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Transnational Mobilities as a Way of Life Among Older Migrants from Southern Europe

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on older Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese migrants who spent their working lives in Switzerland and explores their different forms of geographical mobility between Switzerland and their home countries. Although drawing inspiration from the transnationalism literature and the new mobilities paradigm, we do not neglect a more structural perspective that stresses the constraints endured by older migrants when they try to build mobile lives. We approach the issue of transnational mobility using mainly quantitative data from the survey Vivre–Leben–Vivere, which focuses on the living conditions and health of individuals aged 65 years and above currently living in Switzerland. Within this survey, an oversample of approximately 300 older immigrants of Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese origin aged between 65 and 79 years was conducted in Geneva and Basel. The quantitative data are complemented by material from interviews with three Spanish families living in Geneva. Our data show that to 'settle in Switzerland' or to return home does not imply that older immigrants' transnational mobility ceases. To some extent, it could be argued that they never really 'settled' and transnational mobility is a way of life that is more adapted to the duality of resources and references that they have built up during their adult life. Their geographical mobility can take different forms and is adapted to legal constraints, to family configurations, and to individual situations. **Copyright © 2016 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.**

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This paper aims to explore different forms of geographical mobility among Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese older migrants who spent their working lives in Switzerland. It analyses in particular different patterns of mobility undertaken by older migrants between Switzerland and their home countries. We are mainly inspired by the transnational perspective and the new mobilities paradigm; however, we do not neglect a more structural perspective that underlines the constraints endured by older migrants when they try to build mobile lives. Thus, we are interested in factors that facilitate physical mobility among older migrants, and also in factors that tend to limit this kind of mobility, as the opportunities to be mobile are not equally distributed in societies (Morley, 2002; Sheller and Urry, 2006).

According to the transnational and new mobilities perspectives, the situation of migrants is characterised as one of 'double presence' (Basch

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et al., 1994; Cresswell, 2010; Urry, 2007), in contrast to the idea of 'double absence' developed in the structural perspective (Dietzel-Papakyriakou, 2001; Sayad, 1999, 2001). The idea of double absence means that migrants are neither fully part of the 'host society' nor really present in the home society (Sayad, 1999). By contrast, according to the transnational and new mobilities perspectives, migrants' lives are organised across borders. They live here and there simultaneously (Brenner, 1999). Their double presence can be virtual (at a distance, using new technologies) or concrete (through physical back-and-forth mobility). Thus, from the transnational and new mobilities perspectives, agency is more important than structural constraints like legal or socio-economic barriers (Bolzman, 2013). Moreover, transnationalism and new mobilities paradigms consider that the main issue is not the question of return but the question of circulation (Benson, 2011; Sinatti, 2011): to what extent are migrants able to be mobile and keep in contact with both home and host societies?

In fact, many research studies show that migrants form transnational communities, living out mobile lives across borders in economic, social, cultural, or political areas (Guarnizo, 1994; Portes, 1996). However, these forms of transnational mobility have been especially associated with people of working age who are economically active. Among older migrants, transnational mobility has been discussed mainly with regard to internal migration within the same country (Bond, 1990), or to 'amenity' or 'quality of life' migration from northern to southern Europe (Casado-Diaz *et al.*, 2004; Huber and O'Reilly, 2004). However, transnational mobility has seldom been analysed among former immigrant workers from southern countries, who have been employed as manual workers in Northern European societies.[1]

It is also important to situate these issues in a life course perspective, which can be conceptualised as 'a sequence of age linked transitions that are embedded in social institutions and history' (Bengstson *et al.*, 2005: 493). Among these transitions, retirement is a normative event (i.e. it is socially expected that individuals cease to work at a certain age) that can have an important impact on an individual's life course. It can be both a social and spatial frontier: a social frontier because individuals start a new stage in their lives at retirement and a spatial frontier because the question of the country of residence at this stage of life can be reconsidered (Bolzman and Kaeser, 2012). In the case of migrants, it can be seen as an opportunity to consolidate or develop a transnational way of life: immigrants have many incentives to develop this way of life across borders because of family members, property ownership, investments, and so on in the country of origin. Thus, they can live part of the year in one place and part of the year in another place. Before retirement, many of them had the possibility to spend at least some holiday time in their home country. The question we ask here is how do they develop a transnational way of life by spending longer periods in the country of origin?

