.3% as “repatriation preferences”, and 48.3% are in the “other” category.

Results

Figure 1 reports average marginal effects (AME) associated to migrants' origin across the four nested models, always in comparison to migrants from Algeria, the reference category. Results for the rest of the variables for model 4 are available in Table A2 in Appendix. The AME are estimated in two steps. First, adjusted average probabilities are estimated for each outcome of the dependent variable and for each level of the variable of interest (the level is attributed to the whole sample and the other characteristics are left unchanged). The AME for one modality of an independent variable is then obtained by subtracting the predicted probability associated with this modality to the predicted probability associated with the reference modality. For example, the AME of 0.032 affected to Morocco and Tunisia in Model 4 (see Table A2) means that the probability to declare “return intentions” is 3.2 percentage points higher if all immigrants in our sample were from Morocco and Tunisia compared to the probability if all immigrants in our sample were from Algeria, while holding the other characteristics constant. Significant AME range from 5 percentage points up to 20 percentage points (e.g., the positive AME of being from Portugal rather than Algeria on return intentions, or the negative AME of visiting one's origin country at least once a year rather than never on settlement intentions). While a .05 effect might not appear large, it is substantial in relative terms for outcomes like return intentions, which have a .11 frequency in our studied population. The pseudo-R² of our models (0.13 in model 4) confirms the explanatory power of our covariates, while highlighting that important levels of unexplained heterogeneity remain.

Figure 1 : AME of migrants' geographic origin on their return and post-death location preferences



Source: TeO2 (INED-INSEE, 2019-2020). Confidence intervals at 95%.

Return, settlement at destination and repatriation intentions display distinct patterns. First, when looking at return preferences, migrants from Portugal have the highest probability to wish to return and be located post mortem at origin, with a difference of around 20 percentage points in comparison to Algerians. This gap between Portuguese and Algerians remains overall unchanged when adding the sets of independent variables in the nested models. While Spanish and Italian migrants also have significantly larger return preferences than Algerians (+.08), these differences are less pronounced than for Portuguese. For the rest of European migrants, the gap

with Algerians is not significant. Migrants from Sahelian Africa, Turkey and the Middle East also exhibit larger probabilities to declare return preferences (+.13). Despite differences by origin groups, an interesting result for return intentions is that AME associated to each origin do not significantly vary across the nested models.

By contrast, the differences between Model 1 and the other models are more important for repatriation, especially for predominantly non-Muslim countries. Immigrants from European countries and Asia are less likely to state repatriation preferences in comparison to Algerians in M1, while these differences are no longer significant from M2. This result points to the important role of religion for postmortem repatriation intentions, introduced from Model 2. For immigrants from Morocco, Tunisia, Sahelian Africa and Turkey-ME (predominantly Muslim countries), differences between M1 and M2 are not significant: including religion changes little the differences with Algerians. Even in models including religion (as well as assimilation trajectories and transnational practices), significant differences persist between Algerians and migrants from Sahelian Africa (-.08), other Africa (-0.10), Portugal (-0.11), and other Asia (-.11), who display lower intentions of repatriation. Interestingly, there is not a clear pattern in the size of this difference, neither when considering continent (e.g., Europe or Africa) nor when considering the prevalent religion in the region (e.g., Islam or Christianity). No origin group has significantly larger probabilities of repatriation intentions than immigrants from Algeria.

For settlement at destination, differences by origin with the reference group (Algerians) are less prominent than for the other outcomes. They are often non-significant or of small magnitude, but nonetheless highlight the importance of religion. While migrants from Other Africa are for example more likely than those from Algeria to declare intentions to stay in France and to be buried there in Model 1, the difference is not significant when including religion in Model 2. We observe similar patterns for immigrants from Other Europe and Other Asia, for whom the differences with Algerians are no longer significant in Model 4.

