

# Older immigrants living in Switzerland and ambivalence related to return around the retirement period

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the links between former guest workers' attitudes toward return, as they approach retirement age, and ambivalence. More specifically, we seek answers to the following two questions: Do older immigrants modify their intentions toward return around the retirement period? If the answer is positive, we then ask: To which factors are these changes related when looking at intentions to return both before and after retirement? These questions have seldom been analyzed in the sociological literature, and their relation to ambivalence has not yet really been explored. After considering the state of the art, both from a sociology of migration perspective and through a life-course approach, we analyze empirically how older immigrants deal with the question of return. Our data come from a representative survey of approximately 300 older immigrants from Southern Europe (Italy, Portugal, and Spain), aged between 65 and 79 and living in urban Switzerland. Our findings show that (1) while a significant proportion of Italian and Spanish older migrants give up the idea of returning definitively to their country of origin and decide to establish their main residence in Switzerland, among the Portuguese, a significant minority wanted to return before retirement and are still planning to return, expecting to recover full citizenship in their "home" country; (2) changes with respect to return intentions mainly concern former blue-collar workers and white-collar employees; and (3) older immigrants who do not see migration as a positive decision demonstrate more ambivalence about return.

## Keywords

Ambivalence, citizenship, older immigrants, retirement period, return

Many older immigrants came to Europe during the second half of the last century as young adult workers within the frame of guest labor migration regimes (Piore, 1979). Nowadays, they are

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experiencing a new stage in their life course: they are either near retirement age or already retired. In this new period, many of them are confronted with the issue of where to live: is return still a valuable option for them or is it better to stay in the country where they have spent their adult life—that is, Switzerland? Are other options available?

The aim of this article is to explore the links between former guest workers' attitudes toward return as they approach retirement age and ambivalence. More specifically, we seek answers to the following two questions: Do older immigrants modify their intentions about return as they reach retirement? If yes, which factors have influenced this change in intention to return both before and after retirement? These questions have seldom been analyzed in the sociological literature and their relation to ambivalence is unexplored. After considering the state of the art, both from a sociology of migration perspective and through a life-course approach, we analyze empirically how older immigrants from Southern Europe living in Switzerland deal with the question of return.

## **Ambivalence and the question of return near the retirement period**

From a rational neo-classical economic perspective, it is expected that retired migrants will return to their home countries if this will give them greater purchasing power (Hunter, 2011). However, other theoretical perspectives have shown that return intentions are not exclusively related to rational economic factors but also to other sets of complex factors such as transnational social, cultural, symbolic, and physical ties to the migrants' countries of origin and of residence (Bolzman et al., 2006; Ciobanu and Ramos, 2016; De Haas and Fokkema, 2010). From a macro-social perspective, such as that proposed by social system theory (Luhmann, 1990), return intentions are also related to social and health regimes and to migrants' possibilities of accessing social rights in different contexts (Bommes, 2000; Dwyer and Ackers, 2004; Hunter, 2011). In any case, empirical research shows that the majority of migrants decide to keep their main place of residence in the society where they have spent most of their adult life and that only a minority intend to return to the country of origin or return effectively (Bolzman et al., 2017; Ciobanu and Ramos, 2016). In fact, the preferred situation of many retired immigrants is to go back and forth between the two countries while keeping their main residence in the country of immigration (Bolzman et al., 2017; Ciobanu and Hunter, 2017; Hunter, 2011).

However, one issue that receives little attention from scholars is the change in return intentions once a person nears retirement age. Why do people who were expecting to return finally change their mind around the date of retirement? Which factors are associated with this decision?

### *Limited citizenship and ambivalence*

The work of sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad (1991, 1999) can shed some light on this issue. According to him, the situation of many immigrants is characterized by their limited citizenship in the states in which they live, and this can lead to a form of ambivalence about their place in society. Following Sayad's argument, we consider that, since most international migrants are perceived as full members in neither their host nor their home societies, their situation tends to be ambivalent on many levels. For instance, they aspire to return at some point to their home country but they also know that their economic, social, and familial situations make this option highly improbable in the short term. They perceive their migration as temporary but observe that this transitory period is becoming longer and longer. They have the feeling of not being in the right place and wish to be elsewhere; however, they also have the impression that there no longer is a "right" place to be. The

concept of ambivalent citizenship was also thematized more recently by McNevin (2013), who analyzes the case of irregular migrants looking for an improvement in their rights in an institutional world that does not offer them many opportunities to be recognized as citizens. McIlwaine and Bermudez (2015) also show that home states create structural ambivalence by making external voting—taking part in native-country elections from the host country—a difficult process for migrants, who are both privileged and excluded in this process.

For Sayad (1991), structural ambivalence can be explained mainly by the fact that, in a world organized into states, international migration is not seen as “normal” behavior. Migrants need to justify their decision to remain in the host state with reasons defined as “acceptable” by states and their immigration policies. In other words, their presence is, most of the time, conditional and one-dimensional. For instance, if migrants move to a host country to work and are unemployed for a long period of time, they can lose their residence status (see also Bolzman, 2016).

If we push this argument further, we can consider ambivalence to be related to a lack of full citizenship. In most cases, migrants are considered as denizens—as outsiders—rather than as full members of society because of their uncertain residence status. They do not have “the right to have rights” nor the possibility to influence the future in the societies in which they live (Arendt, 1958). Even though immigrants can settle in a new state, conditionality and the lack of citizenship can lead them to think that their “real place,” the place where they are considered fully as human beings, is their native state (Takai and De Guzman, 2015). Thus, immigrants will experience a lasting nostalgia for a world in which they were more than simple “workers,” one in which they had multifaceted roles. They dream about a return to their “home state” in order to recover their “place in the world” but, at the same time, they perceive a number of obstacles to this option being realistic, so only a minority of them will be able to accomplish the dream. There is thus, gradually, a form of “double absence” (Sayad, 1999), a marginalization both from the society in which they live and from their native society. Or, in the words of Constable (1999), migrants construct the country of origin as “home” but rarely return “home” and develop a state of being “at home but not at home.”

Ambivalence can also be considered from the point of view of the relationship of migrants with their home country (Kivisto and La Vecchia-Mikkola, 2013) and with the migration process itself. In fact, many of them emigrated with projects and goals in mind that they did not perceive to be attainable in their native society because of numerous obstacles caused by the rigidity of the social structure and cultural norms there (Hoffman-Nowotny, 1981). Many of them had a project of upward social mobility for themselves and their families (Takai and De Guzman, 2015). Emigration was the indirect way for them to acquire a better socio-economic status in their home country. As posited in many theories, their reference group remained in the native society (Stark, 1991), and they expected to acquire enough financial resources in the receiving society to improve their economic position in comparison to this reference group (Piore, 1979; Portes, 1996). Being successful abroad was almost a social obligation and a wager on the future. They had something to prove to people whom they perceived as important connections in their homeland. Many studies using the network approach (i.e. Massey et al., 1998) show that migrants seldom talk about their problems when they communicate at a distance with their relatives and friends in the home country. On the contrary, they demonstrate the signs of success through the pictures or videos which they send as well as through their remittances (Pina-Guerrassimoff, 2003). The return to the native country for holidays bearing plenty of gifts is also a well-known occurrence. Even if they actually *suffer* in the destination society, they cannot fail *vis-à-vis* their countrymen. They need to show them that migration was worthwhile. Thus, though many immigrants aspire to go back to the home country, the return needs to be a successful one in order for them to save face (Goffman, 1959). As indicated above, this is a difficult goal to attain short term and migrants tend both to multiply the signs of

success *vis-à-vis* their native country and to postpone their return project for a later stage of their lives. Thus, they try to conciliate incompatible normative expectations related to their particular status (Merton, 1976). All these issues are highly emotional for migrants, who perceive them in a more or less conscious way (Ho, 2009; Ryan, 2008). In any case, these emotional tensions are part of migrants' ambivalence.

