

## Ageing 'here' or 'there'? Spatio-temporalities in older labour migrants' return aspirations from the azores

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## AGEING ‘HERE’ OR ‘THERE’?

### SPATIO-TEMPORALITIES IN OLDER LABOUR MIGRANTS’ RETURN

#### ASPIRATIONS FROM THE AZORES

#### UM LUGAR PARA ENVELHECER?

### ESPAÇO-TEMPORALIDADES E ASPIRAÇÕES DE RETORNO ENTRE

#### IMIGRANTES LABORAIS NOS AÇORES

AUTOR

**ABSTRACT** – In this article, I seek to unpack the multiple spatio-temporalities in older migrants’ ideas about return, shedding light on the complex set of motivations and imaginaries that precede return migration. The paper springs from a space-time approach based on the assertion that return aspirations are continuously shaped and negotiated both in and out of place. The discussion is framed around 36 in-depth life narrative interviews with later-life labour migrants living in the Azores, and a seven-month period of ethnographic fieldwork. The role of spatial dimensions such as the place of settlement and the country of origin, and temporal features such as age, length of stay in the host country or stage of life at the time of migration, is discussed in detail. The paper identifies a ‘family-work matrix’ and a ‘home-host country dialectic’ as central forces shaping migrants’ thoughts and possibilities of return. The multi-stranded, time-fluid, space-induced, context-dependent nature of (return) migration decisions is highlighted and it is shown that an apparent satisfactory social integration in the destination country does not, by itself, prevent migrants’ desire to return.

**Keywords:** return aspirations; spatio-temporalities; older labour migrants; Azores.

**RESUMO** – Neste artigo exploram-se as múltiplas espaço-temporalidades presentes nas considerações de retorno dos imigrantes laborais, lançando-se luz sobre o complexo conjunto de motivações e imaginários que precedem a migração de retorno. O artigo, alicerçado numa abordagem espaço-temporal, parte da premissa de que o desejo de retorno é permanentemente moldado e negociado no (e fora do) lugar. A análise e discussão têm por

base 36 entrevistas de histórias de vida com imigrantes laborais a residir nos Açores e um período de sete meses de trabalho de cariz etnográfico no arquipélago. Dimensões espaciais tais como o país de origem e destino, e dimensões temporais tais como idade, período de residência no país de destino, ou fase de vida aquando da migração são discutidas em detalhe. O artigo identifica duas dimensões-chave no processo de ponderação das possibilidades de retorno – uma ‘matriz família-trabalho’ e uma ‘dialética origem-destino’. Enfatiza-se a natureza fluída das decisões inerentes ao processo migratório, nomeadamente o retorno, salientando-se também o fato destas tomadas de decisão serem fortemente condicionadas pelo espaço, contexto e lugar. O artigo revela ainda que uma integração aparentemente satisfatória do ponto de vista social no país de acolhimento não reduz, por si só, o desejo de retorno ao país de origem.

**Palavras-chave:** aspirações de retorno; espaço-temporalidades; imigrantes laborais em idade avançada; Açores.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Return intentions are important for two main reasons: first, return aspirations provide a necessary, even if incomplete, element for planning and action; and second, more importantly, return intentions represent a general stance towards the migration experience which shapes attitudes and behaviours other than the return itself. This is the case with integration into the receiving society, place attachment, or the maintenance of links with the home country (Carling & Pettersen, 2014). Concepts such as the ‘myth of return’ (Anwar, 1979), the ‘ideology of return’ (Brettell, 1979), or the ‘mirage of return’ (Guarnizo, 1997) convey the complex link between aspirations and realisations of return. While most empirical studies tend to focus on actual return migration behaviour, offering a limited glimpse into the role of space and time in the return considerations (see e.g. Gmelch, 1992; Guarnizo, 1997), this paper draws attention to the spatio-temporalities in older migrants’ return aspirations,