We shall thus endeavour to determine under what conditions the 'duality of resources and references' (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006) observed in many studies of first-generation immigrants represents a potential asset for transnational living after retirement. We use the term 'duality of resources' to describe how the resource system of first-generation immigrants usually draws on the society of origin as well as on the society of residence, both as far as economic assets are concerned and with regard to family networks or broader social relationships (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Baldassar and Merla, 2014). The term 'duality of references' refers to the fact that cultural and symbolic attachments are also shared between the two countries (Hannerz, 1996; Pries, 2001). The immigrants' participation in the host country's labour market combined with regular contacts, both direct and indirect, with the home country helps to propagate this duality. The immigrants' socio-cultural identity is thus shaped by those dual links and, in turn, helps strengthen them through symbolic activities (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

In previous research studies (Bolzman *et al.*, 2001, 2006), we have observed that intentions concerning the choice of a country (or countries) of residence after retirement are related to issues of resources and their spatial location. Economic resources, family and social networks, health status, and cultural resources are four dimensions that play an important role in migrant decisions about whether to return permanently to their home country, to stay in the host country, or to go back and forth between the two (Bolzman, 2013). Here, we shall first explore whether these results are still valid for older immigrants after

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retirement. We shall also discuss how these different types of resources and their location influence the existence of forms of living arrangements that allow some transnational mobility.

To summarise, this paper brings new theoretical light by exploring the relation between two different perspectives: the life course approach and transnational mobilities (also Findlay *et al.*, 2015). Until now, little attention has been granted to transnational mobilities after retirement, especially among former blue-collar workers. It seems that some scholars have implicitly taken for granted the idea that geographical mobility tends to diminish with ageing because health problems and disabilities become more pressing (Stuck *et al.*, 1999). However, in contemporary societies, even former manual workers tend to live longer and in better health conditions (Smith and Puczcó, 2009). Some scholars also assumed that migrants would return definitively following retirement (Mesrine and Thave, 1999). But definitive return also precludes ongoing mobility. The question of geographical mobility at this stage of life thus deserves more systematic exploration. Moreover, the paper analyses how in a relatively homogeneous social milieu like that of former manual workers of immigrant origin there can be different forms of geographical mobility arrangements, related to different types of resources and their location as well as different ways of mobilising resources. This means that 'agency within structures', as asserted in the life course perspective (Elder, 1994), is an important dimension in the study of forms of mobility. Particular attention is also given to another dimension of the life course perspective: the idea of 'linked lives' (Leopold and Schneider, 2011). In other words, it is important to examine mobility arrangements by taking into consideration not only the particular situations of individual older migrants but also the situations of other family members, especially spouses, and more broadly speaking, their family configurations (Widmer, 2010; Wall and Bolzman, 2014).

The main question of this paper is the following: What is the significance of geographical mobility for older southern European migrants who spent their working lives in Switzerland? In order to answer this question, we first set out our methodological approach. Then we situate older immigrants in the Swiss context before proceeding to explore later-life return intentions both before and after retirement, as well as the criteria influencing such decisions. Thereafter, we move to the core of the paper and analyse our quantitative data to gauge how relevant geographical mobility is in older immigrants' lives. Prior to our conclusion, we also explore concrete forms of mobility using qualitative data.

METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

We use mainly quantitative data from the survey Vivre–Leben–Vivere (VLV), which focuses on the living conditions and health of individuals aged 65 years and above currently living in Switzerland. In order to address the increasing diversity of the elderly population, VLV developed a subproject that questioned the living conditions and the life trajectories of immigrant elders compared with the national population. The Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Gerontology and Vulnerability carried out the VLV study in 2012 in five cantons in Switzerland. A total of 3,600 randomly selected individuals aged over 65 years constitute the main sample, stratified by age and sex. An oversample of approximately 300 older immigrant natives of Italy, Spain, and Portugal aged between 65 and 79 years was conducted in Geneva and Basel. In the canton of Geneva, the oversample is composed of natives from Portugal, Spain, and Italy, and in the canton of Basel, of natives from Italy who did not become Swiss citizens (Table 1). These choices of groups and sites were determined by the distribution of these populations relative to the national population and other ethnic-minority groups. The survey was conducted in two phases. First, each respondent received a self-administered questionnaire and a life-event calendar. Second, an interviewer conducted a face-to-face interview with each participant, lasting on average 2 hours. The survey material was translated into the languages of the target population (i.e. French, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian). The respondents could choose to be interviewed in their native language or the local language (i.e. French or German) by a bilingual interviewer.

Qualitative data are drawn on to complement the quantitative analysis. We limit our qualitative analysis to semi-structured interviews with three Spanish families living in Geneva, 10 persons in all including spouses and their children. These interviews were carried out by two research

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Table 1. Number of people interviewed by canton and origin, aged between 65 and 79 years (VLV survey).

		Total population	Italy	Spain	Portugal
Geneva	Women	303	52	34	28
	Men	254	65	34	34
	Total	557	117	68	62
Basel	Women	288	49		
	Men	246	70		
	Total	534	119		
Total		1,091			

Source: Vivre–Leben–Vivere (VLV) data, 2012.

assistants in 2004 (Fojo and Fernandez, 2004). These data are limited to one nationality because the aim of these interviews is mainly exploratory: not to compare between the three migrants groups but rather to show concrete examples of mobility arrangements related to complex family situations, which the quantitative survey does not allow us to observe. We present these forms of mobility arrangements in a separate section of the paper in order to emphasise how diverse these forms can be.[2]

With respect to the three Spanish families, the following selection criteria were used: at least one of the spouses was already retired (at legal age or before the legal age of 65 years for men and 64 years for women) and they had a transnational way of life spending at least part of the year in Switzerland and part of the year in Spain.

In the first case, the spouses had been living for 32 years in Switzerland at the time of the interview, and both had taken early retirement. They were aged respectively 65 (husband) and 62 years (wife). They had two daughters. One of the daughters was married and was the mother of two children in Geneva. In the second situation, the husband was already retired and was 66 years old; his wife was aged 52 years and was still employed in Geneva. They had a daughter aged 15 years. The husband had been living in Switzerland for 35 years and his wife for 27 years. In the third case, the husband was aged 63 years and was still employed; his wife was aged 61 years and had taken early retirement because of health problems. They had one adult son living in Geneva. They had been living in Switzerland for 30 years.

To summarise, the use of detailed quantitative data allows us to explore the return intentions of older immigrants, their geographical mobility practices and the factors that can influence their intentions and practices. Simultaneously, the use of complementary qualitative data facilitates a more complex understanding of mobility practices and patterns among older migrant couples.

OLDER IMMIGRANTS IN THE SWISS CONTEXT

In Switzerland, although the foreign population is on average younger than the national population, the proportion of foreign elderly is constantly on the rise. In 1980, the resident foreign population aged 65 years and over made up 4.9% of the total resident population in this age group; by the year 2000, that figure had risen to 7.1% and in 2010 to 10.5% (OFS, 2011). Forecasts of the Swiss Federal Statistics Office predict that this proportion will reach 13.3% of the total population aged 65 years and over by 2020 (OFS, 2011). This proportion is still modest because it has to be placed into a wider context of the ageing of the whole population. It would also be more visible if we were also to take into account people of immigrant origin who acquired Swiss nationality.[3] While there is an increase of 21% in the total resident population aged 65 years and over between 1995 and 2010, the foreign population over 65 years increases by 55% for the same period.