### *Life course, retirement, and ambivalence*

From a life-course perspective, which can be conceptualized as “a sequence of age linked transitions that are embedded in social institutions and history” (Bengtson et al., 2005: 493), issues that can be a source of ambivalence among migrants can change according to the stage of their life course in which they find themselves. However, they can also be influenced by societal changes embedded in historical contexts and specific spaces, by constraints and resources at their disposal and by situations experienced by significant others linked to them (Elder and Johnson, 2002). The retirement period appears as a new transition where the question of return can be reactivated (Bolzman, 2013; Klinthäll, 2006); however, it also relates to social status and, more broadly, to the place of retired people in society (Guillemard, 1990). Retirement can also concern ambivalent feelings about the future: on the one hand, migrants are expecting to stop working and to have more time for themselves, their family, and their friends; on the other, they are worried about their place in society and about economic subsistence with this new social status.

In fact, 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 a migrant's life course. It can represent a new source of ambivalence, because the need to work no longer retains migrants in the society of residence. In many cases, they draw their retirement pension in their home society and live in the house or flat which they own there. Nevertheless, new conflicting roles can emerge at this stage of their lives. On the one hand, they have the opportunity to show to significant others from their reference group in the home society that they are returning after a successful life abroad. They can finally go back with their “heads held high.” On the other hand, new priorities can arise in relation to new social roles, like duties toward the family they created in the host society: they have, for example, the opportunity to play a role as parents and grandparents for subsequent generations (Percival, 2013), most of whom have no desire, nor intention, to live in their parents' native country. Moreover, as “older people,” they also have new health issues and concerns about the ease of access to care, which can influence their decision to stay or to return (Böcker and Balkir, 2012; Gualda and Escriva, 2014; Hunter, 2011).

### **Questions and Hypotheses**

In this article, we explore how ambivalence is expressed among migrants around the time of retirement. We analyze how structural, relational, and individual levels combine to give conflicting expectations about the available options concerning issues related to this period of the life course. More precisely, the main dimension of ambivalence explored here concerns the question of return. Following the review of the literature, our main assumption is that, during their “active” adulthood, the idea of return is one of migrants' intentions but that transition to retirement brings new structural, relational, and individual elements that lead many migrants to change their mind and to abandon the idea of definitive return. This change of intention can be considered as a form of ambivalence in the sense that individuals may experience a tension between former normative expectations related to migration goals and new normative expectations related to their analysis of the situation, and to other goals that emerge during the life course.

However, not all individuals have the same expectations and experience the same life conditions during migration. There are several “mediations” that introduce differences in migration experience. Here, we explore four dimensions that can have an impact on this experience: citizenship and, more largely, social factors that produce differences and inequalities in life conditions, the assessment of the migration experience and its goals, the possibility to experience a transnational life, and, finally, the assessment of new life conditions during old age, especially health conditions.

With respect to the first “mediation,” according to the literature, the lack of citizenship and a segregated social status in the country of residence are factors that maintain, over time, the idea of return but in an ambivalent way (Constable, 1999; Takai and De Guzman, 2015). On the other hand, even though older immigrants of different nationalities can share the same social conditions in the host society according to their nationality of origin, the opportunity structures that allow them to transform their return intentions and behaviors can be very different (Bolzman et al., 2006; De Coulon and Wolff, 2006). Demographic (age, gender, and marital status) and socio-economic factors (educational level and socio-professional status) can also influence migrants’ access to resources and their decisions about return. Taking into account these data, we consider that such factors define a degree of experienced citizenship—with respect to both the country of residence and of origin—that can have an influence on return intentions, and therefore, cause changes in the latter. To be more precise, hypothesis 1 is as follows: the less migrants experience political citizenship (naturalization) and socio-economic citizenship (higher socio-economic status) in the host society, the more they will be ambivalent with respect to return.

Another “mediating” factor concerns the subjective assessment of migration by individuals. As we have already explained, migrants had valuable reasons for leaving their country of origin and had specific goals which they wished to accomplish in the new society. Whatever their “objective” social and institutional position, they can decide whether or not these goals were attained and can feel more or less accepted in the society in which they live. In that sense, our hypothesis 2 considers that the more older migrants assess their migration as having been the wrong decision, the more they will consider return as an ideal option before retirement; however, confronted with the real conditions of return or the risk of another migration failure, they will be more inclined to change their mind—in other words, to be ambivalent toward return.

In a similar vein, the possibility (or lack) of experiencing regular direct transnational contacts with the country of origin can influence their perception that they have the option of building a sense of belonging and of constructing a meaningful place in the world after retirement. We have seen that, for many older immigrants, the ideal (or the least-poor) solution is to live part of the year in the country of residence and part in the country of origin (Ciobanu and Ramos, 2016; De Haas and Fokkema, 2010; Rodríguez and Egea, 2006). In line with this, our hypothesis 3 is that older immigrants who do have the opportunity to experience transnationalism can find in that experience a way of attenuating ambivalence, because bridges with the native country are part of their concrete lives.

The last “mediating” factor is related to the ways in which immigrants assess the consequences of previous life stages in old age. One particularly significant dimension in old age is health. Previous studies have shown that, in general, former guest workers are in worse physical and mental health compared to the native older population (Bollini and Siem, 1995; Bolzman, 2012). For migrants in poor health, return can be seen as a way to improve their condition in this regard. However, in this case, they may fear the loss of access to quality care in their home country. Therefore, our hypothesis 4 is that migrants in poor health will be more likely to be ambivalent than those in good health.

To summarize, we first explore whether or not retirement is a key moment that leads immigrants to change their mind with respect to return. If the answer to this is positive, we explore four main

factors that influence the changes in their intention to return. The case of Southern European retirees in Switzerland will allow us to empirically test our four hypotheses.

## **Older immigrants from Southern Europe in Switzerland: general context**

Statistics on immigrant populations in Switzerland show that they are aging or, put another way, that the proportion of those aged 65 and over is growing. The statistics demonstrate this trend very explicitly. Thus, in Switzerland, in 1980, foreigners aged 65+ represented 4.9 percent of the total resident population in this age group; in the year 2013, their proportion increased to 11.8 percent (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2014). All in all, older foreigners aged 65+ number some 151,000 and come mainly from Italy (40.5%), Germany (16.9%), France (6.6%), Austria (5.4%), Spain (4.9%), Turkey (2.1%), and Portugal (1.1%)—thus principally from border countries but also from Southern and Eastern Europe. While most Germans, French, and Austrians went to Switzerland as skilled workers, Italian, Spanish, and, later, Portuguese and Turkish migrants were recruited to work in low-skilled positions.