shedding light on the complex set of motivations, thoughts, plans and imaginaries that precede return migration. Four key analytical dimensions emerge from the analysis: family, economic-occupational status, health, and place attachment. The role of spatial dimensions such as the place of settlement and the country of origin, and temporal dimensions such as age, length of stay in the host country or stage of life at the time of migration, is examined in detail. The paper springs from, and is informed by, concepts such as Hägerstrand's time-geography (1985), May and Thrift's timespace (2001) and Schwanen and Kwan's space-time geographies (2012). Building upon this conceptual framework, I discuss and problematise the role of space and time in the wider (return) migration debate. From a life-course perspective, the traditional assumption that middle-aged and older adults hold a strong desire to return home is put into a more nuanced perspective (Cerese, 1974). In a context of political and economic uncertainty and socio-cultural transformation in most migrant-receiving countries, migrants' feelings of belonging, household negotiations, and plans of return gain enhanced relevance (Bolognani & Erdal, 2016; de Haas et al., 2015). Looking at the case of Portugal and its most remote autonomous region, the Azores, assumes particular relevance in the present economic context.

The analysis is based on 36 in-depth life narrative interviews with later-life migrants residing in the Azores, and a seven-month period of ethnographic fieldwork encompassing also a subsequent return to the field. A set of particularly insightful narratives are explored in detail throughout the paper. In a context of resurgence of storytelling in human geography (Cameron, 2012; Riley & Harvey, 2004), using in-depth life narrative interviews allows bringing together and making sense of not only the individual factors shaping return aspirations, but also other complex intra-family dynamics and economic factors inherent to the return decision-making process. In using a life narrative approach, I also seek to address

de Haas and Fokkema's (2011) concern about the need to better understand how initial motives and strategies change over the lifespan.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a critical review of the role of space and time within integration, transnationalism, and return debates is provided. Next, an overview of the Azorean migration context and data and methods used is given. This is followed by a comparative discussion of migrants' return narratives as space-time shaped ideas. The paper concludes by summarising the main findings, highlighting the various forces moulding migrants' return aspirations and the multiple spatio-temporalities in anticipating return.

## **II. FROM ASPIRATIONS TO REALISATIONS: PLACING SPACE AND TIME WITHIN THE INTEGRATION, TRANSNATIONALISM AND RETURN DEBATES**

Whereas return migration has been receiving increasing academic attention in recent years (Cassarino, 2004; King, 2000), less has been written about the factors that influence migrants' intentions and decisions to return (Waldorf, 1995). In particular, with the exception of recent works from Erdal and Ezzati (2015), and Jeffrey and Murison (2011), both looking specifically at the temporal dimension in anticipating return, very little attention has been granted to the role played by space (and time) in migrants' ideas about return.

Theories on migrant integration, particularly those following a more assimilationist line, tend to suggest that the longer migrants stay in the host country, the more integrated and settled they become, and the less prone they are to return (Castles & Miller, 2009; Senyurekli & Menjivar, 2012). Also, if migrants are given access to social rights in the destination country, they are likely to remain for longer periods of time. Several empirical studies support this logic (see e.g. Haug, 2008; Waldorf, 1995). A second strand of theory attempts to

bring together both spatial domains – the home and host countries – within a return migration framework, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM). In this case, migrants have full interest in maximising their integration in the host country in order to increase their income and sustain a proper living for their families back home. Negotiations within the household assume then a major role. This does not, however, translate into a desire for permanent settlement; rather, migrants are frequently seen as ‘target savers’ often holding a future plan of return (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011).

More recently though, and of special relevance to this study, the two aforementioned theories have been challenged by studies on transnationalism (Ahlburg & Brown, 1998; Levitt, 1998). The strengthening of transnational ties and links between the ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries has led to the formation of multiple place attachments and mixed emotional belongings. This seems to be, for instance, the case for the Portuguese in Germany. Despite their strong attachment and belonging to Portugal, visible in frequent remittances and local investments, their plans of return tend to be permanently postponed for a ‘few more “little” years’ (Klimt, 1989; 2000: 261). This is what Lubkemann (2005) has described as ‘narratives of intended return’. A transnational perspective has shown evidence that integration into the receiving society and the maintenance of transnational ties with the home country are not always conflictual; rather, they can be complementary (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Portes et al. 2003). And yet, even in a transnational age, other studies have shown that permanent return is still the ambition of most migrants (Hunter, 2011; Sinatti, 2011). It is therefore crucial to go beyond traditional approaches opposing integration and transnationalism, and recognise that return aspirations are multi-stranded, time-fluid, space-induced, and context-dependent. Return is thus a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a multiplicity of individual, family and structure-related motivations shaped by both spatial and temporal dimensions (Constant & Massey, 2002; de Bree, Davids and de Haas, 2010; de Haas and Fokkema, 2010).