This increase in numbers becomes much more impressive if we consider solely the three nationalities included in our research that came to Switzerland as blue-collar workers in the second half of the 20th century, mainly the Spanish and the Italians, but in more recent years the Portuguese (Bolzman, 2013). The increase is even more striking in absolute figures, the number of Spaniards and Italians aged 65 years and more having soared from 17,093 in 1980 to 39,174 in

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2000 and to 53,098 in 2009 (OFS, 2010), a threefold increase in 30 years. Comparable figures for Portuguese are also constantly on the rise even though they are part of a more recent migration. For example, those aged 65 years and over represented 0.03% of the total resident population of that age group in 1995 and 0.11% in 2010. This is a tiny increase, but it is still a growth of 77% in the absolute number of Portuguese aged 65 years and over from 1995 to 2010. A similar increase can be observed for Turks and other 'Southern Europeans', whereas there is a large decrease of older people from Northern Europe in the foreign population of Switzerland.

In this research, we are interested in older immigrants from Italy, Spain, and Portugal who arrived as guest workers in Switzerland during the second half of the 20th century. Italian and Spanish immigrants arrived mainly between the 1950s and the 1970s (Bolzman *et al.*, 2004), while Portuguese have arrived mainly since the 1980s (Fibbi *et al.*, 2010). Older immigrants from these three countries belong to a generation that experienced severe restrictions in their citizenships rights through state regulations, including restrictions to family reunification and access to housing and employment. Now retired or approaching retirement in an era of globalisation, low-cost flights and more freedom of circulation between EU countries and Switzerland mean that transnational living is more likely. Therefore, immigrants who spent 20 to 40 years of their adult lives as guest workers in Switzerland, harbouring the idea that one day they will probably return to their home country, have progressively discovered that it may be possible to live a transnational life that allows them to be regularly in contact with their home country without completely leaving Switzerland.

In the following empirical sections, detailed information is given about the dimensions that are taken into account when analysing and explaining the mobility of older immigrants. First, we examine return intentions before and after retirement. Second, we study the annual amount of time spent in the home country by the older immigrants. Finally, we analyse mobility patterns of older couples.

INTENTIONS ABOUT RETURN BEFORE AND AFTER RETIREMENT, AND CRITERIA INFLUENCING THE DECISION

In the VLV survey, we asked older immigrants about their intentions to move to their country of origin in the near future. As shown in Table 2, only a very small proportion are willing to settle in their home country, and this trend is the same for Italian and Spanish men and women in the sample. Only Portuguese are more likely to consider this possibility seriously. This difference can be probably explained by three main reasons: Portuguese migrants are younger than Italians and Spanish. In fact, most of them are of young retired aged from 65 to 69 years compared with a more significant population of people aged over 70 years in the other two national groups. The second reason is that Portuguese migration in Switzerland is more recent: most of them arrived in Switzerland in the 1980s and 1990s compared with the longer-standing settlement of Italians (1950s and 1960s) and Spanish (1960s and 1970s) in Switzerland. As a consequence, their links to their home country are probably more intense (Laranjo Marques, 2008; Fibbi *et al.*, 2010). However, in France, the Portuguese presence is of longer date (from the 1960s), and Portuguese are still more likely to intend to return (Attias-Donfut,

Table 2. Percentage of older migrants aged 65 to 79 years planning to move to the home country in the near future by nationality, canton and gender (weighted data).

	Geneva			Basel
	Italy ($N = 117$)	Spain ($N = 68$)	Portugal ($N = 62$)	Italy ($N = 119$)
Women	1.9	3.3	14.8	0
Men	1.6	6.1	21.2	5.7
Total	1.8	4.8	18.3	3.4

Source: Vivre–Leben–Vivere data, 2012.
NB Significant differences between nationalities, $p = 0.000$; significant differences between men of different nationalities, $p = 0.006$; significant differences between women of different nationalities, $p = 0.04$.

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2006). The hypothesis of a stronger 'culture of return' can thus be advanced in their case.

It is interesting to notice that before retirement, a larger proportion of respondents, especially among Italians and Spanish, expressed the intention to go back to their home country (Table 3). Thus, they have changed their mind during the process of retirement. If they do not go back to their country of origin before retirement or just in the immediate years following retirement, it is very difficult to take the decision to go back to their home several years after retirement. Data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office show that emigration rates (from Switzerland) for these nationalities in 2011 are the highest just before retirement age (60–64 years old) or just after retirement age (65–69 years old). These data indicate also that emigration rates after retirement (65–69 years old) are the highest for the Portuguese (10%), while the figure is 5.8% for the Spanish and 1.5% for Italians (OFS, 2013), confirming thus the trends observed in the answers to our survey. Actually, Italian emigration rates are very similar to Swiss citizen's emigration rates for the same categories of age.