If the aging of immigrant populations still appears to be relatively modest it is because, on the one hand, this process is part of a wider demographic trend—that is, the aging of the whole resident population—and, on the other, because the immigration rates of young adults are still very important in Switzerland (Piguet, 2006). Moreover, it is worth remembering that the available statistics only take older *foreigners* into account and not the whole population of older immigrants. The scale of the latter is much more important, especially among Southern Europeans (Wanner and Steiner, 2012); however, those who became Swiss are not visible in the statistics.

Nevertheless, the aging of immigrants is nowadays more visible and is starting to be acknowledged as a social reality, due to the fact that a large part of this foreign resident population has settled permanently. One clear indicator is that, among the 1,937,400 foreigners living in Switzerland in 2013, more than 60 percent had long-term residence permits. In the case of Italian and Spanish residents, 95 percent had this type of permit (Secrétariat d'Etat aux migrations, 2014).

The majority of older immigrants live in urban areas like Basel or Geneva. After obtaining a permanent residence permit, they move from rural areas and small cities to urban centers where employment opportunities for the adults and educational opportunities for their children are perceived to be more interesting. Thus, Italians represent 39.8 percent of the older foreigners aged 65–79 in the city of Basel. In Geneva, they represent 34.9 percent of foreigners in the same age bracket, with the Spanish and the Portuguese representing 12.7 and 2.8 percent, respectively in 2013. This last percentage may be small, but it is constantly increasing whereas the proportion of Italians is decreasing. Thus, the Portuguese represent 19 percent of the foreign population living in Geneva, the French 18.8 percent, and the Italians 11.5 percent (Kaeser, 2015).

Older immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe came to Switzerland as young adult workers within the frame of guest worker migration (Piguet, 2006; Piore, 1979). The first generation of immigrant workers was mainly recruited during the 1950s and 1960s from Italy and Spain and, later, from Portugal, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia. The majority worked in manual professions in industry, construction, restaurants, cleaning, and so on. Even though some had upward social mobility in their careers, the majority were still working in unskilled or manual professions just before retirement: this was the case for around 70 percent of the Spaniards, Italians, and Portuguese, while only a third of Swiss workers occupied these professional positions. Now retired or approaching retirement in an era of globalization, the advent of low-cost flights and more freedom of circulation between European Union (EU) countries and Switzerland mean that transnational living is more likely. Therefore, immigrants who spent 20–40 years of their adult lives as

guest workers in Switzerland, harboring the idea that, one day, they would probably return to their home country, have progressively discovered other options, like mobility between countries, which enable them to live a transnational life and to be in regular contact with their home country without completely leaving Switzerland (Bolzman et al., 2017). However, at the same time, they discover that there are structural factors (such as the size of retirement pensions or the quality of health services) and relational factors (like the dispersion of family members in at least two countries) that are a source of ambivalence, making it difficult to determine their options with respect to the choice of country of residence after retirement. It is thus interesting to know what proportion actually leave Switzerland at the time of retirement.

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office reports annually both the number of permanent residents in Switzerland and the number of permanent residents who leave the country, by citizenship, canton of residence, and age group. Table 1 displays an extract of this for Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish citizens aged between 40 and 79 years and living in the cantons of Basel<sup>1</sup> and Geneva. The period covered is 2011–2016. We focus particularly on Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish nationals holding a Swiss residence permit valid for at least 12 months or having accumulated at least 12 months of legal residence in Switzerland. In Table 1, the column “emigration” indicates, for each foreign citizenship, canton, and age group, the number of foreign nationals leaving Switzerland. The column “immigrant permanent residents”<sup>2</sup> indicates, for each foreign citizenship, canton, and age group, the total number of foreign nationals living in Switzerland at the end of the previous year.<sup>3</sup> “Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland” indicates, for each foreign citizenship, canton, and age group, the share of foreign nationals leaving Switzerland out of the population of foreign nationals (ratio in percentage of “emigration” over “immigrant permanent residents”). The canton of Basel counts few foreign nationals from Portugal and Spain, which is why we do not report them in Table 1. Note that the data do not report the countries for which foreign nationals leave Switzerland.<sup>4</sup>

According to Table 1, very few foreign nationals from Italy, Portugal, and Spain actually left Switzerland between 2011 and 2016 on retirement (the 65- to 79-year-old age group). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that relatively greater numbers of older immigrants from Portugal leave Switzerland than from Italy and Spain. Hence, almost all older immigrants from Italy and Spain and most of older immigrants from Portugal decide to stay in Switzerland on retiring. Only a few of them return to their country of origin. In order to control for a potential age bias, we look at foreign nationals at pre-retirement age (40–64 years). As shown in Table 1, the share of foreign nationals from Southern Europe leaving Switzerland before retiring was small between 2011 and 2016, even for Portuguese nationals.

In Switzerland, the economic crisis did not have the same impact as in other European countries. Unemployment rates are among the lowest in Europe (3%) and wages are high from an international perspective. According to the neo-classical paradigm, this socio-economic context was ideal for the return of these older migrants because their purchasing power could be very high in their countries of origin. However, the figures show that the number of departures during retirement is low, which is somewhat surprising from a purely rational perspective and probably indicates that older immigrants have other motivations for staying than a mere economic calculation.

These results lead us to question whether older immigrants took the decision to stay or to return quite a long time before retirement or were undecided right up to the retirement date. Put differently, were older immigrants from Southern Europe ambivalent about returning to their country of origin at the moment of retirement and why?

In the following methodological and empirical sections, detailed information is given about the dimensions to be taken into account when analyzing and explaining the return intentions of older immigrants.

**Table 1.** Share of Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish immigrants leaving Switzerland.

Year	Immigrants with Italian citizenship					
	40–64 years old			65–79 years old		
	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland
Number	Number	%	Number	Number	%	
<i>Basel</i>						
2011	55	7249	0.76	46	2998	1.53
2012	105	7185	1.46	35	3117	1.12
2013	107	7214	1.48	46	3183	1.44
2014	120	7334	1.64	36	3215	1.12
2015	100	7414	1.35	47	3241	1.45
2016	127	7523	1.69	43	3213	1.34
<i>Geneva</i>						
2011	106	6999	1.51	38	4619	0.92
2012	128	6870	1.86	37	4620	0.80
2013	112	6785	1.65	39	4559	0.85
2014	116	6904	1.68	34	4514	0.75
2015	162	7026	2.30	41	4373	0.94
2016	169	6956	2.43	40	4214	0.95
Year	Immigrants with Portuguese citizenship					
	40–64 years old			65–79 years old		
	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland
Number	Number	%	Number	Number	%	
<i>Geneva</i>						
2011	167	13,129	1.27	31	421	7.36
2012	146	13,585	1.07	25	475	5.26
2013	147	14,257	1.03	41	532	7.71
2014	150	14,963	1.00	31	600	5.17
2015	143	15,606	0.92	57	699	8.15
2016	314	15,720	2.00	87	785	11.08
Year	Immigrants with Spanish citizenship					
	40–64 years old			65–79 years old		
	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland
Number	Number	%	Number	Number	%	
<i>Geneva</i>						
2011	103	5478	1.88	55	1727	3.18



**Table 1.** (Continued)

Year	Immigrants with Spanish citizenship					
	40–64 years old			65–79 years old		
	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland	Emigration	Immigrant permanent residents <sup>a</sup>	Share of immigrants leaving Switzerland
	Number	Number	%	Number	Number	%
2012	114	5457	2.09	46	1739	2.64
2013	134	5505	2.43	37	1754	2.11
2014	101	5627	1.79	36	1805	1.99
2015	168	5822	2.88	46	1836	2.50
2016	228	5934	3.84	62	1821	3.40

Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office, Switzerland.