In the complex interplay of migrants' place attachments, feelings of liminality, and multiple possibilities of return, space plays a crucial role. As initially urged by Torsten Hägerstrand (1985), and later emphasised in works such as those of May and Thrift (2001), Massey (2005), or Schwanen and Kwan (2012), migrants (as well as non-migrants) face multiple – internal and external – constraints to their mobility endeavours. Particularly relevant to the discussion ahead, are the physical (or bodily) constrictions brought by and reinforced by age (the capability constraints mentioned by Hägerstrand), coupling constraints, related to the desire to move closer to family or acquaintances, and authority constraints, concerning structural limitations imposed by outside forces such as immigration bodies. In a world that feels increasingly 'compressed', and where connectedness reaches its highest point (Harvey, 1990; Massey, 2005), spatio-temporal differentiations and inequalities (and associated mobility aspirations) have been subject to little discussion (Schwanen & Kwan, 2012). The ability to move across space depends on both biographical and socially embedded features and only a combined study of both can lead to a deeper understanding of the motives, experiences and outcomes of return aspirations. Differences across space, between the country of settlement and country of origin, can mould (and even dictate) a potential desire to return 'home'. Thus far, however, the discussion of spatialities in return migration often feeds into larger thematic discussions, rarely playing a central role itself (see e.g. Carling & Pettersen, 2014; Plane & Jurjevich, 2009).

Space is not a stand-alone player though, as return aspirations are anything but static. As Johnson-Hanks (2005) argues in her study on Cameroon, life events and decisions are often not fully rational or logical as they are also contingent upon changing aspirations and judicious opportunism. Although the temporal dimension is key to understanding the migration process as a whole and, more specifically, return imaginaries, there are few studies that highlight temporal dimensions such as age or the life-cycle as core research topics (see

e.g. Erdal & Ezzati, 2015; Plane & Jurjevich, 2009). Erdal and Ezzati (2015), for instance, stress the importance of time as a transversal dimension that cuts across gender, class, religion, and national and ethnic boundaries, also underlining the fact that migration theories rarely incorporate the temporal dimension into the analysis. In short: age, length of stay in the receiving country and individual life-cycle stages significantly shape migrants' highly subjective constructions of 'home' and 'homeland', and their desires, attitudes and imaginaries of return. As shown by Dustmann et al. (1996), the desire to return increases with the age of entry in the host country, but tends then to decrease with the migrants' length of stay. As regards the life cycle, retirement frequently acts as a key temporal juncture for rethinking a potential return (Hunter, 2011; King, 2000). As an alternative to permanent return, migrants often opt for swaying between countries of origin and settlement, moving across transnational social fields, and engaging in forms of pendulum migration which reflect their shared loyalties and ways of overcoming tensions within the household (Haas and Fokkema, 2010; Zontini, 2015). Family – with men more prone to return than women and children – tends to play a central role in these 'timespaced' negotiations and dilemmas. Alternatively, there may also be a wish for 'integrated ageing'; the desire to stay put and grow older in the host country (Attias-Donfut et al. 2005).

### **III. FROM A PLATFORM OF EMIGRATION TO A PLACE OF IMMIGRATION: LABOUR MIGRATION IN THE AZORES**

A nine-island Portuguese archipelago in the North Atlantic, geographically remote and traditionally sharing weak social ties with mainland Portugal, the Azores has thus far received little research attention. Historically a place of emigration, the islands have experienced

strong outflows, mainly to North America, from as early as the nineteenth century. Following a latest major wave of emigration which peaked in the late 1950s, Azorean emigration has gradually decelerated since the mid-1970s (Rocha et al., 2011; Williams & Fonseca, 1999), giving way to the arrival of a growing and increasingly diverse group of immigrants. While the first immigrants in the archipelago arrived in the mid-70s and early 80s, following the Portuguese decolonisation process, since the late 90s the number of foreign residents in the Azores has steadily increased (AIPA, 2011; Rocha et al., 2011). This change in the regional mobility patterns cannot be dissociated from broader, country-level socio-economic and political transformations such as accession to the European Union in 1986 and subsequent economic enhancement characterised by a boom of major construction projects and flourishing job opportunities.