The covariates included in the models often share a certain degree of collinearity, making it difficult to interpret the magnitude of their effects (see Table A2). For instance, experiences of discrimination are highly correlated to both religion and origin, which structure racialization processes, such that the variable does not display substantial effects. Variables measuring transnational practices are also likely to be endogenous to our location preferences outcome. Despite those limitations, the effects we do find are in line with the literature. The pattern observed for length of stay in the descriptive statistics remains in Model 4: immigrants who have been in France for at least 20 years are significantly more likely to declare intention to stay in comparison to those who arrived less than 5 years ago (+.10). Transnational practices play a significant role in the probability to declare each type of migration and post-death location preferences: homeownership abroad increases the probability of return intentions (+.05) while it decreases the one for settlement (-0.05), and immigrants who have contacts abroad and visit their origin country are both significantly more likely to state return and body repatriation preferences, and less likely to plan to settle more permanently in France.

Discussion

Our findings show significant differences by region of origin, especially for return and post-death location preferences. Looking back at our hypotheses, they confirm H2b (*Migrants from EU countries display more return intentions*)

and H3 (*Migrants from predominantly Muslim countries display higher post-death repatriation intentions, even among Muslim migrants*), while evidence regarding H1 (*Migrants from countries with an older history of migration in France display more settlement intentions*) and H2a (*Racialized migrants display less settlement intentions, especially when they come from former French colonies*) is more nuanced.

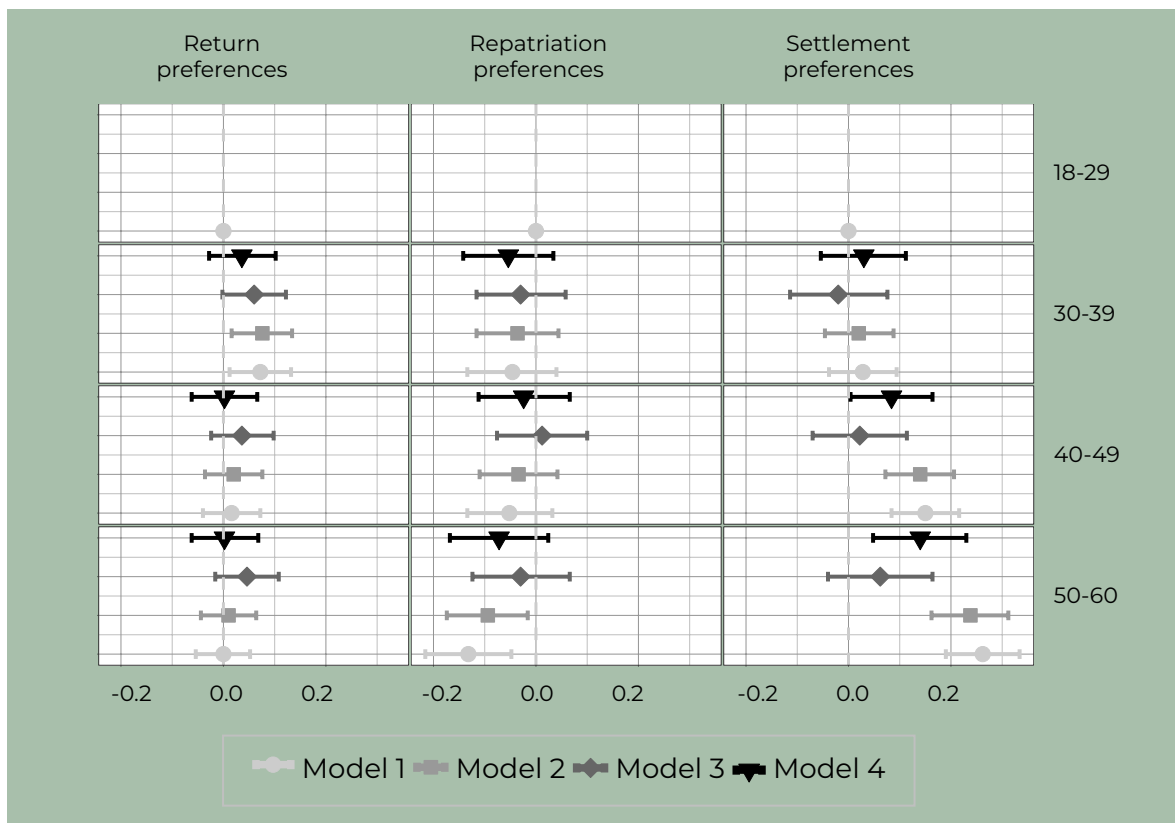
Mobility opportunities provided by EU citizenship (H2b) seem to structure regional differences in return preferences, but can only provide with systematic understanding when combined with other factors, such as the history of the diaspora (H1). Migrants from Portugal are the most likely to display return intentions, both showing for their EU citizenship and the fact they come from relatively more recent migration flows, compared to other European countries, especially Spain and Italy. While Spanish and Italian migrants have higher chances to declare return intentions than most migrants from Africa and Asia, the marginal effect associated with these two origin countries is lower than the one associated with Sahelian Africa, on the one hand, and Turkey and the Middle-East, on the other hand. Migrations from those regions are overall more recent in France than those from Spain and Italy, but also than from Algeria. Furthermore, if Sahelian, Turkish, Middle-Eastern and North African migrants are all likely to face racialization (whether as blacks or Arabs), Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have maintained closer relations with France after independence. Such pattern could then relate to the different periods the flows date back to (H1), as well as colonial histories and racialization processes (H2a).