<sup>a</sup>Number of immigrant permanent residents (or their children) without Swiss citizenship on 31 December of the previous year.

## Methods and data collection

In order to explore older immigrants' intentions about return to their country of origin, we use quantitative data from the *Vivre-Leben-Vivere* (VLV) survey which focuses on the living conditions and health of individuals aged 65+ currently living in Switzerland. In order to address the increasing diversity of the country's elderly population, VLV developed a subproject that questioned the living conditions and the life trajectories of immigrant elders compared to the national population. The center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Gerontology and Vulnerability carried out the VLV study in 2012 in five cantons in Switzerland. A total of 3600 randomly selected individuals aged over 65 constitute the main sample, stratified by age and gender. An oversample of approximately 300 older immigrants, 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 constituted of natives from Portugal, Spain, and Italy and, in the canton of Basel, of natives from Italy. The choice of groups and sites was 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.

The oversample of older immigrants in Switzerland has the following characteristics: (1) the older immigrant is not a Swiss native although she or he can be a naturalized Swiss; (2) the non-Swiss native older immigrant is not born in Switzerland (so that she or he has the experience of immigration) but is a native from either Italy, Spain, or Portugal (only one citizenship is allowed); (3) the older immigrant has said whether or not she or he intends to return to her or his country of origin; (4) the older immigrant has said whether or not she or he intended, before retiring, to return to her or his country of origin; and (5) the older immigrant with Swiss citizenship has another citizenship—she or he is either native Italian, native Spanish, or native Portuguese (only one citizenship other than the Swiss one is allowed).

In the VLV survey, the intention to return in the near future appears as a possible response to a more general question on the location choice of older immigrants. The other possible answers concern locations in Switzerland and in a third country.<sup>5</sup> Older immigrant respondents were also asked whether they had expressed, before retiring, the wish to return to their country of origin on retirement. Four possible answers were considered: “no, I wanted to retire here”; “yes, but I could not realize my plan to return”; “yes, I spent some time there but it did not work out”; and “actually, I spend a part of the year here and the other part there.” Hence, the subject of ambivalence about return was not explicitly treated in the VLV survey, as the question about the intention to return expressed before retiring was asked retrospectively and without relating it to current intentions. Therefore, we need to infer any ambivalence about return from the answers to these questions.

With regard to the question on the older immigrants’ initial intentions to return (expressed before retiring), we have implicitly assumed that they have perfect memories—that is, that they were able to accurately remember where they wished to spend their retirement before the actual event. Yet, we reckon this assumption is rather strong, as individuals can be subject to the false memory phenomenon (having a distorted memory of past events, imagining consciously or non-consciously events that never occurred, etc.), which is well documented in gerontology and psychology studies (Park and Festini, 2017; Schacter et al., 1997). Nevertheless, the question of return has been quite a central issue for many migrants, and the probability that they remember well what their intentions were before retirement is high. Moreover, in previous research about older migrants from Spain and Italy aged 55–64 years, we found that a high proportion among them (about a third) intended to go back to their native country (Bolzman et al., 2001). Even though memories are not perfect, we can rely on this information and assume that our respondents simply changed their mind. It is even probable that they changed their mind with respect to return intentions several times during their stay in Switzerland. However, our quantitative data allow us to focus only on the period around retirement.

The ideal solution would have been to also interview older immigrants who actually returned to their country of origin when they retired. However, tracing foreign nationals who left Switzerland is a very complex and expensive process. Most researchers rely, instead, on return intentions, and we, thus, follow the same strategy (De Coulon and Wolff, 2006). The use of detailed quantitative data allows us to explore the return intentions of older immigrants, particularly if these intentions change between the pre- and post-retirement periods. To understand the sources of ambivalence influencing their intentions and practices and to test our hypotheses, we make use of information data from the VLV survey related to the socio-demographic characteristics of older immigrants, their experience of immigration, and their assessment of their working life and their health.

## Statistical analysis

For this analysis, we construct a dependent variable, *ambivalence*, which describes the behavior of older immigrants concerning return to their country of origin. More precisely, the ambivalence about return is defined as the change of mind related to return intentions. Hence, *ambivalence* is a binary variable that takes a value of 1 if an older immigrant reported that she or he wanted to return to her or his country of origin before retirement<sup>6</sup> then changed her or his mind after retiring.<sup>7</sup> It takes a value of 0 if an older immigrant reported that she or he wanted to return to her or his country of origin on retirement and did not change her or his mind after retiring,<sup>8</sup> did not want to retire in her or his country of origin and did not change her or his mind after retiring, or usually spent one part of the year in her or his country of origin and the other part in the host country, and continued like this after retiring.<sup>9</sup> An older immigrant ambivalent about return is identified with the value 1 in the *ambivalence* variable. We have grouped all the chosen places of retirement outside the

**Table 2.** Descriptions of (No) ambivalence about return.

Ambivalence about return	Main citizenship					N
	Switzerland (naturalized)	Italy	Portugal	Spain	Total	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Wanted to return then changed her or his mind	9.7	36.9	14.3	52.8	32.3	89
Did not want to return then changed her or his mind	0	0.6	9.5	2.8	2.3	6
Wanted to return and still wants to	0	1.9	9.5	5.6	3.4	9
Did not want to return and still does not want to	90.3	57.3	66.7	38.9	60.2	160
Lived and lives in both countries	0	3.2	0	0	1.9	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	266

Source: Vivre-Leben-Vivere (VLV) Survey, Ludwig et al., 2011.

country of origin (in Switzerland or in a third country) into a single category called “do not return to the native country” in order to stress that the issue we are concerned with is the choice to return, not the choice to stay.<sup>10</sup>

Table 2 describes the ambivalent behavior about return of older immigrants according to their main citizenship. For instance, while, prior to retirement, the majority of older immigrants from Portugal did not want to spend it in their country of origin and, post-retirement still do not want to (no ambivalence), older immigrants from Spain are mainly planning to not return to their country of origin although they had wanted to before retirement. Among the older immigrants from Italy, the ambivalent behavior is more mixed. A little over half of older Italian immigrants did not want, prior to the event, to retire to their country of origin and still did not want to on retirement; a third of them wanted to return before retirement and then changed their minds. Table 2 reports that some older immigrants did not want to return to their country of origin then changed their mind after retiring. Although this situation can also be considered as an ambivalent position, it is not necessarily comparable to the one on which older immigrants wanted to return then changed their mind. Both situations can present different explanations. Therefore, since only a few older immigrants initially did not want to return to their native country then changed their minds after retiring, we can dismiss them from the analysis. Besides, subcategories 3 and 5 in Table 2 count few older immigrants. Thus, in the statistical analysis, we will mostly associate non-ambivalent older immigrants with subcategory 4, without loss of generality.

Two examples from qualitative interviews with Portuguese and Spanish older immigrants illustrate both non-ambivalent and ambivalent attitudes. The first illustrates *non-ambivalence*. It is from Antonio, a retired 66-year-old Portuguese man who worked as a bricklayer in construction:

I came to Switzerland 20 years ago to make a living and my project was very clear: to save money so that I could build a house in Portugal with the idea of going back after retirement. The house is there. Because of various circumstances I have not been able to return yet, but my project has not changed; the goal is always the same.