The analysis of return intentions taking into account the gender factor shows that the proportion of Italian and Spanish women who intended to return to their home country in that period of their lives was lower than among men from these national origins, while there are no significant differences between men and women in the Portuguese sample. In an earlier study conducted among Italian and Spanish people approaching retirement age (55–64 years old) in Switzerland, we observed the same trends: Spanish respondents were more inclined to return to their home country than Italians, and women were more reluctant than men to come back to their home country (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006). With respect to the first difference, we explained it by factoring in the diverging perceptions of the home country, more positive among Spanish than among Italians, and by the ethnic community structure, more organised among the Italians than among the Spanish (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006; Bolzman, 2013). This discrepancy between men and women about their future place of life shows that this subject has the potential to be a cause of friction and/or bargaining between spouses. In the critical period just before retirement, men are more likely than women to fear a loss of social status after ceasing employment (Bolzman *et al.*, 2001). As Sayad (1999) has shown, the social status of men in the immigration country has been more related to employment than in the case of women. In other words, men are more worried than women of experiencing a situation of 'double absence': not being recognised as part of Swiss society and being physically far from their home country.

It can thus be observed that among older immigrants from Italy and Spain, trends are similar to those observed in the previous survey. However, among the Portuguese immigrants, return intentions before retirement are lower than those for the other two nationalities and very similar for men and women, but higher after retirement than for the two other nationalities. It seems that, among them, those that decided to stay, and also those that decided to return, had already this idea clearly in mind before retirement. Their decision was probably taken well in advance of retirement age.

Among the criteria that migrants acknowledged as decisive in their decision to stay in Switzerland (or, for a minority, to return to their home country), the following were the most important: living close to children and grandchildren

Table 3. Percentage of older migrants planning to return to the home country before retirement by nationality, canton and gender (weighted data).

	Geneva			Basel
	Italy ($N = 117$)	Spain ($N = 68$)	Portugal ($N = 62$)	Italy ($N = 119$)
Women	34.8	44.4	19.5	40.9
Men	42.4	69.0	23.3	31.0
Total	39.0	57.1	21.4	35.3

Source: Vivre–Leben–Vivere data, 2012.
NB Significant differences between nationalities, $p = 0.000$; significant differences between men of different nationalities, $p = 0.001$; not significant differences between women of different nationalities, $p = 0.079$.

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(66%), the quality of health services (48%), social life and friends (35%, particularly for Italians and Spanish), accessibility of different services (28%, particularly for Italians), and 'what is better for the spouse' (22%), that is, considering the spouse's opinion about the most convenient place to live. In contrast, the cost of living is mentioned by only 8% of respondents; 15% considered that it was important not to feel like a foreigner.

Family is a very important dimension of intergenerational solidarity in southern European countries (Van de Velde, 2008). In a previous paper (Bolzman and Kaeser, 2012), we have described how Italian and Spanish retirees are closely involved in the care of their grandchildren and how significant it is for them to be in daily contact with their children. As the overwhelming majority of their children and grandchildren are living in Switzerland, return is not seen as a real option by the respondents.

The quality of health services is also quite important for older immigrants. Compared with Swiss elders, older migrants are overrepresented among those suffering from poor health (Bolzman and Vagni, 2015). Most older immigrants trust the health services in Switzerland more than in their home country (Bolzman, 2013), and this criterion also plays a role in the decision to stay in Switzerland.

On the contrary, the cost of living is not a significant argument in their decision. Most of them know that in fact the cost of living is cheaper in their home country, and their decision to stay in Switzerland is not related to economic reasons. As King (2000) puts it, decisions about return often have more to do with family or other non-economic considerations, in contrast to the economic basis of outward migration decisions.