Labour migrants in the Azores generally share the same characteristics as those in mainland Portugal in terms of countries of origin, motivations and professional incorporation into the labour market. The immigrants in the archipelago are largely concentrated in four main islands – São Miguel, Terceira, Faial and Pico. Migrants from the Portuguese former colonies in Africa were the first to arrive, followed by Eastern Europeans and Brazilians. Brazilians are currently the most numerous nationality of labour migrants in the archipelago. Cape Verdeans, traditionally the second largest group of labour migrants on the islands, are now the third, after the Chinese (sefstat, 2015). Similar to mainland Portugal, there are more male immigrants than females, although the latter have been increasing. Men work mostly in construction, fisheries and, in the specific case of the Chinese, in small self-owned businesses such as shops or restaurants<sup>1</sup>, while women tend to be employed in hotels, restaurants and personal services. More recently, the economic crisis in Portugal and in its autonomous regions, felt vigorously in the construction sector, led to a drop in the number of migrants arriving in the Azores. The number of migrants living in the archipelago between 2008 and

2014 has been kept more or less constant, from a total of 3,513 migrants in 2008 to 3,536 individuals in 2014, with a slight decline in 2015 (3,361 individuals) (sefstat, various years). There is a general tendency for migrants to settle and stay in the region for significant periods of time (Rocha et al., 2011). In this, mixed marriages and family formation in the Azores are important factors to take into account, as shown by Mendes (2015) for the case of the Brazilian, Cape Verdean and Ukrainian communities in São Miguel island.

In a context of economic gloominess on the islands, migrants' aspirations, whether to stay, engage in onward migration, or return 'home', have gained increased relevance. This research also represents a useful update to the most comprehensive study on immigration in the Azores conducted by Rocha et al. (2011), which is based on surveys from 2004 and 2008, therefore leaving out the period of economic recession that significantly affected the islands since 2008. Understanding migrants' ideas about future mobility patterns represents additional evidence for planning and policies at the local, regional and national level.

#### **IV. DATA AND METHODS**

The analysis is based on 36 in-depth life narrative interviews with later-life labour migrants residing in the Azores and a seven-month period of ethnographic fieldwork<sup>2</sup>. Data collection was carried out between June and December 2014; for this period, I was based in São Miguel island while also extensively travelling between the other islands. Follow-up interviews with a selected number of participants whose narratives were particularly rich thematically were conducted in January 2016. During this period not only did I re-interview some of my research participants and re-visit my main field sites, but I also engaged in a broader experience of return myself, what O'Reilly (2012) refers to as 'ethnographic returning'.

Defining older age is probably one of the greatest endeavours in the study of ageing and later-life (see e.g. Rowles, 1986). Following a period of reflection and deliberation, a minimum threshold of 50 years old was set for the interviews. An admittedly arbitrary cut-off, this is however grounded on the central assumption that later-life is an increasingly diverse stage of life, and thus it was important to account for migrants' different experiences of age and ageing and contemplate a relational understanding of age (Biggs & Daatland, 2004; Hopkins & Pain, 2007). Other studies of ageing migrants have adopted similar age thresholds (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Lulle & King, 2016).

The interviews took place in the migrants' homes or other convenient sites such as local associations or close-by public spaces. The participants were recruited through a combination of methods – my own prior networks and contacts, local institutions and associations, and snowballing – in order to develop and maximise the diversity of the sample collected. Given the in-depth nature of my interviews, I tended to adopt a free-flowing approach – naturally dependent on the participant's type of narrative – also keeping a list of questions and themes I wanted to cover throughout the interview. Stemming from a revival of stories and storytelling in human geography and, more broadly, a 'cultural turn' in social sciences, life narratives have gained renewed interest in recent decades, proving to be a core methodological tool able to successfully unpack the individually-experienced, socially and historically wrought, migration biographies and trajectories (Cameron, 2012; Riley & Harvey, 2007).