The second quotation illustrates *ambivalence*. It is from Rosa, a 63-year-old Spanish woman who took early retirement; she had wanted to return before retirement but changed her mind:

We have an apartment in La Coruña, but our daughters became Swiss and they want to stay in Switzerland, so we want to stay close to them. On the one hand I would love to live in Spain and to enjoy life a little ...

**Table 3.** Distribution of the sample population characteristics according to ambivalence about return.

Variables	No ambivalent	Ambivalent	p-value
Age	70.87 ± 4.13 <sup>a</sup>	72.12 ± 4.30 <sup>a</sup>	0.024**
Gender			0.864
Female	46.55	47.67	
Male	53.45	52.33	
Marital status			0.138
Single/divorced/widowed	28.16	37.21	
Married	71.84	62.79	
Main citizenship			0.000***
Switzerland (naturalized)	16.09	3.49	
Italy	56.32	67.44	
Portugal	18.39	6.98	
Spain	9.20	22.09	
Canton			0.764
Geneva	63.22	65.12	
Basel	36.78	34.88	
Education			0.380
Primary school	47.70	53.49	
Higher than primary school	52.30	46.51	
Last job			0.030**
Job with responsibilities/intermediate professions <sup>b</sup>	19.54	12.79	
Skilled work <sup>c</sup>	45.98	46.51	
Unskilled work <sup>d</sup>	30.46	40.70	
Out of workforce/unknown	4.02	0.00	
Time spent in the home country			0.005***
None	27.01	18.60	
Spent ≤ 1 month	48.85	37.21	
Spent > 1 month	24.14	44.19	
Assessment on migration			0.008***
Good decision	94.25	83.72	
No difference/bad decision	5.75	16.28	
Spending retirement near to children			0.151
No	30.46	22.09	
Yes	69.54	77.91	
Spending retirement where one does not feel like a foreigner			0.000***
No	75.29	93.02	
Yes	24.71	6.98	
Harsh working conditions			0.059*
No	47.13	34.88	
Yes	52.87	65.12	
Working life			0.321
Little/not satisfied	55.17	61.63	
Quiet/very satisfied	44.83	38.37	
Health			0.059*
Good health	44.83	33.72	
Satisfactory health	39.08	54.65	
Bad health	16.09	11.63	

**Table 3.** (Continued)

Variables	No ambivalent	Ambivalent	p-value
Mental health			0.382
Good mental health condition	44.25	46.51	
Worried	22.41	27.91	
Depressed	33.33	25.58	
Population size	174	86	

Source: Vivre-Leben-Vivere (VLV) Survey, (Ludwig et al., 2011).

p indicates the p-value.

<sup>a</sup> $\mu \pm \sigma$ ,  $\mu$  indicates the mean and  $\sigma$  indicates the standard deviation.

<sup>b</sup>Director, licensed professional, other self-employed, farmer (owner), Intellectual work, management, intermediate professions.

<sup>c</sup>Non-manual skilled work (skilled employees), manual skilled work (skilled blue-collar workers).

<sup>d</sup>Non-manual unskilled work (unskilled employees), manual unskilled work (unskilled blue-collar workers).

\* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

We had really made a lot of sacrifices. Moreover, I have still family there and life in Spain is quite different and I miss it. But I also wish to be close to my daughters. Anyway, migrants never know how to do things right! Life brings a lot of surprises. It was very difficult to leave our parents and now it is very difficult to leave our daughters.

To analyze the sources of older immigrants' ambivalence about return, we chose several explanatory variables which are reported in the first column of Table 3. Some of these might need some explanation. The *last job* variable reports the occupational classification category of the last job which the older immigrant respondent held before retirement. Four categories are considered: "jobs with responsibilities/intermediate professions," "skilled work," "unskilled work," and "out of workforce/unknown."<sup>11</sup> The *assessment on migration* variable states whether the older immigrant respondent feels that the decision to immigrate which she or he made was a "good decision" or a "bad decision" or whether she or he is indifferent about it ("no difference/bad decision"). Their mental health is defined following a series of self-statements of symptoms of depression (Lalive d'Épinay et al., 1983: 123–129, 2000: 110–112; Wang et al., 1975). In all, 13 items related to experiences of depression are considered. The *mental health* variable is constructed as follows. First, we calculate a score that counts the number of items that have always or frequently been experienced. Then, we define the values of a variable showing three states of mental health. More precisely, the *mental health* variable takes a value of 1 if an older immigrant respondent displays a score of 0 or 1 (good mental health condition), a value of 2 if the respondent displays a score between 2 and 3 (worried), and a value of 3 if a score higher than 3 (depressed) is displayed. Hence, respondents are considered to have poor mental health if they report having more than three symptoms of depression.

As a first step in our analysis, we test whether there are statistically significant associations between the *ambivalence* variable and the other explanatory variables. To do so, we first report the cross-distribution of the sample population between the ambivalent and non-ambivalent older immigrants on the one hand and between groups defined by each categorical variable on the other. We then use the likelihood-ratio chi-square (LR  $\chi^2$ ) test to detect any statistically significance association. For the continuous explanatory variable *age*, we report the average age of the ambivalent and the non-ambivalent older immigrants respectively. We also display their respective standard deviations before conducting the independent t-test. The purpose of this first step is to select

covariates statistically significant at 0.05 for a logistic regression. The results are displayed in Table 3.

According to Table 3, the average age of ambivalent older immigrants is statistically significantly higher than that of non-ambivalent ones, although the actual difference is small. This means that age is expected to be a statistically important factor for ambivalence but would not necessarily have a large positive impact on the probability of being ambivalent. However, the gender of ambivalent older immigrants is not statistically significantly different from the gender of non-ambivalent ones. Males are over-represented in almost the same proportion in both groups. Married older immigrants are over-represented in both groups; however, the share of non-married (single, divorced, or widowed) older immigrants is relatively greater among the ambivalent than among the non-ambivalent (37.21% and 28.16%, respectively). However, this difference is not statistically significant.

The variables *main citizenship* and *ambivalence* can also be statistically significantly associated. We note that older immigrants who are naturalized Swiss and those who are natives of Portugal are relatively less ambivalent than the older immigrants from Italy or Spain. Indeed, the share of the naturalized Swiss and Portuguese older immigrants is relatively smaller in the ambivalent than in the non-ambivalent group, whereas that of the Italian and Spanish older immigrants is relatively greater. As found in Table 2, older immigrants from Spain are the most likely to be ambivalent and those naturalized or from Portugal are, instead, the most likely to be non-ambivalent. The difference between ambivalent and non-ambivalent among the Italians is relatively small. This variable may be unreliable for interpretation because the subsample for each nationality may be too small, particularly for the Portuguese. Indeed, we need to interpret cautiously the variable *main citizenship*. Nonetheless, we think this is an important variable to consider because it can bring some useful guidance to future research. The canton of residence is clearly not statistically significantly associated with ambivalent behavior about return. The *education level* and *ambivalence* variables are also non-significantly associated, although older immigrants with a low education level (primary school) are more often ambivalent than those with a higher education level. *Last job* is statistically significantly associated with *ambivalence*. The share of individuals who held unskilled jobs is relatively higher among “ambivalent” older immigrants than among “non-ambivalent” ones, although this is not observed for the other occupational classification categories.<sup>12</sup>

The variable *time spent in the home country* states the duration of the last sojourn which older immigrants had in their respective home countries—none, 1 month or less, or more than 1 month. This variable is interpreted as an indicator of the transnational mobility of older immigrants. According to Table 3, the share of individuals who spent long periods (more than 1 month) in their countries of origin is higher among ambivalent older immigrants than among non-ambivalent ones. However, the share of older immigrants spending either short periods or no time in their native country differs little, whether they are ambivalent or not. The variable *assessment on migration* is also statistically significantly associated with *ambivalence*. Older immigrants who reported a neutral or negative impression of their migration are more often among the ambivalent individuals. Similarly, the variables *spending retirement where one does not feel like a foreigner* and *ambivalence* are also highly statistically associated. The share of older immigrants who have chosen the place to which they wish to retire so as not to feel like a foreigner is relatively smaller in the group of ambivalent individuals than in the group of non-ambivalent ones. However, *spending retirement near to children* and *ambivalence* are not statistically significantly associated.