It is also interesting to note that only 15% of respondents mentioned 'not feeling like a foreigner' as a criterion in their decision. Again, it seems that for the great majority of respondents, to stay in Switzerland implies that they still do not feel they are considered as full citizens, despite their long residence in this country. Thus, they are aware that, from the point of view of the legitimacy of their presence, they are not considered as 'insiders' in Swiss society. We find here again an indicator of some form of 'double absence' (Sayad, 1999).

TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY AMONG OLDER MIGRANTS: A REALITY?

Have older migrants definitively settled in Switzerland, their ties to their home country becoming less important? Have they completely stopped their 'coming and going' between Switzerland and their home country? Our data show, in fact, that a significant number (more than 70%) are still spending some time in their home country (Table 4). This is the case particularly for Italians and Spaniards, among whom around 80% spend some time during the year in places of origin. Among Italians, the proportion of men staying at least 1 month during the year is higher than among women in Geneva and lower in Basel. Spanish and Portuguese women figure among those who are more likely to stay at least 1 month in their home country, while men from these nationalities prefer shorter stays in their home country.

Through binomial analysis, we have tested some important factors that can explain the

Table 4. Share of respondents living in Geneva and Basel spending some time during the year in their home country (% in rows).

		No	1 month or less in a year	More than 1 month in a year	Total (%)	*N*
Basel	Italian women	25.5	49.0	25.5	100	47
	Italian men	28.4	55.2	16.4	100	67
Geneva	Italian women	21.7	45.7	32.6	100	46
	Italian men	18.3	30.0	51.7	100	60
	Spanish women	12.0	30.0	58.0	100	33
	Spanish men	24.0	45.0	31.0	100	29
	Portuguese women	30.0	36.0	33.0	100	30
	Portuguese men	29.0	54.0	18.0	100	28
						340

Source: Vivre–Leben–Vivere data, 2012.

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trend for transnational mobility among migrants (Table 5). We have distinguished those who visited their home country in the previous year from those who did not make a return visit. We selected explanatory variables related to demographic situation (sex, age, origin, and canton of residence), socio-economic situation (worries about making ends meet), and health situation (self-reported health). We also examined different forms of transnational relations with the home country: economic ties (owning a house in the home country); family ties (having at least one child in the origin country); social ties (having at least one friend in the origin country); and symbolic ties (wishing to be buried in the origin country). Thus, this last set of variables represented different types of ties with the home country that theoretically could have an influence on geographical mobility.

We ran a step-by-step logistic regression and Bayesian information criterion and log-likelihood tests of the models for goodness of fit. As the VLV survey is stratified by age and sex and oversampled for some nationalities, we included all these variables in the first and final regression model. According to the tests for goodness of fit, we dropped the following explanatory variables: worries about making ends meet, having at least one child in the home country, and having at least one friend in the origin country.

The main conclusions from the binomial regression are that to be owner of a house in the country of origin increases sevenfold the likelihood of spending some time in the home country, compared with those who do not own a house. The second significant factor is health situation: being in good or very good health increases the probability of mobility to the home country by a factor of 3 compared with people in bad or very bad health. The other factors are not statistically significant. In other words, some minimal material conditions are required to facilitate mobility: an independent place to live in the home country and no obstacles related to health. Thus, the probable deterioration of health associated with older–old age groups can be an obstacle to the geographical mobility of older people.

The relationship between return intentions before retirement and mobility practices after retirement was also tested, but there was no statistically significant correlation between these two variables. Mobility is thus probably a practice that has its own determinants, independent from those related to the idea of a permanent return (Bolzman *et al.*, 2006).

Table 5. Binomial analysis: factors affecting transnational mobility.

	Exp(*B*) (odds ratio) and significance (*p*-value)
Constant	4.201
Sex (ref. Women)	
Men	0.573
Groups by nationality and canton (ref. Italians Geneva)	
Italians (Basel)	0.652
Spaniards (Geneva)	1.822
Portuguese (Geneva)	0.408
Self-assessed health [ref. (Very) bad]	
Satisfactory	2.161
(Very) good	3.044*
Place of burial (ref. Switzerland or indifferent)	
Country of origin	0.507
Owner of house (ref. No)	
Yes	7.008***
N	364

Step χ^2 (relative to the block 0): 27.811***; degrees of freedom: 8

Source: Vivre–Leben–Vivere data, 2012.
***$p < 0.001$;
**$p < 0.01$;
*$p < 0.05$.