Our study also confirms the key role of religion in post-death location preferences. At the individual level, Muslim migrants are significantly more likely than migrants with no religion to express post-mortem repatriation preferences and less likely to have settlement intentions (see Table A2). Reflecting that mechanism, differences by origin are largely reduced when including migrants' religion (from Model 1 to Model 2). At the national level, migrants from North Africa are the most likely to declare preferences for repatriation even in Model 4, providing empirical support to our third hypothesis (H3). While migrants from Muslim countries in Turkey and the Middle-East and, to a lesser extent, Sahelian Africa, also display high levels of repatriation intentions (compared for instance to other African countries, Portugal or some Asian countries), those probabilities remain lower than North African migrants' ones. Such differences appear linked to the institutionalization and politicization of death (religious) practices by nation-states at origin, which is particularly salient in North Africa (Balibar, 2011; Balkan, 2023; Chaïb, 2000). Interestingly, settlement intentions also appear related to immigrants' religion as exhibited by the significant changes when including religion, yet to a lesser extent than for post-death repatriation.

While providing original insights on the different types of preferences that are rarely analyzed together, this study remains however constrained by methodological limitations of our data. We have discussed throughout the paper that our measures of return, repatriation and settlement "intentions" can only imperfectly capture real migration patterns, yet still do offer valuable information on migrants' sense of belonging and relationship to both the origin and destination country. It should also be noted that our sample is limited to individuals under 60, while the literature has shown that return migration patterns are often bimodal with an important share of returns taking place at the time of migrants' retirement (Duleep, 1994). The fact that we are focusing on individuals' preferences rather than actual behaviors could however limit the scope of this potential methodological bias: even if migrants are not already retired at the time of the survey – since pensionable age in France generally occurs after 62 –, they could still start thinking about their return and repatriation prospects at earlier ages. In any case, this calls for further research to investigate how these preferences evolve over migrants' life-course at latter ages.

In that line, it is also interesting to underline that the correlation between age and migrants' types of preferences remains limited, as illustrated by Figure 2 which shows AME associated to migrant's age group for each of our four nested models. While we could think that younger people do not think in advance about their "good death" and where they would like their body or ashes to remain, the fact that we do not find any significant differences across migrants' age group on their probability to have preferences for having their remains rest at origin seems to invalidate this assumption, and could further give credit to the idea that migrants' answers to these questions capture something else that solely their migration projects.

Figure 2: AME of migrants' age group on their return, settlement, and post-death location preferences



Source: TeO2 (INED-INSEE, 2019-2020). Confidence intervals at 95%.

Finally, some may be concerned about the potential heterogeneity of the "other" category of our dependent variable which is used as baseline outcome in our nested models. As a robustness check, we ran the same models using an alternative definition of our outcome variable which breaks down this "other" category into two groups, considering individuals who did not declare any specific preference for their post-death location (that is, those who answered "do not mind" to the question "Where do you wish to be buried or have your ashes scattered?") as another category distinct from the "other" group. The results remain overall unchanged, ensuring that the heterogeneity of the "other" category is unlikely to significantly bias our findings.¹

¹ These complementary analyses are available upon request.