As shown in Table 3, the share of older immigrants who experienced harsh working conditions during their working life is relatively greater in the group of ambivalent individuals than in that of the non-ambivalent, a difference which is marginally statistically significant. Older immigrants

who are not or not very satisfied with their working lives are relatively more likely to be ambivalent individuals, although this difference is not statistically significant. *Health* and *ambivalence* are marginally statistically significantly related. Yet, the interpretation of the association is not obvious. Non-ambivalent older immigrants have reported both “good health” and “poor health” conditions in higher percentages than ambivalent older immigrants. Indeed, the latter mostly claim to have “satisfactory health.” Clearly, the association between ambivalence and health is ambiguous, as non-ambivalent older immigrants are more likely to self-rate their health as either good or poor. Older immigrants who show a greater number of symptoms of depression are under-represented in the group of ambivalent individuals and their share increases in the group of non-ambivalent individuals. This finding is clearly counterintuitive, as it suggests that ambivalent older immigrants are less likely to suffer from depression. Nonetheless, this difference is not found to be statistically significant.

To summarize, the variables that seem to be more suited to explaining ambivalence about return among older immigrants through a logistic regression analysis are *age*, *main citizenship*, *last job*, *time spent in the home country*, *assessment on migration*, and *spending retirement where one does not feel like a foreigner*. In the following, we refer to these as associated variables.

In a second step, we use logistic regression analysis to estimate the marginal effects of the explanatory variables on older immigrants’ ambivalent behavior concerning return. To do so, we consider four models, defined as follows. Model 1 focuses on socio-demographic factors (the first hypothesis about mediation factors), Model 2 on socio-demographic and migration-related factors (the second and third hypotheses), and Model 3 on all factors retained in this study (the fourth hypothesis). In Model 4, we select explanatory variables that show statistical significance  $p$ -values below 0.05 in Table 3 and/or Model 3.<sup>13</sup> The results of the estimations are summarized in Table 4.

To interpret the estimation results, it is worth remembering the general expression of a logistic regression for  $N$  individuals and  $K$  explanatory variables

$$\log\left(\frac{P_i}{1-P_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k X_{i,k}, \quad i = 1, \dots, N \quad (1)$$

where  $X_{i,k}$  denotes the independent variables,  $\beta_0$  the intercept, and  $\beta_k$  the coefficients associated with the independent variables.  $P_i$  denotes the probability that the dependent variable  $Y = 1$ , conditionally to the independent variables.  $\exp(\beta_k)$  measures the odds ratio of an ambivalent older immigrant characterized by the value or level of variable  $X_k$ , all other things being equal. According to Table 4, in Model 1, only the age of older immigrants, their main citizenship, and the occupational classification category of the last job they held before retirement are statistically significant. The significance level is, however, weak for the *last job* variable. The gender, marital status, canton of residence, and education level of older immigrants are found not to be statistically significant, which confirms the results from Table 3. With the exception of marital status, these results make sense, as these characteristics did not usually change between the time of immigration and the moment of retirement. The older immigrants get, the more likely they are to turn out to be ambivalent about return. This is quite intuitive for older immigrants who expressed the wish to return to their country of origin and then changed their mind after retirement. Indeed, the older a person gets, the less she or he is ready to make a new migration move that would alter everyday life. However, 1 year does not make a big difference as, for instance, a 71-year-old immigrant is only 1.07 times more likely to be ambivalent than a 70-year-old. This confirms our previous finding (see Table 3). Italian and Spanish older immigrants report a higher probability of being ambivalent about return than older immigrants who are naturalized Swiss. Spanish older immigrants are

**Table 4.** Odds ratios for older immigrants' ambivalence about return.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: ambivalence vs no ambivalence				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 4
Age	1.07**	1.12***	1.12***	1.12***	1.12***
Gender		Baseline level: female			
Male	1.10	1.24	1.24	1.08	
Marital status		Baseline level: single/divorced/widowed			
Married	0.62	0.48**	0.45**	0.43**	0.55*
Main citizenship		Baseline level: Switzerland (naturalized)			
Italy	6.14***	5.90**	5.20**	5.01**	5.83***
Portugal	1.65	2.09	1.67	1.77	2.55
Spain	11.86***	10.54***	11.44***	9.03***	11.96***
Canton		Baseline level: Geneva			
Basel	0.62	0.69	0.64	0.67	
Education		Baseline level: primary school			
Higher than primary school	1.07	0.96	1.04	1.02	
Last job		Baseline level: job with responsibilities/intermediate professions <sup>a</sup>			
Skilled work <sup>b</sup>	1.90	2.57**	1.89	2.20	2.59**
Unskilled work <sup>c</sup>	2.35*	2.75*	2.21	2.46	2.60**
Time spent in the home country		Baseline level: none			
Spent ≤ 1 month		1.23	1.17	1.09	1.25
Spent > 1 month		3.12**	3.06**	3.02**	3.25***
Assessment on migration		Baseline level: good decision			
No difference/bad decision		3.82**	4.65***	4.38***	4.10**
Spending retirement near to children		Baseline level: no			
Yes		1.46	1.65	1.52	
Spending retirement where one does not feel like a foreigner		Baseline level: no			
Yes		0.27**	0.31**	0.27**	0.27***
Harsh working conditions		Baseline level: no			
Yes			1.84	1.84	
Working life		Baseline level: little/not satisfied			
Quiet/very satisfied			0.96	0.89	
Health		Baseline level: good health			
Satisfactory health			2.43***		
Bad health			0.82		
Mental health		Baseline level: good mental health condition			
Worried				0.73	
Depressed				0.47*	
Population size	253	253	253	253	253
Link test	0.996	0.414	0.954	0.776	0.456
McFadden R <sup>2</sup>	0.107	0.198	0.233	0.216	0.191
AIC	1.280	1.234	1.245	1.266	1.180

Source: Vivre-Leben-Vivere (VLV) Survey, (Ludwig et al., 2011).

p indicates the p-value; AIC: Akaike information criterion.

<sup>a</sup>Director, licensed professional, other self-employed, farmer (owner), Intellectual work, management, intermediate professions.

<sup>b</sup>Non-manual skilled work (skilled employees), manual skilled work (skilled blue-collar workers).

<sup>c</sup>Non-manual unskilled work (unskilled employees), manual unskilled work (unskilled blue-collar workers).