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FORMS OF MOBILITY AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AMONG IMMIGRANT COUPLES: THREE EXAMPLES

The majority of older migrants make return visits to their home country, but the mobility configurations can be very different from couple to couple. They can differ with respect to the length of time spent in each country or with respect to the number of back-and-forth trips between countries. They can differ also with respect to the living arrangements between spouses: in some cases, for instance, they move together, and in other cases, they are separated for part of the year. Here, we give three examples related to the situation of three different couples. In each case, the situation of the spouses differs with respect to retirement, family ties, health, and so on.

From Return to Transnational Mobility

Our first couple, Pedro (65 years old) and Ana (62 years old), both decided to take early retirement and go back to Spain. However, after some time living there, they changed their mind. In the words of Pedro:

> We wanted to go to La Coruña, to our apartment that we bought with the money we saved, but after some months our daughters told us: 'Either you come back or we come to bring you back (…).' They missed us, I think.

Ana added that they also missed their daughters.

At the time of the interview, the couple were living part of the year in Switzerland, and part of the year in Spain:

> Now we live in Geneva, where we still have our flat. But we go very often to La Coruña, three or four times during the year. It depends upon when our grandchildren give us a break (laugh). We go very often to our daughter's house in France near Geneva to take care of the kids – or they come to us in Geneva. She needs some help and it is a pleasure for us. When we go for a rest, we stay two or three months in Spain. We take long holidays.

As they are ageing, they prefer low-cost flights over a car for their travels, because they get less tired:

> 'We are too old to travel by car and by plane it is more practical.'

Even though there are no direct flights from Geneva to La Coruña, flights became cheaper in recent years.

Different Mobility Rhythms

In our second family, the husband (Lorenzo, 66 years old) is retired, and his much younger wife (Teresa, 52 years old) is still employed. Teresa and their daughter join him during the summer holidays. Teresa explains:

> He has all his brothers and sisters over there. He always had it in his mind to return but since I am still working and our daughter is still studying, he leaves for Spain between May and September. It is not a question of not loving Switzerland but he has more nostalgia than me.

In their living arrangements, Lorenzo and Teresa take into account the constraints of Swiss legislation, according to which a foreigner holding a long-term residence permit is not allowed to leave Switzerland for more than 6 months if he or she wants to maintain his or her status as a permanent resident. Moreover, some payments related to national insurance schemes or welfare entitlements require recipients to maintain a definitive constant presence in the host country. In this example, living arrangements allow the couple to adapt to these different legal constraints (also Gehring, in preparation).

Visiting During the Holidays and for Special Events

In our third case, the spouses, José (63 years old) and Maria (61 years old), go to Spain only during the holidays. José is still employed, and Maria had to stop work because of health problems. Maria visited Spain several times in the year prior to 2004 when the interview was conducted. Maria's visits were prompted by family duties, namely, the death of an uncle and the illness of her mother-in-law. However, bad health is an important limitation to geographical mobility, as evidence has shown. She experiences considerable pain when she travels and is confronted with the question of immobility, even though it is now possible to fly by plane

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in a few hours. She would like to go to Spain more often, but health constraints are a real burden for her.

CONCLUSION: DUALITY OF RESOURCES AND REFERENCES IN TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY

Retirement is a very important normative event for immigrants. It is a juncture at which they rethink their return intentions and develop more precise projects. Some immigrants return to their home country at that moment (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2002; Pino and Verde, 2006), yet most immigrants 'change their mind' and opt for Switzerland as their main place of residence. However, to 'settle in Switzerland' (or to come back to the home country) does not imply that older immigrants' transnational mobility ceases. On the contrary, our data show that the great majority of older immigrants living in Switzerland are still regularly spending at least some weeks of the year in their home country. From the adult children of migrants, we also know that parents who ostensibly returned to 'settle' in Spain or Italy sometimes come to visit their offspring in Switzerland; adult children also regularly go to visit their parents in these countries (Bolzman *et al.*, 2003).