Conclusion

This research examines the understudied relationship between migrants' intentions to return to their country of origin and their desired location of burial. Using recent data from the French survey *Trajectories and Origins 2* (TeO2, 2019-2020), we study the extent to which first-generation migrants living in France consider three different types of migration projects depending on their geographic origin: settling permanently at destination, returning to the homeland, or staying in France but having their remains rest in the origin country. This study contributes to existing literature by shedding new light on the distinction between return and post-death repatriation intentions, which appears linked to specific underlying mechanisms. Our analysis confirms the important role religion plays, especially in projects of post-death repatriation. In line with existing literature, it suggests that religion does not only influence (post-death) location preferences at the individual level, but also at a meso-social level (structuring family relations and local communities) and at a national level (taking part in strategies by origin countries to define the borders of their imagined communities). Considering jointly return and repatriation preferences, our results especially show how Muslim and Christian migrants with lower settlement intentions distribute themselves between those two options, based on the prescriptions of their respective faiths, on repertoire of meanings negotiated at different levels, and – maybe more importantly – on the opportunity structures shaped by political contexts at origin and destination. Taking a step back from the focus on the specificity of Islam, we especially stress the importance of mobility policies for EU migrants and the history of migration flows.

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Appendix

Table A1: Descriptive statistics by outcome (weighted %, for the additional control variables)

	Return preferences	Repatriation preferences	Settlement preferences	Other	Total
Sex					
Male	50.3	45.3	44.8	49.2	47.6
Female	49.7	54.7	55.2	50.8	52.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Age group	Return preferences	Repatriation preferences	Settlement preferences	Other	Total
18-29	16.4	21.9	14.6	22.4	20.3
30-39	34.7	29.7	22.1	29.0	28.6
40-49	26.8	29.5	31.5	27.1	28.4
50-59	22.1	18.8	31.9	21.5	22.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Number of children living in the household	Return preferences	Repatriation preferences	Settlement preferences	Other	Total
0	35.3	34.4	37.3	43.5	39.4
1	21.7	17.7	18.4	18.1	18.5
2	23.1	21.1	24.3	22.0	22.3
3 and more	19.9	26.8	20.1	16.4	19.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Educational attainment	Return preferences	Repatriation preferences	Settlement preferences	Other	Total
No degree/CEP	33.2	35.6	24.5	20.8	26.2
BEPC	5.8	6.9	7.0	6.2	6.5
CAP/BEP	11.9	12.0	15.7	12.3	12.7
Bac	18.3	13.8	18.5	18.9	17.6
Bac +1/+2	6.0	8.3	10.7	8.7	8.7
Bac+2	24.9	23.4	23.7	33.2	28.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Occupation	Return preferences	Repatriation preferences	Settlement preferences	Other	Total
Never worked	6.3	11.7	3.3	3.9	5.9
Unemployed	12.8	13.6	11.7	12.0	12.4
Student	4.5	6.5	3.8	7.5	6.3
Self-employed	4.9	4.2	6.3	5.8	5.4
Lower	48.6	42.6	48.0	38.7	42.3
Intermediary	11.7	11.9	16.8	16.1	14.7
Upper	11.2	9.6	10.1	16.0	13.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Relationship status					
In a relationship with a migrant - same origin	42.0	42.3	30.4	33.1	35.7
In a relationship with a migrant - mixed origin	6.5	5.6	6.0	6.5	6.2
In a relationship with a native	25.9	21.3	31.2	24.4	25.0
Single	25.6	30.8	32.4	36.1	33.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Homeownership abroad					
No	73.9	83.0	90.4	85.8	84.7
Yes	26.1	17.0	9.6	14.2	15.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Contacts with relatives abroad					
No	4.1	4.1	17.9	9.5	9.1
Often	80.5	76.3	53.9	66.4	68.1
Sometimes	15.4	19.6	28.2	24.1	22.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Visits to the origin country					
Never	5.8	11.1	25.5	15.8	15.3
At least once/year	57.2	46.4	20.8	39.9	39.9
Less than once/year	37.0	42.6	53.8	44.3	44.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