\*p < 0.1; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01.



nearly twice as likely to be ambivalent than Italian older immigrants: while, the former are almost 12 times more likely to be ambivalent than the naturalized older immigrants, the latter are 6 times more likely to be ambivalent than the naturalized older immigrants. This goes hand in hand with hypothesis 1 about political citizenship. However, the odds ratio associated with older immigrants from Portugal is not statistically significant. For them, restricted citizenship is not correlated with ambivalence.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, most of the older immigrants from Italy and Spain went to Switzerland a long time ago. They settled there and may now have second thoughts about a possible return to the home country, leading them to think that they are better off in their host country or that the optimal conditions for a return are not yet met. Although these findings must be taken cautiously because of the small subsample size for each nationality, they deserve to be further investigated in future research.

Older immigrants who were unskilled employees or unskilled blue-collar workers before retiring seem to be 2.35 times more inclined to change their attitude about return than older immigrants who held jobs with responsibilities or intermediate professions. This is in line with hypothesis 1 about socio-economic citizenship. Nonetheless, this difference in the odds of being ambivalent is only marginally statistically significant.

As shown in Table 4, we find similar results in Model 2 as in Model 1 for variables related to the socio-demographic characteristics of older immigrants, except for marital status, which turns out to be statistically significant. Single, divorced, or widowed older immigrants are 2.08 times more likely to change their intentions about return than those who are married. This result informs us that living alone (which is the case of the great majority of these older immigrants) might be a factor in their ambivalence about return. Older immigrants have developed their own network of social relations throughout their adult life in the country of residence and probably fear loneliness if they go back to their country of origin. Note that *age* is more statistically significant in Model 2 than in Model 1. As in Model 1, the “unskilled work” level of the variable *last job* is still only marginally statistically significant. However, the “skilled work” level is statistically significant in Model 2, which was not the case in Model 1. Yet, among blue-collar workers and employees, being skilled or unskilled does not make any difference with regard to their ambivalent behavior about return: former skilled and unskilled blue-collar workers and employees are, respectively, 2.75 and 2.57 times more likely to be ambivalent than older immigrants who held jobs with responsibilities or had intermediate professions.

Variables related to migration assessment seem important to our understanding of the ambivalent behavior about return. Older immigrants for whom migration was a bad decision or neither a good nor a bad one are 3.82 more likely to demonstrate ambivalence about return than those who assess migration as a good decision. This result, with its sizable odds ratio, confirms our hypothesis 2 about the importance of this mediating factor: these older immigrants were in favor of return before retirement but changed their mind around this period in their lives. Probably, the prospect of *failing* return as they failed their immigration to Switzerland might have led them to change their mind. Older immigrants who report that they do not choose the place where they wished to spend their retirement so as not to feel like foreigners are 3.70 times more likely to be ambivalent about return. This result, with its sizable odds ratio, suggests that older immigrants who wished to retire in Switzerland and maintained their decision after the event feel more at home in their host country than in their country of origin. At the opposite end of the spectrum, those who do change their mind do not consider it as important to stay in Switzerland. From their perspective, they will still continue to be considered as foreigners, something which is merely a part of their lives.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to transnational mobility, the results confirm our hypothesis about the importance of this mediating factor: older immigrants who are still spending more than 1 month a year in their country of origin are 3.12 times more likely to be ambivalent than those who have stopped going

there. It seems that the “coming and going” between their country of origin and Switzerland is taken as an alternative to a definitive return or as a way to postpone (not) returning. On the other hand, spending less than 1 month in the country of origin does not affect their ambivalent behavior about return. Such short journeys relate more to holidays than to transnational mobility.

Since the variables on physical and mental health conditions are correlated, we cannot include both of them in the same model, otherwise, we would have a problem of multicollinearity. Therefore, we define two versions of Model 3. In the first, Model 3a, we include all the considered variables, except for *mental health*. In the second, Model 3b, we include all the considered variables except, this time, for *health*. According to Table 4, we find similar results in Model 3a and Model 3b as in Model 2 for variables related to the socio-demographic characteristics and migration experiences of older immigrants, except for *last job*. *Assessment on migration* becomes statistically much more significant in Models 3a and 3b than in Model 2. The odds ratio is also slightly larger. However, *last job* turns out not to be statistically significant in Models 3a and 3b. As expected from Table 3, older immigrants’ self-assessment of their working life presents no statistical significance with regard to ambivalent behavior concerning return in Models 3a and 3b, nor has the fact of having experienced harsh working conditions during their working life. Older immigrants who reported satisfactory health are 2.43 times more likely to be ambivalent than those reporting good health. However, self-assessing bad health is not statistically significant for ambivalence (Model 3a). As explained above, when commenting on Table 3, this result with regard to health is ambiguous. Older immigrants might have used idiosyncratic criteria when they self-evaluated the state of their health. In turn, older immigrants who have reported having many symptoms of depression are less likely to be ambivalent than those who have reported at most only one. This result is surprising with respect to our hypothesis 4 concerning an expected positive relation between ambivalence and poor mental health. Yet, the odds ratio associated with *mental health* is only marginally statistically significant.

With Model 4, we check the robustness of the previous results. The model includes the associated variables plus *marital status*. The latter is retained in Model 4 because it turns out to be statistically significant in Models 3a and 3b, although it does not belong to the initially associated variables. In turn, Model 4 does not include *health*, although one of its levels is significant in Model 3a. We choose to exclude it because it provides an ambiguous result. As reported in Table 4, the estimation results in Model 4 are similar to those in Models 3a and 3b with regard to their common independent variables. However, *marital status* appears only marginally statistically significant in Model 4.

At the bottom of Table 4, for each model considered, we offer several tests assessing model fit. For instance, the link test is useful in detecting specification errors or whether other explanatory variables are missing. The result of the link test is given by its  $p$ -value. According to Table 4, no model has a statistically significant link test, which means that all the models are well-specified. These results confirm the observation we made that the signs of the relationship between ambivalence and the independent variables do not change from a smaller model to a larger model. The McFadden’s  $R^2$  and the Akaike information criterion (AIC) are also reported for model comparisons. According to the AIC, Model 4 is the *best* model as it reports the lowest AIC.

From the logistic regression analysis, we can draw up the following typical profile of ambivalent older immigrants from Southern Europe: older immigrants who (1) are not naturalized Swiss but are natives of Italy or Spain, (2) were blue-collar workers or employees before retiring, (3) think that their immigration experience was a relatively bitter disappointment, (4) consider the issue of being integrated as an unimportant factor in convincing them to change their mind about return and stay in Switzerland, and (5) practice transnational mobility between the country of residence and the country of origin. Being of advanced age and single, divorced, or widowed can be considered as secondary characteristics of ambivalent older immigrants.

Comparatively, we can draw the following typical profile of non-ambivalent older immigrants from Southern Europe: older immigrants who (1) are naturalized Swiss, (2) held jobs with responsibilities or an intermediate profession, (3) think that their immigration experience was quite successful, (4) consider that not feeling like a foreigner was an important factor in their decision to stay in Switzerland, and (5) do not practice transnational mobility between the country of residence and the country of origin. Being “young retired” and married can also be considered as secondary characteristics of non-ambivalent older immigrants. According to Table 3, being a native of Portugal might be another characteristic of non-ambivalent older immigrants. However, this was not confirmed by the logistic regressions, most probably because of the small subsample size for the Portuguese.