The interviews were transcribed and analysed following an inductive and dialectic process between research questions, the narrative texts and supporting theories. The primary data collected was complemented by fieldnotes, participant observation, and reflections arising from engagement in multiple activities with the study group. The labour migrants interviewed came mostly from Cape Verde, Brazil and Eastern European countries<sup>3</sup>, their age ranged from 50 to 72 years old, and there was a predominance of women. The majority of the

migrants were settled in the Azores for 10 years or more and were married, although some did not have their families with them.

## **V. SPATIO-TEMPORALITIES IN MIGRANTS' RETURN ASPIRATIONS: EXPLORING THE 'FAMILY-WORK MATRIX' AND THE 'HOME-HOST COUNTRY DIALECTIC'**

Through an inductive analysis of the data collected, four analytical dimensions emerged as central in understanding migrants' return aspirations: family, economic-occupational status, health, and place attachment. Bearing in mind that thoughts about return are the product of a multitude of factors rather than factors in isolation, the four dimensions highlighted must be looked upon as inextricably linked and highly dependent on each other. For Yolanda<sup>4</sup>, a Cape Verdean woman in her late 50s, living in the Azores since the early 80s, access to economic resources allowed her to keep in permanent contact with Cape Verde rather than prompting any desire to return. Having reached a comfortable economic situation through her small business, as well as attaining a respected social position in the island community, Yolanda maintains transnational links with her homeland by sending goods to disadvantaged children back home and by frequently visiting Cape Verde. Despite this close emotional link, Yolanda does not hold any illusions of return:

I think it doesn't make any sense to go and live in Cape Verde now because I have all my grandchildren here. My family is all here, I only have one sister in Cape Verde. The life I have here can no longer be achieved in Cape Verde.

As in Moran-Taylor and Menjivar's study (2005), the location of the immediate family, particularly children, seems to be a central factor shaping the desire to return 'home'. Also visible in Yolanda's narrative is apprehension about the economic climate in Cape Verde, and her strong place attachment to the Azores:

When I go to Cape Verde, I'm there but I know home is here. But I always enjoy going back and helping the Cape Verdean people. It makes me feel good. (...) Life in Cape Verde, still today, is a lot of work, there's a lot of poverty. I remember when I was a kid, girls were not allowed in school because they would learn how to write to their boyfriends. We used to work in the fields from morning to evening and then go feed the animals. We used to cart water pails on our heads at 1 or 2 in the morning to bring water home to cook couscous for breakfast. Then in the morning it would start all over again.

Like Yolanda, another Cape Verdean, Tito, also settled in the Azores long ago. A fisherman, he arrived in a fishing village in mainland Portugal in 1974. At the age of 20, he moved to the Azores to work in a local fisheries company. He is now in his early 60s, married to an Azorean woman and with two grown-up children. With no close family in Cape Verde (his siblings are migrants as well, most of them living in the Netherlands and Italy), the last time he visited the island where he was born was in 1982. Transnational links with Cape Verde have been lost over time. Reflecting on his 'homeland', he stresses:

When you first leave you always think you'll visit your homeland often but then... Now I don't miss it that much anymore because I have many friends here, everyone knows me, and I'm well integrated; because I haven't been back in Cape Verde for so many years...

Asked where he sees himself in the future, he categorically replied:

Here; I won't leave anymore. And like me, many other Cape Verdeans won't ever leave the Azores.

In both narratives, there is a common thread related to the young age at the time of arrival in the Azores and the long period of settlement in the host country (cf. Dustmann et al., 1996). However, as noticeable in Camila's case below, even when migration takes place at a later stage of life and less time has been spent in the host country, family formation (or family reunion) continues to be decisive in shaping migrants' thoughts of return (cf. Mendes, 2015). For this Brazilian woman in her early 50s, family ties have played a crucial role in her decision to settle permanently on the islands. In the Azores since the early 2000s, two main events determined her stay in the Azores: first, getting married to an Azorean and, secondly, having her daughter come from Brazil to join her and putting down her own roots in the Azores. Equally important is her successful business venture and relatively quick economic integration. Contrary to theories that see return as a consequence of an integration failure (Jensen & Pedersen, 2007), Camila's (and other participants) deep satisfaction in remaining in the Azores does not necessarily cancel the desire to keep close contact with the country of origin, and even return there temporarily. In these cases, family – the presence of ageing parents or children back in the homeland – actively contributes to the development of transnational lives (cf. Baldassar, 2007). Thinking of her future possibilities of return, Camila says:

The next few years will be here because I will never leave my daughter behind. My plan [once retired] is to spend the summer here, then three months in Brazil, and then I come back and spend another five or six months in the Azores. That's my plan, to go to Brazil more often because I know my son and granddaughter

miss me. My parents are older now and I also want to be closer to them. But this surely doesn't mean leaving the Azores.