%	10.9	23.3	17.5	48.3	100
N	1,072	2,139	2,010	4,757	9,978

Table A2 : Estimated marginal effects for all the variables from Model 4

	Return preferences	Settlement preferences	Repatriation preferences
Geographic origin (Algeria)			
Morocco/Tunisia	0.032** (0.012)	0.009 (0.021)	-0.041* (0.019)
Sahelian Africa	0.133*** (0.020)	-0.067** (0.021)	-0.085*** (0.023)
Other Africa	0.040* (0.020)	-0.003 (0.028)	-0.100*** (0.029)
Portugal	0.205*** (0.034)	-0.043+ (0.025)	-0.109** (0.036)
Spain/Italy	0.076** (0.029)	-0.015 (0.031)	-0.036 (0.046)
Other Europe	0.028+ (0.016)	0.049+ (0.026)	-0.066* (0.028)
Turkey/MO	0.133*** (0.017)	0.023 (0.026)	-0.044+ (0.023)
Other Asia	0.086** (0.030)	0.035 (0.027)	-0.106** (0.040)
Other	0.029 (0.030)	-0.020 (0.034)	0.058 (0.053)
Sex (Male)			
Female	-0.014 (0.010)	0.021+ (0.011)	0.008 (0.013)
Age group (18-29)			
30-39	0.018 (0.016)	0.015 (0.021)	-0.027 (0.023)
40-49	0.001 (0.016)	0.042* (0.020)	-0.012 (0.023)
50-59	0.001 (0.016)	0.070** (0.023)	-0.036 (0.024)
Number of children living in the household (0)			
1	0.013 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.015)	0.014 (0.020)
2	-0.004 (0.014)	0.009 (0.016)	0.000 (0.018)
3 and more	-0.018 (0.014)	0.030+ (0.018)	0.007 (0.019)
Religion (No religion)			
Christian	-0.045	0.051+	-0.022

	(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.031)
Muslim	-0.004	-0.058*	0.131***
	(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.036)
Other	-0.032	0.005	0.015
	(0.050)	(0.033)	(0.051)
Importance of religion (No religion or not important)			
A little	0.040*	-0.021	0.029
	(0.020)	(0.025)	(0.028)
Medium	0.069**	-0.054*	0.086**
	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.029)
A lot	0.094***	-0.051*	0.118***
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.030)
Length of stay (Less than 5 years)			
5-9	0.003	0.004	-0.036
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.028)
10-14	-0.010	0.023	-0.038
	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.031)
15-19	-0.009	0.041+	-0.075**
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.028)
> 20	-0.024	0.096***	-0.074**
	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.029)
Homeownership in France			
	-0.009	0.018	-0.045**
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.014)
Perceived discrimination in the last 5 years (None)			
Often	-0.018	-0.027	0.022
	(0.016)	(0.022)	(0.027)
Sometimes	0.020	-0.026+	0.000
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.016)
Educational attainment (CAP/BEP)			
No degree/CEP	-0.011	-0.009	0.047*
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.021)
BEP/C	0.021	-0.008	0.028
	(0.019)	(0.026)	(0.030)
Bac	-0.012	-0.009	-0.031
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.023)
Bac +1/+2	0.001	-0.002	0.024
	(0.018)	(0.025)	(0.028)
Bac+2	-0.011	-0.019	-0.017

	(0.018)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Occupation (Intermediary)			
Never worked	0.024	-0.029	0.085**
	(0.023)	(0.029)	(0.034)
Unemployed	0.029	-0.010	0.012
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.028)
Student	0.007	-0.037	0.018
	(0.025)	(0.034)	(0.041)
Self-employed	-0.005	0.005	-0.027
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.030)
Lower	0.018	0.023	0.001
	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.023)
Upper	0.001	-0.024	-0.011
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.029)
Relationship status (Single)			
In a relationship with a migrant - same origin	0.013	-0.010	0.004
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.018)
In a relationship with a migrant - mixed origin	0.034	-0.028	0.031
	(0.028)	(0.023)	(0.032)
In a relationship with a native	0.025+	0.041**	-0.007
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.020)
Homeownership abroad	0.054***	-0.051***	0.020
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.017)
Contacts with relatives abroad (None)			
Often	0.039**	-0.078***	0.099***
	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Sometimes	0.006	-0.041*	0.057**
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Visits in the origin country (Never)			
At least once a year	0.110***	-0.203***	0.080***
	(0.012)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Less than once a year	0.056***	-0.111***	0.049**
	(0.011)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Observations	9,978	9,978	9,978