If we compare these two profiles, it is interesting to note that the ambivalent older migrants experience a more solitary marital life, have lived for a long period of their lives in Switzerland with the legal status of “foreigner,” but accept this position as part of their migrant condition; they were in subordinate positions during their professional career and experienced migration as a rather difficult process. However, they manage to live a transnational life and maintain satisfactory mental health. On the contrary, the non-ambivalent present the classical traits of successfully integrated migrants: they became Swiss nationals and do not feel like foreigners, they experienced upward professional mobility, consider their migration to be a successful decision and have settled permanently in Switzerland.

Another interesting result is the fact that Italians and Spaniards are more concerned with ambivalence than the Portuguese or the naturalized Swiss. Spaniards and Italians find themselves institutionally and socially in an intermediate position between the naturalized Swiss and the Portuguese. The former are certainly still foreigners, but settled in Switzerland earlier than the Portuguese and, even though the vast majority of them occupy subordinate positions in the labor market, they experienced a somewhat greater upward occupational mobility than the Portuguese during their careers (Bolzman and Vagni, 2018). The latter also experience more precarious living conditions in Switzerland (Fibbi et al., 2010). This raises the question of whether ambivalence toward return emerges more easily among groups occupying positions that are structurally fragile, though not *too* fragile. There should be a certain amount of room for maneuver so that the change of attitude toward return can manifest itself.

## **Conclusion**

Ambivalence concerns a significant proportion of older migrants. Indeed, migrants’ social place in society is defined in an ambivalent way: neither in the resident society nor in the society of origin are they considered to be full citizens. Even though they have rights in both societies, they are not considered as citizens with respect to one central dimension of citizenship—that is, they are not perceived as being full members of society. In the place where they live, it is suggested that they should go to a place where they “really” belong—their “home” society—but, once there, the non-migrant population sees them as “aliens” belonging mainly to another reality. Migrants are therefore necessarily led to ask themselves questions about their place in the world, about what is “home” for them (Boccagni, 2017; Erdal, 2014).

The return question is at the core of their ambivalent situation and is an expression of many other forms of ambivalence in their lives. From a life-course perspective, this issue arises, often with much intensity, around the retirement period, because it is at this life stage that the possibility, and sometimes the necessity, of deciding where to live appears. We saw that a significant proportion of Italian and Spanish older migrants give up the idea of returning definitively to their country of origin and decide to establish their main residence in Switzerland. For naturalized older migrants,

this decision takes place earlier in their lives and is related to their recognition as full citizens in the Swiss context. On the other hand, among the Portuguese, a significant minority wanted to return before retirement and are still planning to return, expecting to recover full citizenship in their “home” country.

Changes with respect to return intentions mainly concern former blue-collar workers and white-collar employees. Since they never felt completely recognized in a segregated labor market along ethnic boundaries (Piguet, 2006), the return option was, for them, a way of keeping alive the idea of upward social mobility and, more broadly speaking, of social recognition—a goal perceived as possible to attain once in the “home” society. However, when arriving at the age of retirement, this goal is not perceived to be as important or as realistic as it was in the past. Other priorities arise, like having access to social rights and to health care, or continuing to live close to their social network.

Among the former guest workers, the most concerned with ambivalence about return are those who do not assess migration as a positive decision. For them, migration was not a good experience and they dreamt of going back to their home country. However, when they had the concrete opportunity to implement the return option, they changed their minds, probably because they feared a new negative migration experience at a stage of their lives when they do not have the same energy that they possessed during their younger years.

Nevertheless, they have no illusions about their place in Swiss society, even though they agree to spend their old age there. They know that they will continue, to a certain extent, to be perceived as and to feel like aliens. They accept this as part of their migrant condition. It is not always a comfortable situation, but they have learnt, over time, to manage it.

Moreover, they found a way to avoid feeling like permanent outsiders: their solution is to live transnational lives, spending part of the year in their “home” country. Coming and going allows them to feel constantly connected to both the societies that are relevant in their lives (Bolzman et al., 2006). For Southern European immigrants, this practice is not very expensive thanks to low-cost flights and is feasible from an institutional perspective because Switzerland is part of the Schengen space. However, there are also constraints: they cannot be absent continuously for more than 3 months if they want to have access to non-contributive financial support. This solution also requires access to housing in the home country and good health which allows them to go back and forth (Bolzman et al., 2017).

The pioneering work of Robert Merton (1976) underlined the importance of conflicting roles and values within a specific society as factors of ambivalence for migrants. Our observations show that the core of ambivalence for older immigrants is not only related to difficulties in conciliating past norms and values with present ones. In the VLV case study, ambivalence is closely related to a lack of full citizenship and is expressed around the retirement period. At that point in the life course, the question of return reveals the existing tension between a transnational experience of life and the lack of transnational mechanisms through which to recognize this experience. Older immigrants have to deal with this question both as a structural constraint and as a subjective experience.

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## Notes

1. Here, we consider the cantons of Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft together.
2. The term “immigrant” is to be taken in a broad sense—that is, to include both foreign nationals who have migrated to Switzerland and foreign nationals born there.

3. We take this number as a proxy of the actual number of foreign nationals living in Switzerland at the beginning of the year. It is an approximation because we omit individuals who change age groups between the end of 1 year and the beginning of the next.
4. However, we have controlled for the number of new entries from people aged 65–79 who go from Switzerland to Italy, Portugal, and Spain; the figures are very close to the number of departures from Switzerland which we show in Table 1.
5. The other possible answers are “stay in the current accommodation,” “move to another house in the same city,” “move to another house in the same canton,” “move to another house in another canton,” or “move to another house in another country.”
6. To the question of whether the older immigrant expressed, before retiring, the wish to return to her or his country of origin, she or he answered either “yes, but I could not realize my plans to return” or “yes, I spent some time there but it did not work out.”
7. To the question on the location choice of the older immigrant in the near future, she or he answered either “stay in my current accommodation,” “move within the same city,” “move within the same canton,” “move to another canton,” or “move to another country.”
8. To the question of the location choice of the older immigrant in the near future, the answer was “move to my country of origin.”
9. To the question of whether the older immigrant expressed, before retiring, the wish to return to her or his country of origin, she or he answered “actually, I spend a part of the year here and the other part there.” To the question on the location choice of the older immigrant in the near future, the answer was either “stay in the current accommodation,” “move within the same city,” “move within the same canton,” “move to another canton,” or “move to another country.”
10. As only a few of the older immigrant respondents expressed their intention to move to a third country, this will have virtually no impact on the statistical analysis.
11. As only a few older immigrant respondents did not report the last job they held before retirement or were then out of the workforce, we chose to consider them together in a separate category.
12. Among ambivalent older immigrants, none were out of the workforce before retirement.
13. Since none of the older immigrants who were out of the workforce or did not report the last job they held were ambivalent about return, we cannot include them in the logistic regression analysis. Therefore, they are excluded from the sample.
14. The Portuguese were less ambivalent but a significant minority among them wanted to return before retirement and was still willing to do so after retirement. Their different attitude toward return, compared to that of Italians and Spaniards, can be explained by two possible main reasons: Portuguese migrants have probably maintained more intense links with their home country during their stay in Switzerland (Fibbi et al., 2010; Laranjo Marques, 2008) and the same can be observed in France (Attias-Donfut, 2006). The hypothesis of a stronger “culture of return,” even after retirement, can thus be advanced in their case (Bolzman et al., 2017).
15. Spending retirement near to children is not, however, a statistically significant factor for ambivalent behavior about return.

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