Despite the majority of the participants being clear about their wish to stay in the Azores, the idea of return can sometimes be ambivalent or unsettled. For Kateryna, a Ukrainian woman in her mid-60s, the idea of return is not straightforward. Having arrived in the Azores in the early 2000s to work as a music teacher, Kateryna lives permanently divided between the islands where she has a job, and Ukraine where she has her husband and son. The permanent divide related to this 'family-work matrix' is apparent in her words:

[When visiting Ukraine] I don't want to come back but I know I need to; I have my work here. I still need to work. I no longer know where I'm the most important – either here because of my work or there because of my family.

Ruminating about her possibilities of return in the future, Kateryna muses on the factors acting upon her decision to return and admits that her choice does not depend only on her and her own agency, but also on the situation back in Ukraine. As she puts it:

I'm like a broken leaf in the wind, and the wind takes me wherever it wants to so... I don't have any concrete idea now [about where she will be in the future] because I know it doesn't depend only on me. It depends on the situation in my country [referring to Ukraine], work, people...

For Davit, a Georgian man in his late 60s, in the Azores since the early 2000s, return aspirations are shaped by the time he has to wait to get his Portuguese retirement pension. Previously a construction worker, but unemployed since 2011, Davit's stay in the Azores is permanently renegotiated in light of the available social benefits while he waits for a retirement pension that will support him (and his family) in the future. In Davit's case, the

idea of return is built around economic considerations – his retirement pension – but also the fact that his family is all back home. The spatio-temporalities of anticipating return echo throughout his narrative:

Once I get my pension I think I will go back because I'm old now and then what will I do here by myself? There [in Georgia] I have my children, my grandchildren, everyone...here I have nobody. And then, I need a home. I don't have a home here and cannot afford to buy one. As soon as this is over [the waiting time to get his pension], I think I will go back.

As pointed out in other studies (Gardner, 2002; Hunter, 2011), also for Malam, a man from Guinea-Bissau in his early 60s, health issues have been the most important reason prolonging his stay in the host country. In mainland Portugal since 1982, he arrived in the Azores in the early 2000s. After many years working in construction he was diagnosed with eye cataracts. He has been unable to work since 2011. With his wife and three children back in Guinea-Bissau, whom he has not seen for seven years, he does not see any other reason to remain in the Azores other than the healthcare he would not have access to back home. When asked about his feelings on home and return, and despite having pointed out structural problems in Guinea-Bissau such as poverty, corruption and political instability, he unmistakably says:

My home is in Guinea-Bissau. But if Guinea-Bissau didn't exist in this world, then Portugal would be my home. [Pausing for a minute, he adds:] My wish is to return to my homeland. Once I get my eye surgery, and if everything goes well, I will go back to 'my land'.

Access to better healthcare links together the economic and social dimensions, but the presence of family back home, despite the long absence, also plays a critical role in Malam's wish to return. A smaller number of migrants conveyed a more explicit desire to return home which is strongly associated with the current economic climate in Portugal, and the Azores, and normally reinforced by the presence of family back home. Interestingly enough, this does not necessarily conflict with a clearly-stated strong place attachment to the Azores. Return orientations are also clearly gendered: men tend to be more oriented to return than women, which can generate tensions within the household (Haas and Fokkema, 2010). This can be linked to three main factors: first, male individuals tend to be more often unaccompanied in the Azores, having left their family back in the homeland; secondly, men seem to be able to find jobs or other casual work more easily back home which can potentially facilitate their re-integration; and thirdly, women tend to benefit more from the freedoms and economic autonomy gained abroad (cf. Haas and Fokkema, 2010).