Thus, even though many migrants lived their adult life expecting to return at the moment of retirement, when this moment actually arrives, most of them do not fulfil this initial wish. As shown also by Klinthäll (2006), the probability of return migration declines after the age of 65 years. In fact, many older migrants adopt mobility as a lifestyle rather than returning permanently. To some extent, we may conclude that they never really 'settled' and mobility is a way of life that is more adapted to the duality of resources and references that they have built up during their adult life (Sinatti, 2011). In the same perspective, Kelly and Lusio (2006) even refer to a 'transnational habitus'.

For those living in Switzerland, patterns of mobility between Switzerland and the home country can be very different: from a few weeks for holidays to several months during the year. As shown by qualitative data, length of stay and purposes of mobility are very much related to family configurations in both countries (location and age of relatives and age of spouses) (Wall and Bolzman, 2014).

Forms of mobility are also related to the process of retirement itself and to other factors affecting geographical mobility (health and housing situation). As a matter of fact, mobility is an activity that requires material resources like housing, and also financial resources for the maintenance of two residences, as well as for transportation expenses. It also requires preparation and the mobilisation of resources in a transnational perspective (Casarino, 2004). Being in good health is also a decisive factor facilitating a mobile way of life: when health declines, physical mobility becomes a more painful activity and tends to be reduced.

Patterns of mobility are also influenced by geographical distance and especially transport connections between the place of residence in Switzerland and the place of 'residence' in the home country. For southern Europeans, the 'democratisation' and expansion of flights across the continent make it easier to go home frequently, compared with some years ago when the only possibility was to undertake long and exhausting journeys by train or by car. Thus, their translocal mobility is easier nowadays.

Older migrants also take into account state regulations (permits, social security entitlements, and so on) (Ackers and Dwyer, 2004). Although the option of spending part of the year in the home country is not really surprising given the transnational and new mobilities perspectives discussed earlier, this option is adapted to legal constraints, underlined by the structural perspective, such as reducing the sojourn in the home country in order to maintain permanent resident status in Switzerland. Older migrants also sometimes adapt their mobility in order to keep access to forms of public economic support related to place of residence (also Gehring, in preparation).

Thus, our data show that most older immigrants develop different forms of 'double presence' that allow them to stay connected to both of the countries, which have been relevant during their lives. Through their life experiences, older immigrants develop a culture of 'in-betweenness'. Most of them do not want to choose between their home country and the country where they have spent their adult life. Their world is both transnational and translocal. However, they

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also have to deal with structural constraints that reduce their scope of action and limit their patterns of physical mobility. To some extent, these limitations – and others related to scarce material resources and bad health – lead some of them to experience a situation of 'double absence': in this case, they feel at loss both with respect to their country of residence and their country of origin.

More research in a life course perspective (Attias-Donfut, 2004) is needed in order to better understand which processes favour either 'double presence' or 'double absence' among older immigrants. It would also be worth analysing in greater depth what the consequences of limited physical mobility are as follows: is physical decline compensated by the development of other forms of mobility (virtual IT-mediated mobilities for instance) or does it lead to the reduction of all forms of mobility?

NOTES

(1) There are some interesting papers on return migration, like the classic study by Cerase (1974) about Italians going back from the United States to southern Italy. More recently, Rodriguez *et al.* (2002) have studied Spanish return migration in Andalusia. But these studies are more focused in return issues than in mobility issues, even though return migration in fact implies temporary mobility (Hunter, 2011; Horn *et al.*, 2013; Baykara-Krumme, 2013).

(2) We do not have similar interviews with Italian and Portuguese older migrants. Probably some of them elaborate different mobility arrangements, which we intend to explore in the near future.

(3) It is difficult to estimate precisely the number of immigrants aged 65 to 79 years that took Swiss nationality, because there are no reliable naturalisation statistics by age and nationality of origin. However, their proportion is probably between 10% and 15% of the cohort if we take the proportion of naturalised respondents in the VLV questionnaire.

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