More assertive aspirations of return are often found among migrants who arrived in the Azores at a later stage of their lives, mostly coming from Brazil and Eastern Europe. This can be generally linked to a prevalence of stronger memories, attachments and belonging to the country of origin compared to the receiving society. However, it is important to note that the migrants aspiring to return home have stayed in the Azores for a significant period of time (with no exceptions, over ten years), which contrasts with Cassarino's concept of 'short stay' for those who want to return (Cassarino, 2004). This 'delayed return' may be linked to the context of economic recession in the Azores, which has decreased migrants' ability to mobilise resources to return home promptly.

Meantime, acquiring permanent residency or, preferably, Portuguese citizenship is a central goal before returning home, even temporarily (Bastia, 2011; Senyurekli & Menjivar, 2012). This suggests the importance of keeping links with Portugal even after return,

including the option of re-migration (to Portugal or other European countries). What is more, this puts into doubt the traditional assumption that return represents a final step in the migration cycle. Lucas, a Brazilian man in his mid-60s, in the Azores since the early 2000s, conveys a clear narrative of ‘delayed return’. For him, the inability to get a job in the Azores, which he contrasts with the faster-growing Brazilian economy, fosters his return aspirations. Lucas’ disappointment with life on the islands is thus related to the economic context – Lucas was laid off from his job in construction in 2010 – rather than to the social environment. The economic side of local integration hence plays a decisive role in his desire to go back:

I feel at home in both places [Portugal and Brazil], but this idea of going home doesn’t get out of my head; I simply can’t ignore it. I need to go home because I don’t have a job here. I have been planning and preparing things to go.

On the other hand, in the case of Vinicius, a Brazilian man in his early 60s, family plays a more crucial role. Having arrived in the archipelago in the early 2000s, when there were plenty of job opportunities in construction, he has seen the economic context of the islands change for the worse and could not help his son’s desire to attempt his own ‘European dream’. His son arrived in the Azores in 2011, got an Azorean partner and decided to settle permanently. While Vinicius was by then determined to return to Brazil, his son’s arrival made him re-think his possibilities of return. A few years later, however, Vinicius’ story carries a strong and immediate desire to go home:

The thing that held me back here all this time was Wilson [his son]. Because I didn’t want to leave him; but now there’s no way around it. Because it’s not only Wilson, I also have Gabriel and Alma [his two other children in Brazil], and my

grandchildren, my house in Brazil, my little plot of land, everything waiting. I just cannot stay any longer because nothing is changing here.

## **VI. CONCLUSION: RETHINKING THE ROLE OF SPACE AND TIME IN ANTICIPATING RETURN**

Aspirations of return, and return itself, are deeply spatio-temporal phenomena. Place, embodied in the migrants' place of origin and destination, can fundamentally shape migrants' imaginaries of return. Thoughts about permanent settlement and return also significantly shift over time as migrants navigate the lifecourse. It has been shown here that migration decisions are reversible, fluid, and in permanent negotiation. As Erdal and Ezzati (2015: 1214) put it: 'migrants and their descendants' return considerations are evidently multilayered and in process, rather than static'. This paper has identified family and work as decisive forces affecting migrants' return aspirations, and named here as the 'family-work matrix'. It has also stressed the importance of a 'home-host country dialectic' that profoundly affects migrants' ideas and possibilities of return. Space-related coupling constraints (Hägerstrand, 1985), and space-time geographies of inequality (Schwanen & Kwan, 2012), are clearly imprinted in both the 'family-work matrix' and the 'home-host country dialectic'.

This article has also shown that aspirations to return do not always result from, nor are caused by, failure to integrate. In fact, an apparently satisfactory social integration in the host country does not prevent the desire to return. The commonly accepted idea that successful integration in the host country leads to a weakening of transnational ties and reduces the desire to return has also been challenged. In a context of a seeming satisfactory social integration in the Azores, place seems to play a significant role in easing migrants' adaptation

to the host country. In this case, the small size and community-feeling of the Azores seem to act as a facilitator of social integration and attachment to place. On the other hand, the not so vibrant local economy, particularly vulnerable to the recent economic crisis, appears to act in the opposite way, stirring the desire to return due to a lack of job opportunities. This can be linked to a more structuralist approach to return, according to which the place of settlement significantly affects migrants' integration process and feelings of belonging, and shapes their return expectations (Cassarino, 2004).

Unlike previous studies (Moran-Taylor & Menjivar 2005; Senyurekli & Menjivar 2012) in which migrants mostly lived in a permanent state of ambivalence about whether or not to engage in return migration, in the Azorean case the majority of the migrants interviewed do not intend to return to their homeland<sup>5</sup>. The fact that most migrants have spent a substantial part of their adult lives in the Azores, having formed family or undertaken family reunion, helps explain their stronger desire to stay. In short, migrants with no aspirations of return tend to have at least one the following characteristics, oftentimes interlinked: i) they have lived in the Azores for a significant period of time (almost half of them arrived during the mid-late 70s and 80s); ii) arrived in the Azores at a younger age; iii) are employed or are recipients of social benefits; iv) have formed a new family in the Azores or have already reunited with their family brought over from back home; v) come from countries where the socio-economic differential with Portugal/the Azores is substantial (mostly former Portuguese colonies in Africa); vi) have acquired Portuguese citizenship; vii) are mostly women.

Different groups of migrants show different rationales for return migration. This 'home-host country dialectic' is clear among labour migrants in the Azores. While African migrants tend to have limited aspirations of return given their longer presence in the Azores and the more difficult socio-economic and political context in their countries of origin, Brazilian migrants (and to a less extent Eastern Europeans) are more prone to return. This is mostly

linked to the fast-growing economy in Brazil (in 2014) in comparison to the economic recession and limited job opportunities in Portugal and, especially, in the Azores. The important role of migrants' country of origin seems to be consistent with Carling and Pettersen's (2014) findings that aspirations of return change substantially according to the type of country migrants' plan to return to. An important opposing (or at least attenuating) factor to return, even in a context of long-term unemployment, should be highlighted nonetheless. The presence of a still reliable welfare system, including social and housing benefits, acts as an important attraction to stay put in the Azores, particularly for those coming from African countries where the welfare state is weak or non-existent. The possibility of enjoying a retirement pension later on proves to be a crucial factor in the decision to stay. Thus, this paper adds to previous studies (see also Hunter, 2011) by unpacking and underpinning the role of economic integration and benefits from the social services system as key factors influencing migrants' aspirations of return. The economic dimension, however, is not a force acting in isolation and the presence (or absence) of family also plays a critical role in the return rationale.

This paper started out with the question of whether to 'age here *or* there'. Having examined the return aspirations of the labour migrants in the Azores, it seems fair to say that, for the majority of the migrants interviewed, the ageing experience is imagined in one sole place, the host *or* home country. This tends to be related to the fact that, for these largely unskilled migrants, successful return is still associated with permanent return. Yet, it is important not to forget that, in the light of increasingly transnational lives, 'ageing here *and* there' becomes ever more present for migrants thinking about return (Hunter, 2011; Sinatti, 2011). More than fixed in time, return aspirations, ageing 'here' and/or 'there', are inevitably shifting, place-induced and context-dependent. Understanding migrants' rationales and demeanour towards return implies, above all, realising the fluidity of migration decisions

over space and time. Future research will benefit from taking longitudinal and intersectional approaches in which variables such as age, class, gender, religion or ethnicity are brought together under the same theoretical framework. Forthcoming studies would also benefit from addressing a number of key questions. Who are the later-life migrants more likely to engage in return migration? How do individual and collective aspirations, attitudes and imaginaries play out in the desire to return home? Which implications do aspirations of return have for the home and host countries? Finally, from a policy-making perspective, and in light of increasing strategies to attract young skilled migrants back to their homeland, it would be interesting to further explore the benefits and challenges arising from attracting and re-integrating older migrants back home.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to highlight that the Chinese community is especially visible in the most populated island of São Miguel. Given the recent nature of this migration, these migrants are normally young or middle-aged adults.

<sup>2</sup> This fieldwork is part of my ongoing PhD research at the University of Sussex, which also includes interviews with two other groups of older migrants – return migrants and lifestyle migrants.

<sup>3</sup> This includes participants from Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. At the crossroads between Western Asia and Eastern Europe, Georgia is also included in this group.

<sup>4</sup> All names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the participants. All quotations were translated into English by the author.

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<sup>5</sup> It must be acknowledged that, to some extent, this is a biased perspective since those who are/were oriented to return may have already left.